
Bachelor's thesis

International Business Administration

Ninbos 13

2017

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The Influence of Negative Online Word-of-Mouth on Consumers' Hotel Purchase Intention in China: Taking TripAdvisor as an Example



BACHELOR'S THESIS | ABSTRACT

TURKU UNIVERSITY OF APPLIED SCIENCES

International Business

2017 | 44 + 16

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The Influence of Negative Online Word-of-Mouth on Consumers' Hotel Purchase Intention in China: Taking TripAdvisor as an Example

Purpose: The aim of this research is to investigate the influence of negative e-WOM on Chinese consumers' hotel purchase intention, taking TripAdvisor as an example.

Methodology: Questionnaire surveys were used to collect quantitative data. The respondents of the questionnaires should have some browsing experience on TripAdvisor. Questionnaires were collected online through a survey platform – Questionnaire Star. A total of 93 questionnaires were valid, and SPSS software was used for data analysis.

Findings: Chinese consumers believe that negative reviews should have some influence on their hotel purchase intentions. The five most influential factors are negative star rating, volumes of negative reviews, negative visual cues and reviewers' expertise (e.g., their user level on TripAdvisor). They believe that reviewers can express their opinions freely online as a result of the anonymity system of TripAdvisor, which can improve the usefulness of these negative comments. When it comes to the volumes of negative comments, they believe that a moderate (30-50%) amount of negative reviews can be influential. However, the personal experience of the review readers, negative aspect of anonymity and the tie strength between the reviewers and review readers appears to have little effect on the influence of negative reviews on consumers' hotel purchase intention. The research also found that youths (below 30) and high-education groups (with bachelor degree or higher) are more likely to be influenced by negative reviews than those middle-aged or low-education groups.

Research limitations: The sample size of this research is small (93), which might not be a representation of the characteristics of the entire population (i.e., all Chinese customers who have browsing experience on review websites such as TripAdvisor).

Key Words: Online WOM, Negative Reviews, Purchase Intention, TripAdvisor

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1 Introduction

This is an introduction chapter that consists of three sub-sections. In Section 1.1, the background of the research is introduced, which includes issues such as the importance of (negative) online word-of-mouth and the reasons to select the hotel industry. Following this, Section 1.2 introduces the research aim and questions. The last Section 1.3 is about the structure of the research.

1.1 Background

Due to the development of information communication technology (ICT), online (or electronic) word-of-mouth (which is abbreviated below as e-WOM) is becoming more popular than traditional WOM. It plays an increasingly important role in affecting the consuming behaviours of the buyers (Laroche *et al.*, 2005, p. 263). For example, a survey from Bullbul *et al.* (2014, p. 5) suggested that 74% of consumers' product perceptions are affected by e-WOM. The popularity of e-WOM is especially true in China due to the prevalence of Internet and online social media. Specifically, the data from Internet Live Stars (2011) shows that China has the world's largest number of Internet users which is around 513 million. Also, social media (such as (micro) blogs, social-networking sites (SNSs) and other online communities) is widely accepted by a large number of users (more than 300 million) in China (Chiu *et al.*, 2012). In addition, China is a society that is based on *Guanxi* network, which means online communication should have a significant impact on consumers' purchase behaviours (Romaniuk, 2016).

Davis & Khazanchi (2007) suggests that purchase intention of buyers can be influenced by the valence of e-WOM. Here, the valence of e-WOM is defined by Hennig-Thurau *et al.* (2004, p. 40) as "the statement" that is "made by potential, actual or former customers about products or services" that "can be either negative or positive". This means that customer behaviours can be influenced by both negative and positive WOM that they have confronted online. However, both Hornik *et al.* (2015) and Luethi (2016) found that the negative e-WOM is more likely to influence customer purchase intentions than the positive ones. Hence, the focus of this study is placed on the negative effect that e-WOM might have on the purchase intention of Chinese customers in the hotel industry.

According to Castillo (2016), e-WOM should have a strong influence on the purchase intention of customers in hotel industry. Specifically, among customers searching for e-WOM, 15.5% of them are browsed reviews of hotel service (China Internet Network Information Center, 2016). This high percentage can be explained by the intangible feature of hotel service, which cannot be transmitted or tested before its provision (Jaume, 2013). Hence, Hennig-Thurau *et al.* (2004) concluded that e-WOM plays an important role in supplying information to customers (who are willing to select hotel service) so that they can make an appropriate purchase decision. Although there are many studies to investigate the influence of e-WOM on customer purchase intention in hotel industry (e.g., Huang, 2016), few studies have been carried out to investigate the influence of negative e-WOM on customer purchase behaviours in this industry. Therefore, this research intends to fill this gap by analysing the impact of negative e-WOM on customer purchase intentions in the specific Chinese hotel industry.

1.2 Research Aim and Questions

The aim of this research are to investigate the different types of negative e-WOM that Chinese consumers might have due to the service provided in hotel industry and to explore how these various negative e-WOM might influence their hotel purchase intention, based on the communication model developed by Lasswell (1948). Specifically, there are two research questions that are required to be answered.

Research Question 1: What kinds of negative e-WOM might influence customers' hotel purchase intention?

Research Question 2: How these negative e-WOM reviews might affect customers' hotel purchase intention?

1.3 Research Structure

There are five chapters in this thesis. In this first chapter, the background of the research is introduced. In the second chapter, a literature review is presented, where the influence of negative e-WOM is discussed, as well as the channels of negative e-WOM (e.g., review websites), the influence of negative e-WOM on consumer purchase intentions based on the Lasswell's communication model. Following this, chapter three is research methodology,

where the data collection method (e.g., sampling and questionnaire survey) is introduced. The last two chapters are about the presentation of the results and the discussion of the research findings in accordance with the previous literature.

2 Literature Review

This literature review chapter consists of seven sub-sections. First, the definition and the importance of online WOM is introduced. Then, the role of negative e-WOM in customer purchasing behaviours is discussed. Following this, one of the popular the e-WOM channels – review websites (e.g., TripAdvisor) – is introduced. The fourth sub-section is an introduction of customer purchase intention, and the fifth sub-section is about how negative e-WOM might influence customer purchase intention on the channel of review websites. In the subsequent sub-section, Lasswell's communication model is used to illustrate how negative e-WOM might affect customer purchase intentions, including factors such as negative star rating, high volumes of negative reviews, negative visual cues, bidirectional anonymity, e-WOM senders' (and receivers') expertise and the tie strength between the e-WOM senders and receivers. The last seventh sub-section gives a conceptual framework.

2.1 Online Word-of-Mouth (e-WOM)

According to Westbrook (1987), e-WOM is about the informal communication carried out among consumers through Internet-based technology regarding the usage (or characteristics) of specific goods (or services). This means that e-WOM is realized through the use of multiple electronic communication channels, which is different from traditional WOM that is dependent on oral communication of consumers (Buttle, 1998). In other words, Internet plays an important role in WOM communication among consumers, and WOM is more based on computer technology in current business society (Kozinets, 2002). Specifically, the WOM communication among consumers will not be restricted within the face-to-face boundaries, as the Internet provides an innovative solution where consumers can convey their opinions through social networking sites (SNSs), (micro) blogs and online discussion forums, etc. (Cheung & Lee, 2012). By using Internet, interpersonal communication of WOM about products (or services) can reach the consumers from all over the world – where one can have access to the shared information and opinions that are provided by individuals who are living

far away (Todorova, 2012). In addition, online WOM allows social interactions between consumers, where they can not only receive product-related information but also express their own opinions (Chu & Choi, 2011).

Online e-WOM is becoming extremely popular in China (Chiu *et al.*, 2012). This development in e-WOM is a result of the boost of Chinese Internet users. By the end of 2016, the Internet penetration rate in China is 53.2%, the Internet users reached 731 million (China Internet Watch, 2017). Some of the previous studies show that Chinese are more likely to be influenced by e-WOM than consumers in other countries (Chiu *et al.*, 2012). For example, Chinese are more likely to purchase the products (or the services) if they see that the products (or the services) are recommended by their acquaintance or friends through online WOM channels such as review websites (Asur & Huberman, 2011). Some scholars give reasons to explain the important role of online WOM among Chinese consumers. For example, Maxxelli Consulting (2013) found that Chinese consumers are usually sceptical of the comments that are provided by the official institutions, and they are more convinced of the recommendations that are provided by their peers. Also, Tse (1999) found that Chinese are more comfortable to express their true opinions online, when compared with the face-to-face communication. This then facilitates the popularity of e-WOM in Chinese society.

2.2 Influence of Negative e-WOM

As it is discussed in Section 1.1, the valence of e-WOM has some influence on the purchase intentions of the products (or the services). Here, the valence of e-WOM is about the degree of satisfaction or dissatisfaction of the consumers towards a product (or a service), from positive to negative (Shao, 2012). Arndt. (1967) also pointed out that WOM can be either positive or negative. According to Silverman (2001), the negative e-WOM the complaints that are posted on the Internet by the consumers about products (or the services) after the purchasing experience. Also, Black & Kelley (2009) pointed out the content of negative e-WOM on Internet is about the dissatisfied purchasing experiences towards a product (or a service) described by the dissatisfied consumers.

The negative WOM is suggested to have stronger influence than the positive WOM on the purchase intentions of the consumers. This is especially true if the negative WOM can be

expressed online. As it is stated by Park & Lee (2009), the development of Internet helps to strengthen the power of negative WOM, as the records of the reviews can be stored on the Internet for an indefinite period of time. Skowronski & Carlston (1989) proposed some arguments to support the important role of negative e-WOM in influencing the purchase intentions of the consumers. According to their opinion, there are usually a fewer number of negative WOM that might be posted online than the positive WOM, since the exceeded number of negative online WOM might bring fatal damage to the image of the products (or the services). Hence, they explained that the negative online WOM that occurs occasional should be more reliable to consumers and hence is more likely to influence their purchase intentions towards the products (or the services). In a more current study from Cheung & Lee (2012) and Lee & Park (2008), found the powerful influence of negative e-WOM on the purchase intention of the consumers, as consumers who are exposed to negative online WOM are found to have lower shopping intentions than those who are not exposed to these negative reviews.

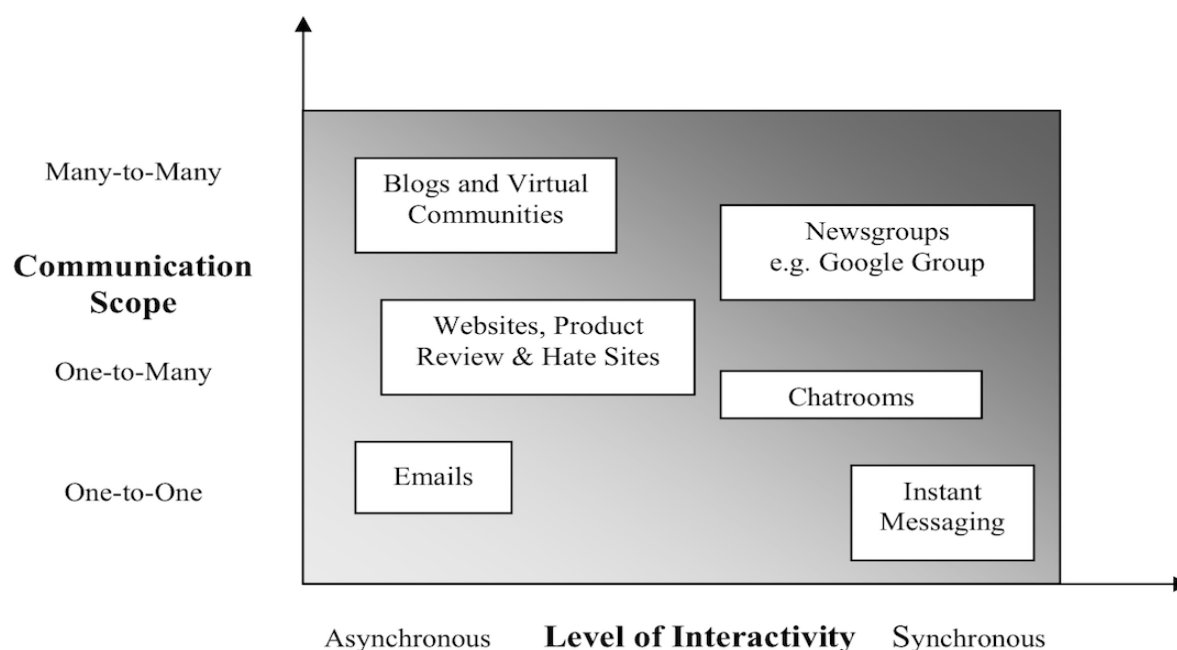
The strong influence of negative e-WOM on consumers' purchase intention is also observed in China. For instance, Lee (2016) found that the influential effects of negative e-WOM on purchase intentions is much stronger than the positive ones among Chinese consumers. Also, findings from Birmingham University (2009) show that negative comments are with strong influence on Chinese customers' attitudes towards the products (or the services), as their purchase intentions will drop dramatically if they are exposed to negative comments on review websites.

2.3 Online WOM Channel: Review Website

Litvin et al. (2008, p. 30) proposed a typology of e-WOM channels, where there are 6 types of electronic media i.e., blogs, newsgroups, review websites, chatrooms, instant messaging and e-mails. The classifications of these six types of e-media is based on two dimensions i.e., level of interactivity and communication scope. Here, the level of interactivity varies from asynchronous (e.g., email and blog) to synchronous (e.g., instant messaging), and the communication scope varies from one-to-one (where a consumer is linked with another) to one-to-many (where a single consumer is linked to a group of consumers). The locations of the review website in the typology is presented in the Figure 1. It could be seen that review

website is an asynchronous and one-to-many channel.

Figure 1: Typology of e-WOM Channels (Litvin *et al.*, 2008, p. 30)



This means review website helps to provide a platform where consumers can exchange the information of the products (or the services) to many other consumers freely, regardless of the geographic restrictions or the time limitations (Gfrerer & Pokrywka, 2012). The review websites are supposed to have two main functions by Lee & Park (2008). Moreover, the first function is that review website plays an important role as informant, since it can help to provide consumer-related information about the products (or the services); the second function of the review website is that it can help to collect both positive and negative recommendations from the past users of the products (or the services). Also, the influence of the review website is becoming stronger, which was contributed by the improved penetration rate of Internet. With the rise of Internet, it is much easier for the consumers to get access to the reviews that are posted by a large number of other consumers who have ever purchased and used the products (or the services) (Dellarocas, 2003).

The review website is becoming popular in China. One example is DianPing, which has 29.5% market share and 70 million active users in China in 2015 (Library, 2015). In this website, the information about the business and the evaluations that are given by past consumers towards

the business in food, apparel and leisure product industries are provided. When it comes to the hotel industry which is the focus of this study, TripAdvisor is one of the review websites that is frequently used in China. The company was established in 2000 with business coverage in more than 30 countries. According to TripAdvisor (2013), the platform has more than 350 million visitors per month, and with over 78 million registered users and tourist reviews and comments. And through the use of this platform, consumers can give both positive and negative opinions towards the products (or services) that are provided by different hotels through the rating and review system of this website (Aljahdali, 2016). The TripAdvisor entered into the Chinese market in 2009, with a local name of MaoTuYing. In addition to global hotels, MaoTuYing incorporated around 80,000 Chinese hotels, varying from luxury to budget hotels (Xiang, 2014). Until 2014, there was more than 2,000,000 reviews posted by Chinese consumers on the website. This is an indication that the TripAdvisor is becoming widely accepted among Chinese consumers, as it provides an alternative way for consumers to share their hotel purchasing experience and get access to review information that is provided by their peers which can support their hotel purchase decisions (China Travel News, 2015).

2.4 Customer Purchase Intention

Purchase intention belongs to the main concepts in the marketing literature. The interest of purchase intention comes from its close relationship with buying behaviour (Goyal, 2014).

Conner & Sparks (2005) suggested that consumers who are with high purchase intention are likely to buy the products (or the services) the next time when they are engaged in the product (or the service) markets (Fandos & Flavian, 2006). This view is also supported by previous studies that there is a significant positive relationship between customer purchase intention and their buying behaviours. For example, Ajzen (1991) found that there is a strong positive relationship between customer intention and their purchasing behaviours. Similarly, Tirtiroglu & Elbeck (2008) and Schiffman & Kanuk (2012) found from their studies that purchase intentions of consumers are likely to influence their buying decisions, where high purchase intention is associated with higher possibilities in making decisions in buying the product (or the service). In the hotel context, hotel purchase intention refers to customers booking hotel through using independent or exclusive hotel online reservation systems (Ratnasingam, 2012). Thus, in this thesis, hotel purchase intention is defined as the situation in which customers are willing and keep the intention to browse TripAdvisor in order to choose a hotel room.

2.5 Review Websites and Intangibility of Hotel Industry

The IHIP characteristics are defined for the discipline of service marketing, namely inseparability, heterogeneity, intangibility and perishability (Parasuraman, 1988). Among these four characteristics, intangibility is integral with hotel industry.

To be specific, intangibility means difficulty of evaluating service before the experience and lack of tangibility after the experience (Kotler, 2003). In hotel context, hotel products are services and are mostly intangible presented through tangible and concrete elements. In other words, it is their use what is transmitted, which shows that the hotel products and services are primarily experiences (Jaume, 2013). Also, intangibility indicated that the hotel cannot be experienced and evaluated by the consumers before the completion of the consumption behaviours (Li & Liang, 2013).

Hence, the existence of review website such as TripAdvisor is quite significant to the hotel industry and to the potential consumers of the hotel who are willing to search on review websites to identify the comments that are provided by previous service users so as to make a judgement on whether they should choose the hotel or not (Lee *et al.*, 2008)

2.6 Review Websites and Customer Purchase Intention

Review website has a strong influence on customer purchase intention (Sparks & Browning, 2010). Through browsing review websites, consumers can search for and critically evaluate the information that has been provided (Ye & Chen, 2011). For example, O'Connor (2010) found that 60% of consumers expressed their willingness to check online before making their purchase decisions. Also, he pointed out that 80% of consumers who checked online supported the views that reviews on the website influenced their purchase decisions. The strong influence of review websites also contributed to its features such as fast communication, low costs and wide reach of large potential audience (Hennig-Thurau *et al.*, 2004), which allows consumers to intercommunicate with different people around world (Todorova, 2012). In addition, the information can be provided by consumers in an anonymous manner on the review websites, so that dissatisfied customers are willing to express their true feedback (Peneva, 2015).

In hotel industry, review website is playing an important role as mentioned above. This is because the product (or the service) that is provided by the hotel to the consumers is

intangible as mentioned above and should be purchased and consumed at the same time (and at the same place) (Jaume, 2013). In addition, Black & Kelley (2009) found that it is possible for the review website to reach the number of consumers twice as many as offline channels. This is because review websites can provide information to a vast variety of potential consumers who are searching online for hotel information whereas traditional WOM can only reach close friends and families (Xie *et al.*, 2011). When it is not possible for a potential consumer to obtain reliable information about a hotel from acquaintances in real life, he/she are likely to seek for helps from review websites – as it is suggested that 77.9% of potential consumers are likely to read online reviews of hotel in order to form better purchase intentions (Fernández *et al.*, 2009).

TripAdvisor is one of the important review websites that influence consumers' hotel purchase intention. According to Yacouel & Fleischer (2012), TripAdvisor is the fundamental channel that can provide review service for hotels. Also, a survey from TripAdvisor (2013) suggested that 80% of consumers in 2013 chose to search for online reviews before making their decisions in choosing hotel services. Moreover, the survey found that consumers are likely to compare around 7 different hotels before they made their final reservation. The important role of review websites (especially TripAdvisor) in hotel industry is also supported by Jeong & Jeon (2008), where they pointed out that 82% of potential consumers of hotel service trusted reviews that are posted on TripAdvisor.

2.7 Negative e-WOM and Consumers' Hotel Purchase Intention

In review websites (e.g., TripAdvisor), the e-WOM refers to the posted reviews on these platforms (Fernández *et al.*, 2009). According to Cheng *et al.* (2006), negative e-WOM on review websites in hotel industry is related to negative feedback (e.g., unfavourable experience or aggressive complaints about hotel service) that are provided by the hotel service users, which can prevent potential consumers to purchase service from the hotel (Litvin & Pan, 2008). Hotel industries are likely to receive negative reviews online, this is because every hotel has the possibilities of not being able to satisfy the requirements of all guests (especially those guests with high demands) (Kim, 2009). This might then generate dissatisfaction and complaints. For example, Melián *et al.* (2013) found that there are more

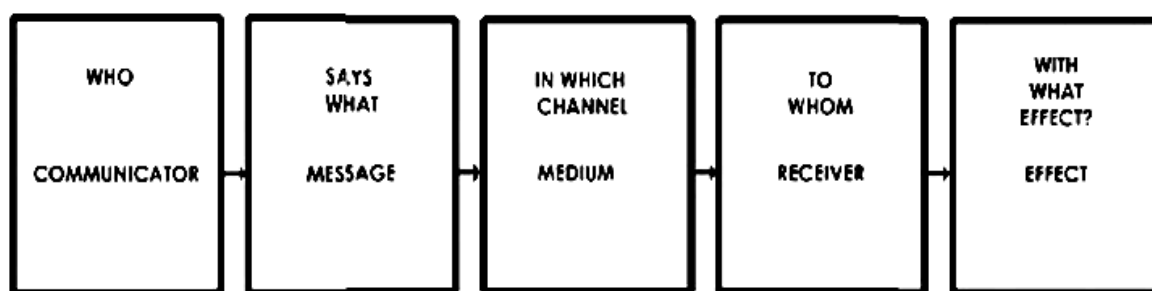
than 30% of reviews that are negative on TripAdvisor. These negative comments are likely to magnify the feeling of uncertainty and fear of potential consumers towards the service that they are expected to receive (Arndt, 1967). Therefore, negative reviews on websites should affect the expectations of potential consumers in the service and room values of the hotels and hence reduce their hotel purchase interests and intentions (Cantalops & Salvi, 2014; Homer & Yoon, 1992; Zheng, Youn & Kincaid, 2009).

Based on Lasswell's Communication model, this sub-section will discuss the factors that are involved in the negative e-WOM that might influence the consumers' hotel purchase intention. These factors include negative star rating, high volumes of negative online reviews, negative visual cues, bidirectional anonymity, e-WOM information senders' (or receivers') expertise, and the tie strength between the senders and the receivers of the information).

2.7.1 Lasswell's Communication Model

The Lasswell's communication model is presented in Figure 2. There are five components in the model i.e., communicator, message, medium, receiver and effect. In a successful communication, it is required to understand who said the words, what he/she said, in which channel that the words have been said, to whom the words have been said, and the effect of the words that have been said (Lasswell, 1948). When compared with previous models, such as S-M-C-R model, Laswell incorporated the components of medium and effect and emphasize the significance of effect (Lee, 2016). Specifically, Mishra (2016) explain further that communicator represents the creator and sender of the message, the message represents the content of the message and the related arguments, the medium is the carrier of the message (e.g., where the message is posted on), the receiver represents the recipients of the message, and the effect represents the influence of the message on the receivers. Furthermore, this model is suitable for the situation when personal or group communication need to be disseminated to various groups in various situations (Mishra, 2016), which suits the intercommunicating condition on review website, such as TripAdvisor.

Figure 2: Lasswell's Communication Model (Lasswell, 1948, p. 117)



The essence of successful online communication through Internet channels (such as review websites) depends on how information is exchanged between the information senders and the receivers (Cheng & Zhou, 2010), and in this study, review websites exactly play role for information exchanges. Specifically, in an e-WOM communication, the communicator could be the senders of hotel reviews, the message is the reviewed comments regarding the hotel information, the medium is the review websites, the receiver is the seekers of hotel information (i.e., potential consumers of hotel service), and the effect can be referred to the purchase intention and behaviours of these potential consumers who have been communicated with the hotel information (Wong, 2012; Xu, 2015).

Hence, Lasswell's communication model is used in this thesis to analyse the e-WOM communication on TripAdvisor and the influence of the negative e-WOM on consumers' hotel purchase intention.

2.7.2 Star Rating System

The star rating system was established in 1958 by Mobil Travel Guides, where the rating is based on 5 stars (from 1 to 5 where 5 presents the one with the highest quality) (Miller, 2015). There are many previous studies that were carried out to analyse the influence of star rating on customer purchase behaviour (Flanagin & Metzger, 2013). For example, Sparks & Browning (2011) found that consumers are willing to depend on easy-to-be-processed information such as customer rating to make evaluations and decisions when they are faced up with a plenty of information. This is especially apparent in online purchasing environment, where there are a large quantity of information and consumers are goal-driven (Van Schaik & Ling, 2009), because consumer rating is a reflection of the quality of the product (or the service) providers (Yang & Mai, 2010). Hence, Chen (2008) said that consumers' star rating tends to have strong influence on the purchase intentions of future service users.

Figure 3: Star Rating System of TripAdvisor (TripAdvisor, 2013)



Traveler tips help you choose the right room. [Room tips \(338\)](#)

An example of the star rating system of TripAdvisor is presented in Figure 3. It could be seen that the quality of each hotel is rated based on 5 circles (from 1 to 5 which represents terrible, poor, average, very good and excellent). The rating of the hotel is also based on 6 specific attributes, which are sleep quality, location, rooms, service, value and cleanliness (Xie & Zhang, 2014). One of the benefits of the star rating system is that it can help hotel service seekers to form initial impression about hotels without reviewing hundreds or even thousands of comments that are provided by the consumers to the hotels. This means that they can rely on the number of green circles (out of 5) that the hotel has received to make a quick and easy judgement about the quality of the hotel service (Patel, 2011). Hence, star rating can provide straightforward information. However, star rating system is with disadvantages. For example, if the hotel is with relatively low levels of star rating, the consumers might not be willing to browse detailed reviews, thereby affecting their purchase intention passively.

2.7.3 Volume of Negative Online Reviews

According to Liu (2006), the volume of e-WOM has some influence on the awareness, attitudes, intentions and behaviours of consumers. This relationship between e-WOM volume and consumer purchase intention is also supported by other research. For example, Cheung & Thadani (2012) found that volume of online reviews can reduce the anxiety of the consumers towards the products (or the services) that they might receive. This is because volume, especially the high volume, of comments reflects that the product (or the service) is

popular (Aljahdali, 2016), since it at least has a large amounts of consumers (Godes & Mayzlin, 2004). Hence, volume of comments might strengthen the confidence of the consumers as it can reduce the feeling of uncertainty of the consumers towards the products (or the services) that they intend to purchase (Wu, 2013).

The consumers' reviews can be either positive or negative. However, according to López & Sicilia (2014), consumers' negative comments can give the potential buyers of hotel service a more comprehensive understanding towards the real service quality of the hotel, so that they can have expectations on the negative aspects of the service that they might receive. This view is also supported by Viglia & Ladrón-de-Guevara (2013), in their study about TripAdvisor, they found that consumers are willing to read negative comments on review websites, due to the fact that negative reviews can provide more information so that consumers who are seeking for hotel information can be informed about both positive and negative aspects of the hotel and hence they should feel certain about their expectation of hotel service. Therefore, the provision of negative reviews is suggested to be better than only the monotonous positive information. However, there are also other studies suggesting that consumers should have lower purchase intention if they are exposed to negative reviews (Shrestha, 2016). This is especially true in China, where there is a phenomenon of crowd mentality, which means that Chinese are more likely to follow the behaviours of others without asking why (Erdogan, 2016). Hence, it is supposed that – in China – when volume of negative reviews towards some hotels reach a certain number, purchase intentions of these Chinese buyers should be largely lowered as they are easily to be influenced by the attitudes and the comments from others.

2.7.4 Negative Visual Cues

According to Bi (2010), there is an old proverb that a picture is more than a thousand words, which suggests that the importance of visual cues in influencing the impression of the consumers towards the products (or the services) that might be provided by the sellers. Therefore, the visual cues are dramatically essential to the intangible hotel service because the intangible service can be shows through visual cues in concrete way. Based on the views of Davis & Khazanchi (2007), visual cues are the images that are posted by the consumers which can be reviewed by other potential online consumers that is related to the products (or

the services). The benefits of visual cues according to Karvonen & Parkkinen (2001) is that the real pictures (or images) of the products that are posted by the online sellers can increase the reliability of the products, reduce the uncertainty feelings of the consumers, and hence promote their online purchase intentions. This argument is also supported by the research from Cem (2013), where he found that pictures (and images) that are posted online can increase the pleasure feelings of the consumers, which encourages them to be engaged in purchasing behaviours. The important role of visual cues among Chinese hotel customers is also supported by China Internet Data and Information Centre (2014), where a survey suggested that 44% of Chinese hotel consumers are attracted by the pictures and images that are posted by the hotels when they are browsing the information.

Figure 4: Visual Cues of Hilton Helsinki Kalastajatorppa (Source: TripAdvisor)

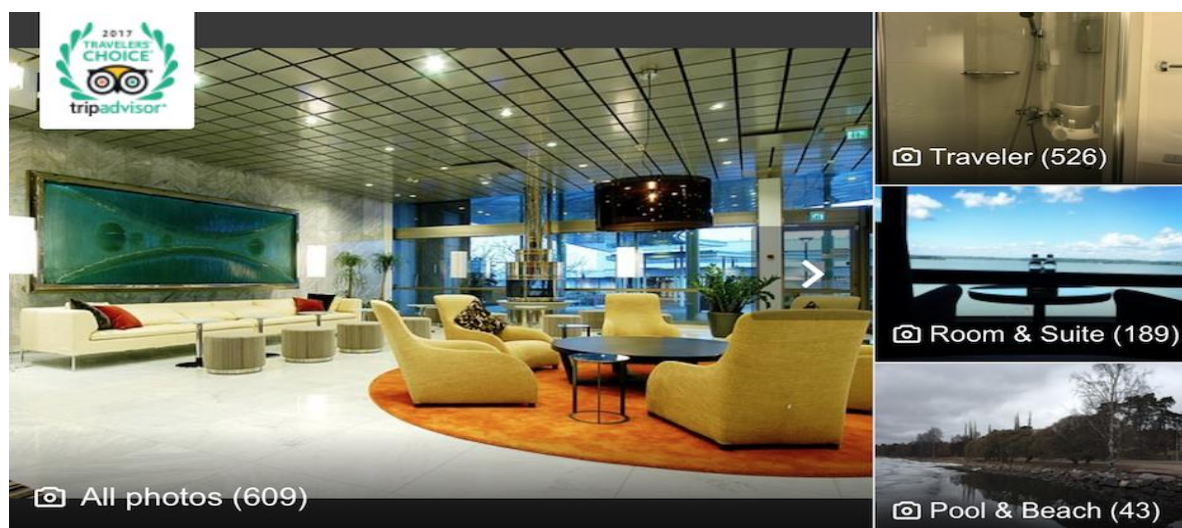


Figure 5: Reviews from Former Consumer with Visual Cues (Source: TripAdvisor)



A TripAdvisor ...



Reviewed March 22, 2017 via mobile

港区的高性价比之选

[Google Translation](#)

酒店位于游轮码头不远，去芬兰堡的摆渡码头也很近，旁边是俄罗斯统治时期的海关大楼——非常漂亮的建筑。酒店一楼有很多半圆形的观景窗，很有格调。大堂自助咖啡吧提供免费的热水，这对于亚洲客人很重要。地下一楼是健身房和桑拿房，刷房卡使用。早餐厅很漂亮，使用ipad点果汁也太豪气了吧，餐食是我在芬兰各酒店中最好的。酒店客房很宽敞，除了没有热水壶外应有尽有，作为猫图鹰给予的环保黄金级别酒店，自然不提供小包装洗浴液，连瓶装水都不提供，当然前台可以买到，2.8欧的样子。我们入住的时候酒店正在翻新外立面，布满脚手架，看上去总有点怪怪的，这是没给5星的唯一原因。

[Show less](#)

Stayed: March 2017, traveled with friends



It is very easy to find visual cues on different review websites including the TripAdvisor. For example, on TripAdvisor, the hotel owners are likely to post pictures (or images) of their hotel facilities, decorations and its surrounding environment to promote the image of the hotel as a travel destination (Cem, 2013). In Figure 4, the photos of the visual cues of Hilton Helsinki Kalastajatorppa is presented in TripAdvisor. Nevertheless, the visual cues can also be posted by the consumers who are writing their reviews. Hotel consumers might prefer to attach some pictures (or images) of the hotel, rather than simply giving some comments or reviews. An example is given in Figure 5, where a consumer of the hotel in Helsinki posted his/her comments with pictures showing the real living environment of the hotel and the flaw of this hotel's service. Hence, it could be concluded that visual cues (including pictures and images) can present consumers more about the service quality of the hotel that they intend to choose for a stay. Furthermore, consumers need positive visual cues to confirm their purchase intention and increase their experiential value (Grace Suk Ha Chan, 2017). However, as it is stated by Suprpto (2013), every hotel might have disadvantages in service quality, which means that hotels cannot avoid negative comments with visual cues. Therefore, these real-life pictures (images) that are posted by past consumers about the negative aspects of the hotels are likely to reduce the purchase intentions of the future potential consumers (Silverman, 2001).

2.7.5 Bidirectional Anonymity

In comparison with face-to-face communication, online communication might cause lower levels of social anxiety and it is also difficult for the consumers to be recognized by the public (Li & Liang, 2013). This means that Internet helps to improve the anonymous level of e-WOM, when compared with the traditional WOM. And according to the opinions of Roed (2003), there are two dimensions of anonymity. First, through online communication, it is possible for the online communicators and receivers to hide their personal information so that they can express their views freely (Walther, 1996), which is the positive sides of anonymity. However, it is also possible that the communicators might not obey with the social norms if their personal information can be protected and they cannot be recognized by the public. In this way, they might create rumours that are detrimental for the social wellbeing (Roed, 2003). For example, Zhu (2013) found that in China, people might not trust the information that are provided online about the hotels, as they believe that anonymity are false and might decrease the credibility of the data.

TripAdvisor is an example where there is bidirectional anonymity. According to Jeacle & Carter (2011), tourists can share their information regarding the spots and hotels on TripAdvisor in an anonymous manner. When compared with other review websites, TripAdvisor wins reputation in credibility among consumers in different countries (including Chinese consumers) (Park, *et al.*, 2007). However, the anonymity system of TripAdvisor has both positive and negative effects. In the positive aspect, it is believed that anonymity can help to improve the willingness of consumers to express honestly about their viewpoints (Roed, 2003). To be specific, since the negative aspects of service quality in a hotel cannot be avoided (Ventura, 2017), the negative comments and reviews (e.g., complaints) from consumers might help present the true conditions of the hotel and hence reduce the purchase intentions of future consumers (Zheng *et al.*, 2009). When it comes to the negative aspects of anonymity, it should be said that the high level of anonymity in review websites such as TripAdvisor might lead to the creation of fake and malicious reviews, which means that there will be abused use of the review service (TripAdvisorWatch, 2010). In this way, consumers might be confused about the information that is provided by these review websites (such as TripAdvisor) and wonder about the authenticity of the information on these websites. Hence, this means that anonymity might decrease the credibility of the information that is offered on review websites

as the information source is vague (Rains & Scott, 2007). For example, the reviewers should have different backgrounds and it is difficult to check the authenticity of the information that is provided by them (Litvin & Pan, 2008). In this way, Chatterjee (2001) found that consumers are likely to ignore the negative reviews that are provided by strangers, as they are not sure whether the information is reliable or not. Therefore, it can be said that negative comments can both help increase the credibility of reviews, and reduce the authenticity of the review websites if the abused information is provided, thereby influencing consumers purchase intention in different ways.

2.7.6 Online WOM Senders' Expertise

According to Bristor (1990), the expertise is about the provision of information that is based on the knowledge which is gained from the real-life experience of a person. Hence, Xu (2015) pointed out that e-WOM expertise of the information senders is about how the information receiver perceives the abilities of the information senders in providing reliable information that he/she is in need of. Gilly *et al.*, (1998) found from their studies that the receivers' perceived expertise of the senders has a positive influence on the purchase intentions of these information receivers. This is because they believed that information senders who are experts tend to give more reliable information with confidence to them regarding the service or the product quality. Hence, consumers tend to give more trust to information senders who are experts.

The hotel industry is more service-based, where the information exchange between consumers regarding the service quality of the hotel is important (Chan & Mackenzie, 2013). Hence, consumers in the hotel industry are likely to rely on the real-life experience that is provided by past consumers (Wu, 2013). According to Huang & Chen (2006), the information that is provided by the consumers with expertise is supposed to be with features such as authoritativeness, competence, expertness and experience. An example is the review website of TripAdvisor, where it is easy to distinguish the experienced and inexperienced reviewers. To be specific, the reviewers who usually provide information that is useful will be voted by other users of TripAdvisor, so that they can be rewarded as helpful reviewers. Also, the reviewers who are proactively engaged in the reviewing activities can be rewarded as senior contributors if he/she has enough amounts of accumulated points in his/her accounts. As the

level of the reviewer increases, his icon's colour will be changed from green to yellow, which is an indication of high-level contributors (TripAdvisor, 2013). Therefore, these yellow-icon users can be viewed as experienced or even expert reviewers by the consumers, so that their opinions are more influential than the ordinary reviewers on the purchase intentions of the potential information seekers (Wu, 2013). Another study from Bristor, (1990) also suggested that consumers tend to trust reviewers who are with experienced or expert knowledge, so that the criticisms that are stated by them to the potential consumers are highly likely to reduce the purchase intentions of these consumers.

2.7.7 Tie Strength between Online WOM Senders and Receivers

According to Oosthoek (2013), tie strength is used to describe the level of the intensity of the social relationship between the online WOM senders and receivers. The range of the tie strength varies from weak to strong (Wang & Chang, 2013). There are many previous studies to analyse the influence of tie strength on the purchasing behaviours of consumers. For example, the studies from Brown & Reingen (1987) suggested that consumers are more likely to be influenced by information senders if they have strong tie strength with them than the senders with whom they have weak tie strength. Similarly, Gilbert & Karahalios (2009) found that consumers are likely to trust the information that is provided by senders with whom they have strong ties.

However, in online review communication, the tie strength between the online WOM senders and receivers should be weak, since most of them are strangers (Wu, 2013). For example, based on the anonymity system of the review websites such as TripAdvisor, the hotel information providers should have little or no relationship with the hotel information seekers (Xia & Bechwati, 2008). Since the information receivers are not sure about the authenticity of the online reviews (Cheng & Zhou, 2010), they might wonder the credibility of these reviews and hence should have reduced hotel purchase intentions. The situation is also similar for negative reviews that are provided by the information senders. Although previous studies suggested that negative reviews tend to have more influence on the purchase intentions of the hotel information seekers (e.g., Dougherty *et al.*, 2013; Yang & Mai, 2010), these negative reviews that are provided online in anonymous manner by the senders who are strangers and are with weak tie strength with the receivers should be perceived with suspicion and the

complete acceptance is difficult, thereby lessening information receivers hotel purchase intention.

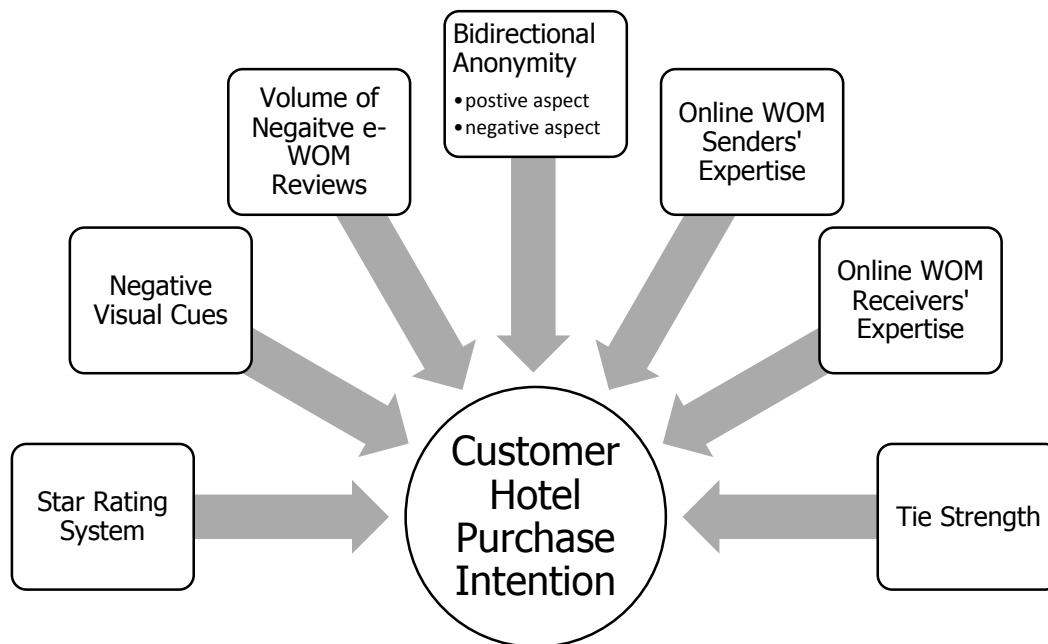
2.7.8 Online WOM Receivers' Expertise

The online WOM receiver is the individual who give responses to the information that is provided by the communicators, and Cheung & Thadani (2010) pointed out that the influence that the provided information might have on an individual is different from one to another. The findings from Bloch *et al.* (1986) is that information receivers with equipped knowledge or enhanced experience are less likely to be influenced by the information that are provided by the communicators, since they might have their own bank of knowledge so that they should process the provided information impartially and critically. The similar findings are also given by Bansal & Voyer (2000), where they found that expert or experienced receivers are less likely to be influenced by online WOM as they are with personal judgment in making decisions and desire to seek for reassurance in order to reduce risks by using their own knowledge and expertise (Levy, 2012).

In addition, Fan & Miao (2012) pointed out that the expertise of the receivers is especially important in hotel industry, as consumers cannot reach the hotel service before consumption. When they are faced up with hundreds or thousands of reviews, they are required to make their own decisions on which information can be accepted or be dropped. Although Ahluwalia (2002) pointed out that negative reviews are likely to influence the purchase intentions of the consumers than the positive reviews, he also pointed out that the level of influence that of the reviews depends more on consumers personal judgments of the information receivers rather than on whether reviews are negative or not. This is explained by Fan & Miao (2012) that the receivers should process the information based on their own expertise, especially when the information is provided online in anonymous manner. This view is also supported by Bansal & Voyer (2000), where they found that receivers with high level of expertise are less likely to be influenced by the online WOM.

2.8 Conceptual Framework

Figure 6: Conceptual Framework (Source: Author)



Based on the above discussion, a conceptual framework can be established regarding the influence of negative e-WOM on customer purchase intention. This is done to provide the prior knowledge towards the two research questions. For the first research question (i.e., What kinds of negative e-WOM might influence customers' hotel purchase intention?), the answer is 8 factors in Figure 6 (i.e., star rating system, negative visual cues, volume of negative e-WOM reviews, bidirectional anonymity, online WOM senders' (and receivers') expertise, and the tie strength between senders and receivers). When it comes to the second research question (i.e., how these negative e-WOM reviews might affect customers' hotel purchase intention?), there are some contradicting findings which show that negative reviews might have both positive and negative influence on the purchase intentions of the consumers.

3 Research Methodology

In this chapter, the research methodology that was used in this research is introduced. In the first sub-section, the research approach of this study is introduced, which is quantitative research method. Following this, the population and sampling methods of this research is presented, which is convenience sampling (snowball sampling). Then, the design of the questionnaire survey is discussed in details.

3.1 Quantitative Research Approach

According to Saunders (2016, p. 692), research is a process where scientific research methods are applied, so that data are collected, analysed and interpreted from real-life to answer the specific research questions. Based on the view of Williams (2007, p. 68), there are three research approaches i.e., quantitative, qualitative and mixed approaches. In this study, the quantitative research method was applied, so that the general research results would represent the general characteristics of the population (Johnson, 2007). According to Saunders (2016), quantitative method is usually applied to analyse the relationship between variables, where graphs, charts and statistics are used to present the collected empirical data. As it is stated in Section 1.2, the aim of the study is to analyse the influence of negative online WOM on Chinese consumers' hotel purchase intentions. Hence, the quantitative research method is applied, as Saunders (2016, p. 496) pointed out that the quantitative method can "help to explore, present, describe and examine relationship and trends within data".

3.2 Population and Sampling

The population of this research is all Chinese consumers who browse review websites (e.g., TripAdvisor) to make decisions in hotel selections. It was not possible to collect the information from the entire population, which means that sampling was necessary. The snowball sampling used in this research, which belongs to convenience sampling. According to Saunders, (2016, p. 241), convenience sampling method is a purposive sampling, where the cases in a sample are selected because they are available or are easy to be accessed. Specifically, in snowball sampling, "subsequent respondents are obtained from information provided by initial respondents" (Saunders, 2016, p. 240). This means that the survey will be passed to some initial respondents and then be delivered from these initial respondents to other subsequent respondents. Finally, a sufficient number of potential respondents can be recruited to answer the questions of the survey. This is explained further by Andale (2014), pointed out that the snowball sampling works in two steps i.e. identifying potential subjects in the population and asking these subjects to recruit other potential respondents. Specifically, in this research, the author first forwards the survey links to some initial respondents (e.g., friends, families, users of discussion forums, users of travel groups on SNSs) and ask them to help with forwarding the links to other potential respondents. Snowball sampling method come with some biases, for instance, sampling bias may occur when previous respondents

tend to nominate other people that they are familiar. Therefore, it is highly conceivable that the respondents have the similar traits and personalities, which may result in only a small group of the entire population (Explorale, 2012). But Bryman (2010) pointed out that the data that are collected using snowball sampling can be representative of the population if the sample size is big enough.

3.3 Data Collection: Questionnaire Survey

According to Saunders (2016, p. 724), primary data are collected specially “for the research project being undertaken”. In this research, primary data was collected from questionnaire survey. Before the distribution of formal questionnaires, a pilot test should be carried out first to assess the validity and reliability of the collected primary data (Saunders, 2016, p. 473). This view is also supported by Tirtiroglu & Elbeck (2008) as they pointed out that pilot test is a mini-version of the full research where the validity and reliability of the research can be tested first. Based on the results of the pilot test, the researchers can refine the questionnaires to guarantee that respondents can feel it easy to answer all questions and the collected data can be easily recorded (Saunders, 2016, p. 473). Specifically, the pilot test was carried out among 7 Chinese consumers (who had some experience of browsing TripAdvisor) where pilot questionnaires were sent. After the completion of the questionnaires, the researcher asked the feelings of the respondents and their feedback to the contents of the questionnaires, i.e. they were asked whether the questions are easy to follow, any misunderstandings in words and the design was reasonable. Based on their feedback, the questionnaires were amended in case that there are some confusions in the understanding of the contents.

After the pilot test, the final questionnaires were distributed during one-week period from 9th June to 15th June. The questionnaire was created online through a platform called Questionnaire Star, so that the questionnaire URL could be sent to potential respondents. The online survey was used in this research since Guest (2016) pointed out that it is a data collection tool that is cost and time-efficient as data is easy to be distributed and collected. The questionnaire URL was posted by the author to SNSs (e.g., travelling groups of Tencent QQ, WeChat, Weibo) and also to the Baidu Post Bar and Qiongyou (the former one is an online forum that can get people together with similar interests by constructing topics such as traveling or hotels; the latter one is the biggest discussion forums of travellers in China). A

total of 125 questionnaire URL were sent within one week, but in total answers from 110 questionnaires were collected. The response rate is 88%.

3.4 Questionnaire Design

In total, there are 16 questions in the questionnaire, grouped into two sections. The full questionnaire (English version) is attached in Appendix 1. The respondents answered questionnaire on the translated Chinese version. In the first section, the demographic information of the respondents was collected, which includes gender, age, education, income, and employment status. In addition, a question (i.e., question 6 “have you ever browsed hotels on TripAdvisor?”) was asked to identify whether the respondents are with same experience in hotel browsing on TripAdvisor. If the answer is “no”, these respondents were screened out. By doing this, respondents without hotel browsing experience on TripAdvisor or not of interests in the study were excluded from the research. In the second section, the data regarding the influence of negative e-WOM on Chinese consumers’ hotel purchase intentions were collected. Hence, the questions were designed based on the factors that are discussed in Section 2.7. The respondents of the questionnaires were directed to answer how much (to what extent) they believe that each factor of negative e-WOM might influence their purchase intentions based a Likert-scale questions. There are 5 Likert-scales, ranging from 1 (strongly disagree) to 5 (strongly agree).

The content of each question was modified from previous literature. For example, question 8 (“To what extent do you believe that low scores from star rating system might reduce your intention to book a hotel”) was modified from the research of Xu (2015), where she discussed the influence of e-WOM on consumers’ purchase intentions. In addition, the question 12 (“To what extent do you believe that negative reviews do not affect my intention to book a hotel because these reviews are anonymous and I do not know who wrote them”) and question 13 (“To what extent do you believe that negative reviews decrease my intention to book a hotel, since user anonymity supports people to express opinions more authentically”) were adapted from the study of Duffy (2013), which was about the influence of anonymity on consumers’ hotel purchase intention based on the case study of the TripAdvisor. Finally, the question 14 (“To what extent do you believe that negative reviews from high-level reviewers decrease my intention to book a hotel”), question 15 (“To what extent do you believe that negative reviews

by stranger users affect my intention to book a hotel less than negative reviews by familiar users), question 16 (“To what extent do you believe that my knowledge and experience on hotels plays more important role than negative reviews when I am choosing a hotel”) were adjusted from the reports from Li (2008), where she studied about the influence of the negative e-WOM on the purchase intentions of the consumers in budget hotels.

4 Results and Data Analysis

In this chapter, the results of the research are presented, which includes data cleaning, the demographic profiles of the respondents, the influence of negative reviews on consumers’ purchase intention (in different demographic groups).

4.1 Demographic Profiles of Respondents

The demographic profiles of the respondents are presented in details in Appendix 2. Specifically, the majority of the respondents are females, which account for around 66% of the total respondents. The percentage of males are 34%. When it comes to the age group, 29% of them can be grouped as young (below 30), and others (around 71%) can be classified as the middle-aged or even older. In terms of the educational level, 53% are with vocational degree (or college) or below, and the rest 47% are with bachelor degree or higher. And there are more than half (52%) of respondents are employed, while 32% are students and 16% are unemployed. When it comes to the distribution of incomes, 68% of respondents are with monthly income lower than 5500 RMB (around 700 euros), whereas the rest 32% are with income higher than 5500 RMB. The monthly income of 5500 RMB is used here as classification criteria since ESGOOGLE (2015) shows that the average income of Chinese citizens are around 4134 RMB (around 500 euros), who can be grouped as with medium incomes.

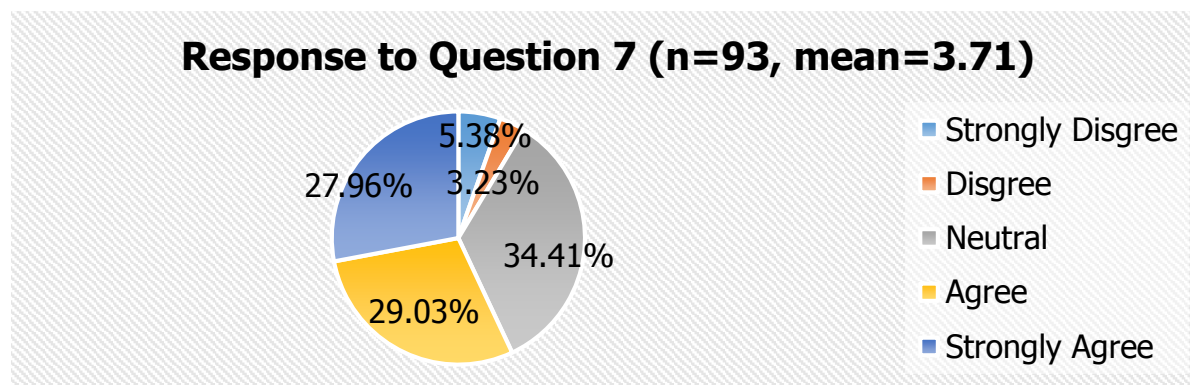
Figure 7: Demographic Information

Demographic Information			
Gender	66% females	34% males	
Age	29% below 30	71% over 30	
Educational Level	53% vocational degree of below	47% bachelor degree of higher	
Social roles	52% employed	32% students	16% unemployed
Monthly Income	68% < 5500RMB	32% > 5500RMB	

4.2 Negative Online Reviews and Hotel Purchase Intention

Figure 8 represents question 7 i.e., to what extent that the responds agree or disagree that “negative reviews affect my intention to book a hotel”.

Figure 8: Response to Question 7

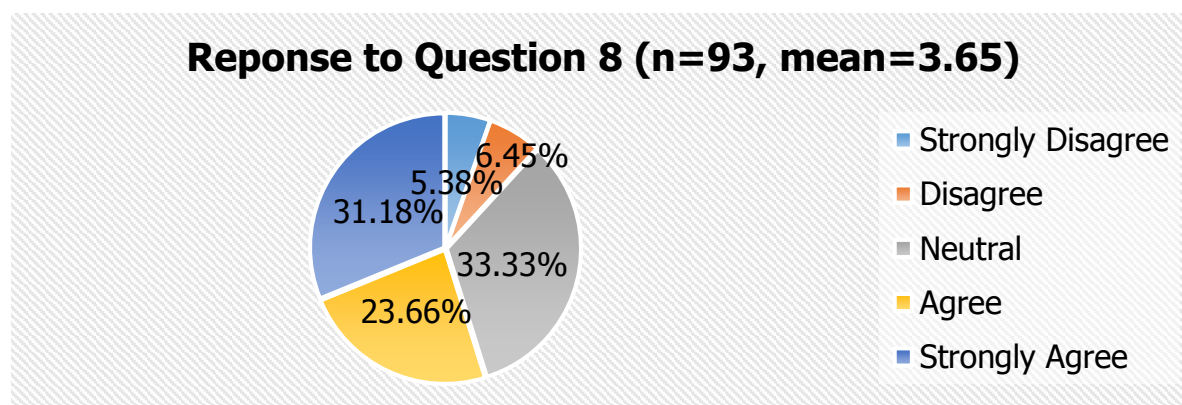


The result show that more than half (57%) of the respondents agree or strongly agree that negative reviews affect their hotel purchase intentions. The rest 43% hold neutral or negative attitudes. It is an indication that respondents (to some extent) agree that negative reviews on TripAdvisor will influence their purchase intention of hotels. Specially, the influence of specific factors of negative reviews on customer purchase intentions are discussed below.

4.2.1 Star Rating System and Hotel Purchase intention

Figure 9 presents the result of question 8 i.e. to what extent the respondents believe that “low scores from star rating system reduce my intention to book a hotel”. Based on the findings, more than half (55%) of the respondents hold strongly agree or agree views. There are only 12% of the respondents do not agree with this view. The great comparison shows that star rating system should have some influence on hotel purchase intention, as it is perceived by the respondents.

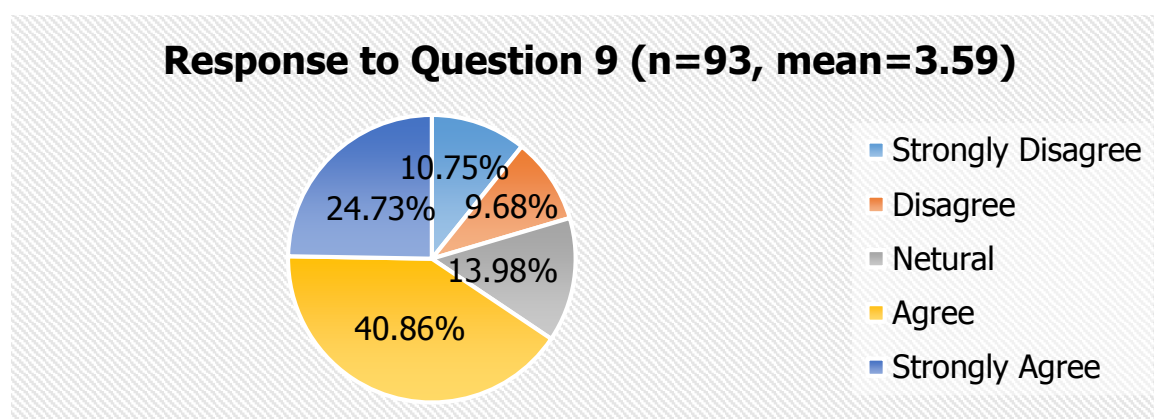
Figure 9: Response to Question 8



4.2.2 Volumes of Negative Reviews and Hotel Purchase Intention

Figure 10 shows the result from question 9 i.e. to what extent do the respondents agree or disagree that “volume of negative reviews can directly decrease my intention to choose a hotel”.

Figure 10: Response to Question 9

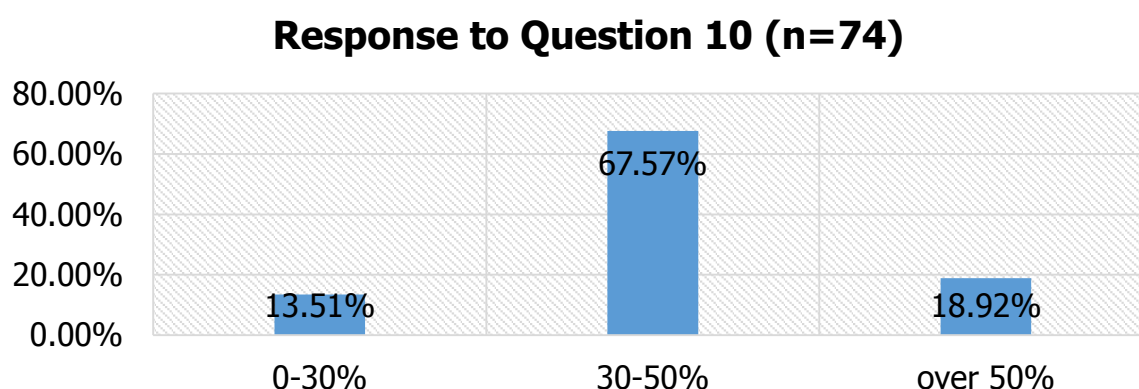


Based on the findings, a majority of respondents (65%) strongly agree or agree that volumes of negative reviews have negative influence on their hotel purchase intentions. Also, there are only 20% respondents do not agree with this view, which presents that respondents hold agree attitudes towards the influence of volumes of negative comments on their willingness to book hotels.

Figure 11 presents the results of question 10 i.e. how many negative reviews will weaken my purchase intention on certain hotel. Specially, there are 19 respondents disagree or strongly disagree with the question 9, which means they do not consider volume as a factor that affect their hotels' purchase intention, these respondents skip to question 11 directly; hence, the total respondents for question 10 are 74. Among respondents who hold agree, strongly agree

or neutral view in question 10, most of them (67.57%) believe that 30-50% of negative reviews are likely to affect their hotel purchase intentions, whereas only a few respondents (13.51%) believes that only a few (0-30%) volumes of negative reviews can reduce their intentions to book certain hotels. Hence, it can be concluded that volumes of negative e-WOM have some influence on consumers' hotel purchase intention, and 30-50% of negative reviews should be influential.

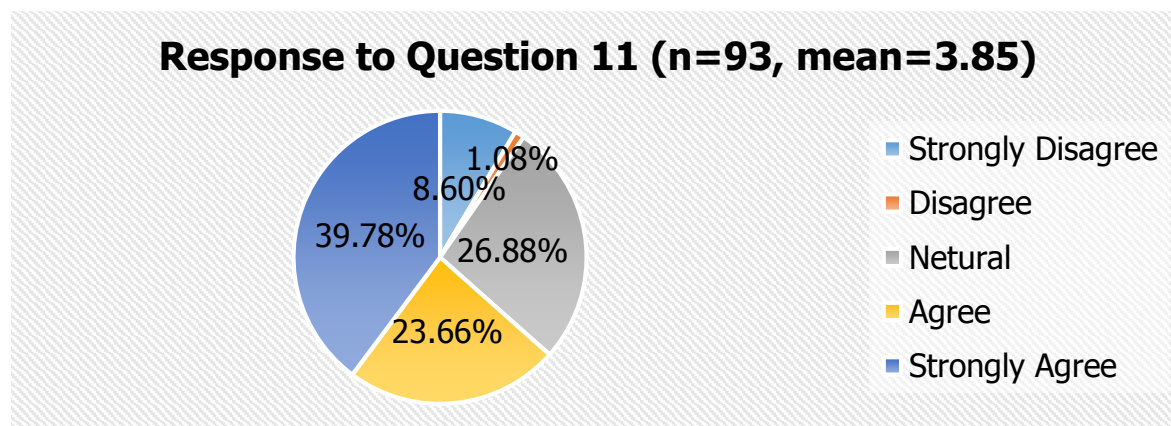
Figure 11: Response to Question 10



4.2.3 Negative Visual Cues and Hotel Purchase Intention

Figure 12 presents the results of question 11 i.e. “the intention to book a hotel will be decreased if it has received negative reviews with pictures”. The majority (63%) of the respondents agree with this opinion where negative reviews with visual cues (pictures) should reduce their intention to book hotels. Also, only 9.68% of respondents disagree with this opinion. The results indicate that the influential effects of negative reviews with negative visual cues on consumers' purchase intention.

Figure 12: Response of Question 11



4.2.4 Bidirectional Anonymity and Hotel Purchase Intention

Figure 13 gives the results of question 12 i.e. negative reviews do not affect my intention to book a hotel because these reviews are anonymous and I do not know who wrote them. It could be seen that only 31% of the respondents support this view, which is less than 50%. Also, there are more than 32% of the respondents disagree with this view. This is an indication that Chinese hotel consumers do not believe that the anonymity of negative reviews might have little influence on their purchase intention just because these reviews are not from reliable sources.

Figure 13: Response to Question 12

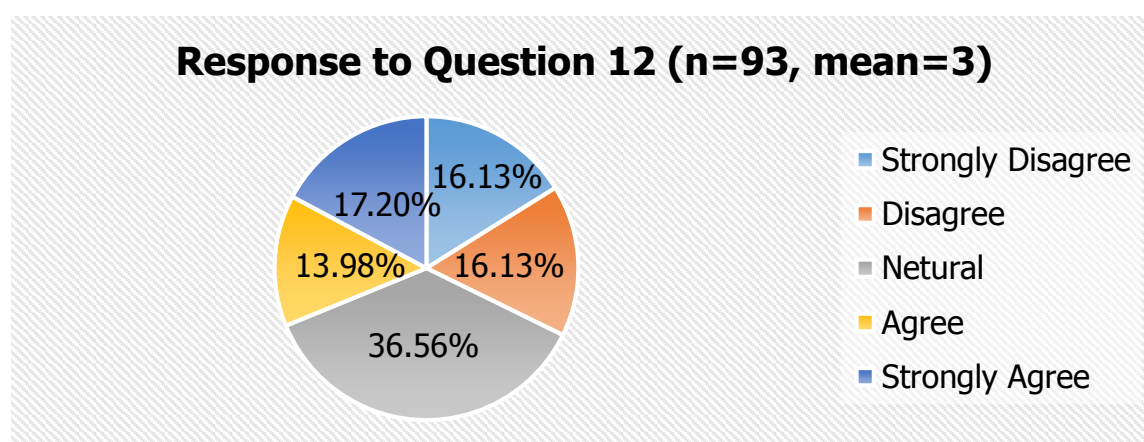
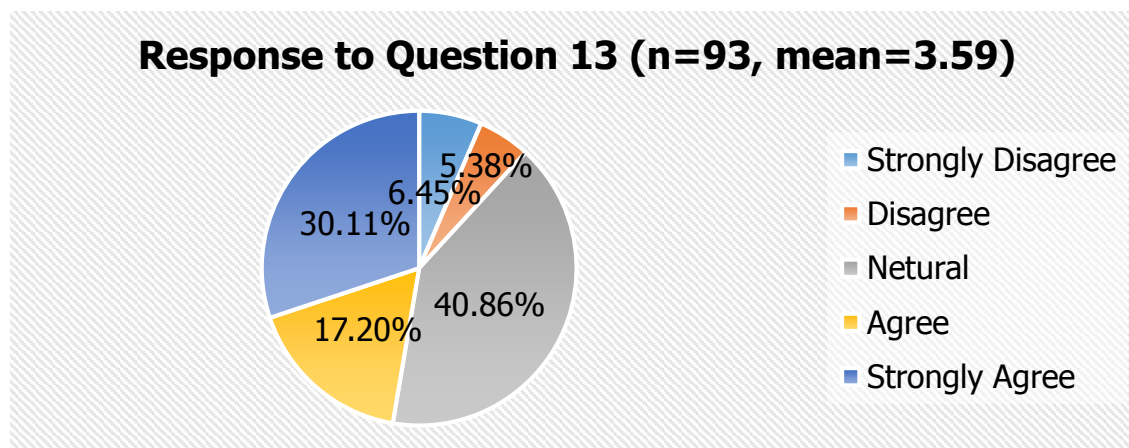


Figure 14 presents the results of question 13 i.e. negative reviews decrease my intention to book a hotel, since user anonymity supports people to express opinions more authentically. According to the results, around half (47%) of the respondents agree with this view, whereas only 12% of the respondents disagree with this view. The outcome shows that consumers agree with the opinion that user anonymity can help consumers to express more freely in negative reviews about the hotels that might influence the purchase intentions of the future visitors.

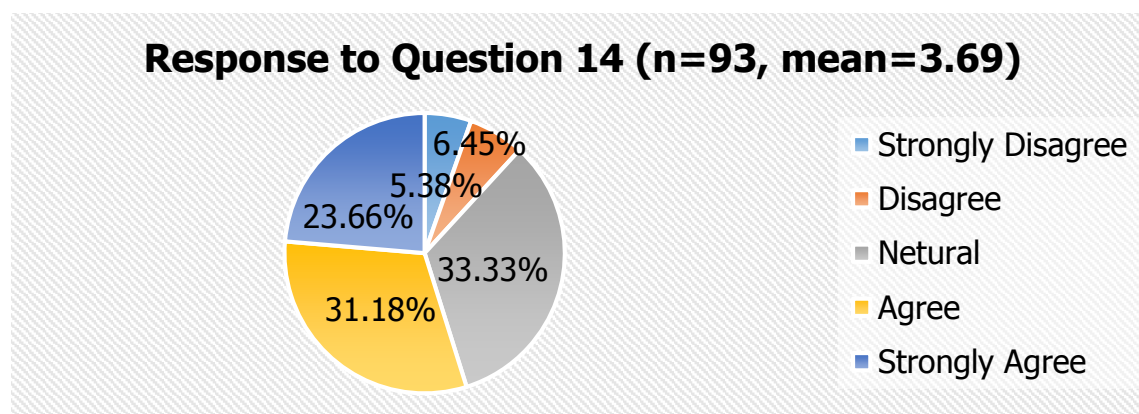
Figure 14: Response to Question 13



4.2.5 Online WOM Senders' Expertise and Hotel Purchase Intention

Figure 15 gives the results of question 14 i.e. negative reviews from high-level reviewers decrease my intention to book a hotel. According to the findings, 55% of the respondents agree or strongly agree with the view that they are likely to be influenced by the negative reviews that are posted by the experienced reviewers. Also, only 12% of the respondents do not agree with this view. Hence, it could be said that the respondents believe that negative reviews from the experienced reviewers are with influential effects on their purchase intention.

Figure 15: Response to Question 14

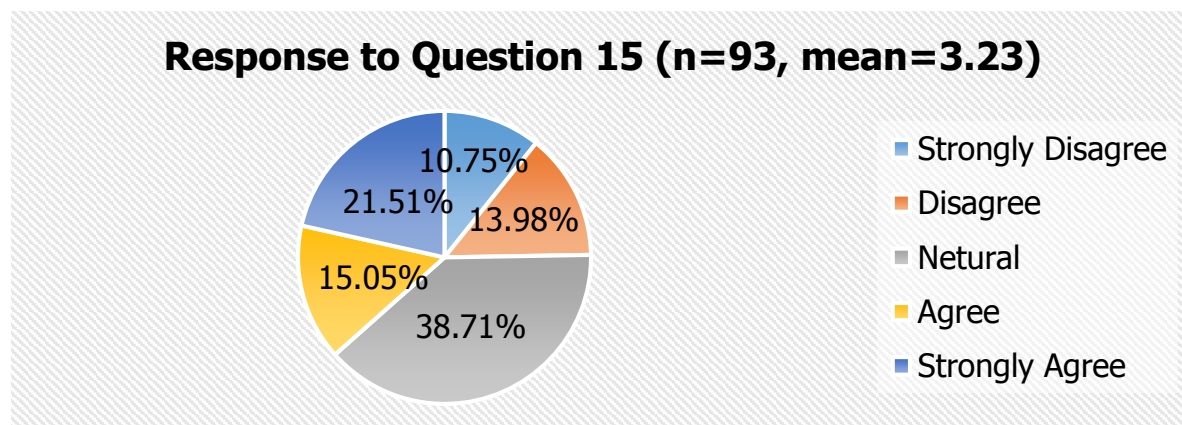


4.2.6 Tie Strength between Sender and Receiver and Hotel Purchase Intention

Figure 16 presents the results of question 15 i.e. negative reviews by stranger users affect my intention to book a hotel less than negative reviews by family users. The findings show that only 37% of the respondents that the influential effects of the comments from families should be stronger than the reviews from the strangers. In addition, around 39% of the respondents

hold the neutral view that there should not be big difference between the influence of negative reviews from stranger users and familiar users. Hence, it seems that tie strength has little influence on hotel purchase intention.

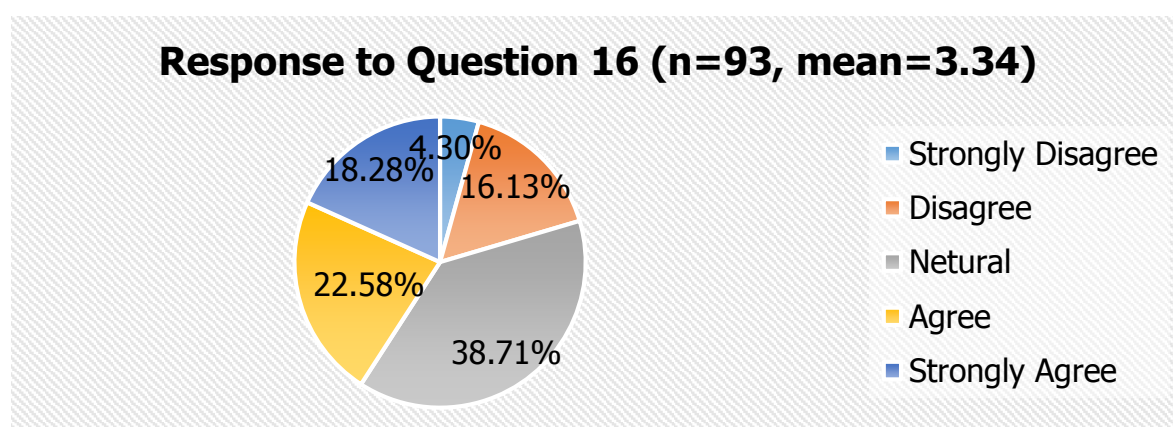
Figure 16: Response to Question 15



4.2.7 Online WOM Receivers' Expertise and Hotel Purchase Intention

Figure 17 gives the results of question 16 i.e. my knowledge and experience on hotels plays more important role than negative reviews when I am choosing a hotel. The findings show that around 41% respondents are likely to reply on their own hotel purchase experience and knowledge when they are making decisions of hotel selections. Also, there are more than half (59%) hold negative or neutral attitudes. Therefore, it could be said that the perceived importance of the influential effects from the receivers' expertise is low.

Figure 17: Response to Question 16



4.3 Negative Reviews and Hotel Purchase Intention in Demographic Groups

Based on Laerd Statistics (2013), independent t-test used to "evaluate the means between two unrelated groups on the same continuous and dependent variables". Therefore, this

independent t-test fits to analyse whether eight different factors (dependent variables) discussed in this study differed based on different age, education, gender and income groups (independent variables). However, question 10 is single choice question and asks about “how many negative reviews on this website will weaken your purchase intention on certain hotel?”, for which the independent t-test is not suitable. Thus, the independent t-test will be applied on question all questions except question 10.

As for the values of significance from independent t-test, if the Sig value is greater than 0.05, it means that there is no significant difference between means of two groups; if $0.001 < \text{Sig value} < 0.05$, it means the difference is significant; if the Sig value is less than 0.001, the difference is highly significant (StatisticalHelp, 2015)

According to Table 2, there is significant difference between the attitudes of youths (below 30) and the middle-aged or older in the influence of negative reviews on hotel purchase intention. Specifically, youths are more likely to believe that negative reviews will affect their attention to book a hotel, volume of negative reviews and negative rating stars will reduce their purchase intentions, negative visual cues will decrease their purchase intentions, and negative reviews from experienced communicator are more likely to reduce their purchase intentions. However, it seems that the middle-aged and the older are more likely to believe that their personal knowledge and tie strength between information senders will affect the negative influence of the reviews on their purchase intentions.

Table 1: Description of Each Question

Question 7	Negative reviews affect my intention to book a hotel passively
Question 8	Low scores from star rating system reduce my intention to book a hotel
Question 9	Volume of negative reviews can directly decrease my intention to book a hotel.
Question 11	The intention to book a hotel will be decreased if it has received negative reviews with pictures
Question 12	Negative reviews do not affect my intention to book a hotel because these reviews are anonymous and I do not know who wrote them
Question 13	Negative reviews decrease my intention to book a hotel, since user anonymity supports people to express opinions more authentically

Question 14	Negative reviews from high-level reviewers decrease my intention to book a hotel
Question 15	Negative reviews by stranger users affect my intention to book a hotel less than negative reviews by familiar users
Question 16	My knowledge and experience on hotels plays more important role than negative reviews when I am choosing a hotel

Table 2: Mean Difference between Age Groups

	Mean			
	Below 30	Above 30	Difference	Sig. (p value)
Question 7	3.86	3.64	0.221	0.004
Question 8	3.83	3.56	0.265	0.030
Question 9	3.90	3.45	0.433	0.015
Question 11	4.17	3.70	0.469	0.000
Question 12	2.83	3.08	-0.251	0.066
Question 13	3.69	3.55	0.143	0.007
Question 14	3.79	3.64	0.152	0.018
Question 15	2.97	3.34	-0.387	0.045
Question 16	3.07	3.47	-0.400	0.013

Table 3: Mean Difference between Education Groups

	Mean			
	College and Below	Bachelor and Above	Difference	Sig. (p value)
Question 7	3.65	3.77	-0.120	0.001
Question 8	3.51	3.80	-0.285	0.000
Question 9	3.65	3.57	0.044	0.162
Question 11	3.78	3.93	-0.156	0.018
Question 12	3.12	2.86	0.259	0.007
Question 13	3.53	3.66	-0.128	0.005
Question 14	3.51	3.89	-0.376	0.023
Question 15	3.29	3.16	0.127	0.068
Question 16	3.39	3.30	0.920	0.004

Similarly, the significant difference can be also found between different educational groups (Table 3). Specifically, it seems that the high-education groups (bachelor or above) are more

likely to be influenced by the negative reviews than the low-education groups (college or below). The high-education groups are more likely to be influenced by negative star rating systems, negative visual cues, and the negative reviews that are written by the experienced information senders. However, high-education groups thought that the influence of negative reviews on their purchase intentions are less likely to be affected by their personal knowledge, when compared with the low-education groups.

Table 4: Mean Difference between Social Role Groups

	Mean			
	Other social roles (students/unemployed)	Employed	Difference	Sig. (p value)
Question 7	3.51	3.90	-0.385	0.992
Question 8	3.51	3.77	-0.260	0.571
Question 9	3.71	3.48	0.232	0.003
Question 11	3.91	3.79	0.119	0.056
Question 12	3.22	2.79	0.431	0.312
Question 13	3.62	3.56	0.060	0.198
Question 14	3.47	3.90	-0.429	0.029
Question 15	3.47	3.00	0.467	0.125
Question 16	3.51	3.19	0.324	0.076

When it comes to the comparison between different social roles groups, there are also some significance between these two groups (Table 4). However, compared with age and education groups, the difference is relatively slight since all sig. (p) values are higher than 0.05 except the volume of negative review volume and the negative reviews proposed by high-level reviews senders. Moreover, other social roles (students and unemployed people) tend to be influenced more by the volume of negative reviews; whereas, employed respondents are more likely to be affected by the negative reviews sent by experienced information senders. Besides, there are no significant differences in the influence of negative reviews on consumers' hotel purchase intentions between gender and income groups, since all sig. (p) values are much higher than 0.05 (c.f. Appendix 3).

5 Discussion and Conclusion

In this chapter, the research results will be discussed, based on the findings of previous literature. Also, conclusions will be arrived, as well as the recommendation and a discussion of the research limitations.

5.1 Discussion of Research Results

Based on the demographic information of the respondents (Appendix 2), people who have ever browsed review websites such as TripAdvisor are usually well-educated. This is consistent with the findings from Hamdi (2017) and Huang (2016) that well-educated consumers are more likely to access to Internet, which accounts for 46.1% of the web users in China. So they can easily access TripAdvisor. Also, the users of TripAdvisor are usually employed, which is supported by Manley (2016) who found that employees usually have frequent business trips. Also, the majority of the respondents are the medium-income groups in China (around 5,500 RMB per month). This is consistent with previous findings that middle-income groups in China account for a majority of the population which is up to 109 million people (Document, 2016).

5.1.1 Negative Star Rating and Hotel Purchase Intention

According to the research results, negative star rating is likely to reduce the respondents' intention to book a hotel on TripAdvisor. Around 55% agree or strongly agree with this view, with mean attitudes of 3.65 (higher than neutral which is 3). This is consistent with previous research findings. For example, Berger (2010) pointed out that low star rating from consumers is a reflection of dissatisfaction towards hotel service quality, which will reduce the intentions of future visitors to book the hotels. This finding is also supported by Bambauer-Sachse (2011), where he found that low rating from consumers can bring detrimental effects to the brand equity of the hotels, hence can result in the decreased booking intentions of the consumers.

5.1.2 Volume of Negative Reviews and Hotel Purchase Intention

The research results give that volume of negative reviews on TripAdvisor tend to reduce hotel purchase intention, which is agreed (or totally agreed) by 70% of the respondents, with mean value of 3.76 (higher than neutral). Also, 68.29% of the respondents thought that the influential volume should be around 30-50%. This result is consistent with previous studies.

For instance, Romaniuk (2016) pointed out that online reviews can help establish customer trusts, and a certain proportion of negative online reviews can result in decreased purchase intentions. The influence of volume of negative reviews on hotel purchase intention is also supported by Duan (2008). In addition, it was found that Chinese consumers are more likely to be influenced by crowd mentality (Erdogan, 2016). In other words, they are likely to behave similarly with their peers or group members (Luo, 2009). This can explain why when there are a certain number of negative reviews, Chinese consumers will have reduced purchase intention as they are easily to be influenced by others.

5.1.3 Negative Visual Cues and Hotel Purchase Intention

The research results show that negative visual cues can result in decreased hotel purchase intention, which is agreed (or strongly agreed) by 63% of the respondents with mean value of 3.85. This influence is supported by the findings from Aljahdali (2016). Also, according to Kouyoumdjian (2012), negative visual cues have more direct effects than the written words as they can provide concrete evidence. Hence, he pointed out that the influential effects of negative visual cues should be much stronger than the high volume of negative written reviews. A similar study that was carried out in China by Liang & Wang (2015) also have similar results.

5.1.4 Directional Anonymity and Hotel Purchase Intention

This research supports the positive effect of anonymity on consumers' hotel purchase intention. Only 31% agree (or strongly agree) that negative reviews cannot reduce purchase intention due to anonymity (we do not know who wrote the comments), whereas 47% agree (or strongly agree) that negative reviews have reduced effects as communicators tend to express their opinions freely. Respondents' attitude towards negative aspect of anonymity is quite neutral, which has deviation with Chinese cultural custom that Chinese always believe anonymity are fake and might decrease the credibility of the information (Zhu, 2013).

5.1.5 Expertise of Senders, Receivers and Their Tie Strength

The research found that e-WOM senders' expertise can affect the negative influence of negative reviews on hotel purchase intention, which is agreed (or strongly agreed) by 55% of

respondents with mean value of 3.69. This is consistent with the findings from Dholakia (1977), where he found a strong influence of negative comments that are given by experienced communicators. Similar research was also carried out in China, where Li (2008) found that experienced reviewers have strong effects on users' purchase intention, and a negative comment from these reviewers might can largely decrease the intentions of future users to book the hotels. Millwood (2016) also found that negative reviews that are written by high-level reviewers tend to have ten thousands of readers.

The tie strength between information senders and receivers have little effect on the influence of negative reviews on consumers' purchase intention, as the effect is only supported by 37% respondents and the mean value is 3.23 which is quite close to neutral. This is consistent with previous findings that users on review websites are with weak relationship with each other (Xia & Bechwati, 2008).

The influence of negative reviews on purchase intention is less likely to be influenced by personal knowledge (experience) of the receivers, as the view is agreed by only 41% of the respondents with mean value of 3.34 which is quite close to neutral. This means that when consumers are browsing review websites such as TripAdvisor, they do not think too much of their own hotels' knowledge or experience. In other words, their individual knowledge has little effect on their intention to book a hotel. This is not consistent with previous findings that expertise of the information receivers might influence their intention of hotel purchase (Bansal & Voyer, 2000). This inconsistency might be caused by the limited sample size in this study.

5.1.6 Negative Reviews and Hotel Purchase Intention in Demographic Groups

The research findings show that the influence of negative reviews on TripAdvisor on consumers' hotel purchase intention tend to be significantly stronger in the youth groups (below 30) when compared with the middle-aged groups (above 30). Also, the influence of negative reviews on consumers' hotel purchase intention is also significantly higher in high-education groups (with bachelor degree or higher) than in low-education groups (with college degree or lower). As for the different social roles group, other social roles groups (students and unemployed) and employed groups are influenced by volume of negative reviews and the

review senders' expertise separately. However, there is no significant difference between income and gender groups.

5.2 Conclusion and Recommendation

When it comes to the first reach question i.e. "What kinds of negative e-WOM might influence customers' hotel purchase intention?". The answer is 8 factors that were summarised in Figure 6 i.e., star rating system, negative visual cues, volumes of negative WOM reviews, bidirectional anonymity, online WOM senders' expertise, online WOM receivers' expertise, and the tie strength between the senders and receivers. However, there are only five with strong influence, which are star rating system, negative visual cues, volumes of negative WOM, online WOM senders' expertise and experience, and the positive effect of anonymity (i.e., communicator can express freely).

The second research question can also be answered i.e., "How these negative e-WOM reviews might affect customers' hotel purchase intention?". There are consistent results from both the research findings and the literature review that negative star rating tends to reduce hotel purchase intention. Also, volumes of negative reviews can result in reduced hotel purchase intention, and the influential volumes of negative reviews is moderate (30-50% which is supported by 68.29% respondents). This is consistent with the crowd mentality habits of Chinese consumers. In addition, negative visual cues have strong power in reducing consumers' hotel purchase intention. It is said that a picture worth more than a thousand words, and past research also support that negative visual cues might have stronger influence than volumes of negative written words. A positive effect of anonymity is found in this research, where negative reviews can reduce consumers' purchase intention since they can express their opinions freely online. Furthermore, the reviews that are written by the experienced reviewers tend to have stronger effects on consumers' purchase intention. However, the tie strength between communicators and receivers have little effect on the influence of negative comments, since users on review websites tend to have weak relationship with each other. Also, the personal knowledge and experience of the e-WOM receivers have little effect on consumers' purchase intentions, which is not consistent with previous research. Besides, the negative aspect of anonymity seems have neutral influence on consumers' hotel purchase intention, which is not consistent with the Chinese cultural

custom. When it comes to the comparisons between demographic groups, it seems that youths (below 30) and high-education groups (with bachelor degree or higher) are more likely to be influenced by negative reviews on TripAdvisor. Also, the other social groups (students and unemployed) are more influenced by volume of negative reviews while employed groups more care about the expert level of reviews senders.

Hence, it is recommended that hotels that intend to promote its sales should focus on the recovery and remedy of negative e-WOM on review websites such as TripAdvisor, so that the complaints of the hotel should be addressed. It should place emphasis especially on factors such as volume of negative reviews, negative visual cues, negative star rating. First, hotels should take more time to respond to negative reviews and provide service recovery response to remedy and tackle mistakes. For instance, hotels can take advantage of online review sites' monitoring capabilities; specifically, if hotels take time to establish their hotel's contact information on TripAdvisor, TripAdvisor will send alerts to hotels whenever a review is posted to site about hotels; hotels can then readily monitor online reviews so that all complaints are addressed. Secondly, in terms of negative visual cues, hoteliers should upload high-quality images, provide browsers with useful non-textual information about hotels through using a friendly interface to the hotel website, as well as extrinsic cues (e.g., clear pictures of room facilities, the neighbouring environment, and onsite amenities); on the other side, when encountering reviews with negative pictures, hotels should contact and response with negative reviewers as soon as possible, which is similar to the management of cutting down volume of negative reviews. Finally, the star rating system can be better if TripAdvisor can add half-dots for its star rating system, because there is difference between 3 and 4 and maybe many consumers think that some hotels only value 3.5 rating.

Furthermore, there are also suggestions about senders' expertise and anonymous system on TripAdvisor. In terms of senders' expertise, in author's opinion, TripAdvisor can also do something. High-level users usually have various badges and titles which can be recognized easily by other hotel seekers; but, in order to classify reviewers' degree more specifically, TripAdvisor can set a test, asking about the travelling and hotel knowledge; when reviewers hit scores, TripAdvisor can award another badge to show their knowledge level. When it comes to anonymous system, suggestion is two sided. On one hand, user anonymity on

TripAdvisor cannot be cancelled, since findings in this study show that respondents are satisfied with user anonymity, which make them feel safe and dare to speak out their authenticable reviews about hotels. Thus, TripAdvisor should retain the anonymity and update its IT skill to improve safety and security of its users. On the other hand, many people do not like anonymity because they regard anonymity as origin of fraud and fake, suggested by (Charles Smith, 2012), so if the fraud comments can be put under controls, crosscurrent about anonymity on TripAdvisor will be lessened. Thus, in author's opinion, censorship of TripAdvisor must be established and a team of quality assurance specialists should be recruited in order to examine questionable reviews and ensure reviews' authenticity; the innovative IT tool is also requested to monitor and mark questionable reviews.

Additionally, hotels should focus on negative reviews that come from the high-level reviewers and to youths (below 30) and high-education customers, as negative reviews from experienced reviewers are more influential and the purchase intentions of youths and high-degree consumers are more likely to be influenced by negative reviews. When it comes to the review websites such as TripAdvisor, the recommendation is that they should improve their system such as the design of star rating, expertise of the e-WOM senders (e.g., their use levels that can be represented by titles) and the approval of reviews by the team members of TripAdvisor to improve its quality.

5.3 Research Limitations

This research is with limitations. First, the sample size is relatively small (i.e. with only 93 respondents), which could not represent the general characterises of all population. Second, the snowball sampling method is used, which means that it is possible that some certain groups (e.g., youths) are more likely to be sampled than other groups (e.g., the middle-aged). In this way, the data collected might be a reflection of the attitudes of some certain groups rather than a general representation of the entire population (i.e., all Chinese consumers who have browsed review websites such as TripAdvisor). Thus, the further study should avoid this and apply more random sampling method. Thirdly, the Lasswell's communication model is quite linear and general and does not include the significant feedback factor and possibility of noise, which means that the necessary interaction between information senders and information receivers is not considered, leading to an incomplete communication circle.

Therefore, the future study should choose more completed model or establish a new model by adding the noises and feedback factors.

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Appendix 1: Questionnaire

Hi, I am Wensi Peng, a student of international business at Turku University of Applied Science in Turku, Finland. I am implementing my thesis research about the influence of negative online Word-Of-Mouth on consumers' hotel purchase intention in China. I would appreciate it if you could spend your time to respond my questionnaire. The language of questionnaire is Chinese and answering the questionnaire will take you around 4-5 minutes. The answers gathered from this questionnaire will be only used for academic purpose and your participation is voluntary and anonymous.

Questionnaire link: <https://sojump.com/jq/14771055.aspx>

Thank you very much

Kind Regards

Wensi Peng

First Section: demographic information:

1. Please specify your gender

- ☐ Male
- ☐ Female

2. Please specify your age

- ☐ less than 20
- ☐ 20-30
- ☐ 31-40
- ☐ 41-50
- ☐ more than 50

3. Please specify your educational level?

- ☐ High School
- ☐ Junior College Student
- ☐ Bachelor Student
- ☐ Master Student

☐ Ph.D. Student

4. Please specify your income per month?

☐ under 3000 yuan

☐ 3001 yuan - 5500 yuan

☐ 5501 yuan - 8000 yuan

☐ 8001 yuan - 10500 yuan

☐ over 10500 yuan

5. Please specify your social role

☐ unemployed

☐ employed

☐ students

6. Have you ever have browsed hotels on TripAdvisor (Daodao/Maotuying) website before?

☐ Yes

☐ No

Second Section: Influence of Negative Reviews

You are required to rate each of the following statement on a five-point scale ranging from 1-5, where “1” represents “strongly disagree” while “5” means “strongly agree” and mean rating “3” indicates that you neither agree nor disagree.

<u>Factors</u>	Questions from 7-16	Range 1-5
<u>Purchase Intention</u>	7. Negative reviews affect my intention to book a hotel passively.	

<u>Star rating system</u>	8. Low scores from star rating system reduce my intention to choose a hotel.	
<u>Negative online reviews volume</u>	9. Volume of negative reviews can directly decrease my intention to book a hotel. <u>(If your answer is “strongly disagree” or “disagree”, please skip to question 11)</u>	
	10. How many negative reviews on this website will weaken my purchase intention on certain hotel?	Single Choice: ○ 0-30% ○ 30-50% ○ over more than 50%
<u>Negative visual cues</u>	11. The intention to book a hotel will be decreased if it has received negative reviews with pictures.	
<u>Bidirectional Anonymity (negative aspect)</u>	12. Negative reviews do not affect my intention to book a hotel because these reviews are anonymous and I do not know who wrote them.	
<u>Bidirectional Anonymity (positive aspect)</u>	13. Negative reviews decrease my intention to book a hotel, since user anonymity supports people to express opinions more authentically.	
<u>Online Reviews senders' expertise</u>	14. Negative reviews from high-level reviewers decrease my intention to book a hotel.	
<u>Tie strength</u>	15. Negative reviews by stranger users affect my intention to book a hotel less than negative reviews by familiar users.	
<u>Online Reviews receivers' expertise</u>	16. My knowledge and experience on hotels plays more important role than negative reviews when I am choosing a hotel.	

Appendix 2: Demographic Information of Respondents

Characters	Frequency	Percentage
Gender		
Male	32	34,41%
Female	61	65,59%
Age		
Below 20	8	8,6%
20-30	21	22,58%
31-40	17	18,28%
41-50	28	30,11%
Over 50	19	20,43%
Educational Level		
High school	21	22,58%
Vocational University	28	30,11%
Bachelor student	41	44,09%
Master student	2	2,15%
Ph.D. student	1	1,08%
Social Role		
Student	30	32,26%
Unemployed	15	16,13%
Employee	48	51,61%
Monthly income (RMB)		
Below 3000	30	32,26%
3001-5500	33	35,48%
5501-8000	14	15,05%

8001-10500	12	12,90%
Over 10500	4	4,30%

Appendix 3: Mean Difference in Gender and Income Groups

	Mean			
	Male	Female	Difference	Sig. (p value)
Question 7	3.50	3.82	-0.320	0.150
Question 8	3.53	3.70	-0.174	0.326
Question 9	3.44	3.67	-0.253	0.613
Question 11	3.63	3.97	-0.342	0.119
Question 12	3.06	2.97	-0.095	0.482
Question 13	3.38	3.70	-0.440	0.500
Question 14	3.66	3.70	-0.049	0.772
Question 15	3.28	3.20	0.085	0.397
Question 16	3.31	3.36	-0.048	0.536

	Mean			
	Income Below 5500RMB	Income Above 5500RMB	Difference	Sig. (p value)
Question 7	3.76	3.60	0.162	0.938
Question 8	3.73	3.47	0.263	0.716
Question 9	3.57	3.63	-0,062	0.762
Question 11	4.00	3.53	0.467	0.271
Question 12	3.03	2.93	0.098	0.467
Question 13	3.59	3.60	-0.013	0.865
Question 14	3.65	3.77	-0.116	0.869
Question 15	3.30	3.07	0.235	0.471
Question 16	3.38	3.27	0.114	0.668