THE CREDIBILITY OF ONLINE PRODUCT REVIEWS:

DO PERCEIVED SIMILARITY, SOURCE PRESTIGE, AND ARGUMENT QUALITY FOSTER THE EMERGENCE OF TRUST?

by

YAN SHAN

(Under the Direction of Karen W. King)

ABSTRACT

Online product reviews are important information sources in consumer decision-making process. According to 2010 Pew Research Internet Project, eight five percent of Americans have searched for online reviews about the products and services they buy. Despite the importance of online product reviews in product evaluation, relatively little attention has been given to investigate the influencing factors of consumer trust towards online product reviews. There is an emerging need to address the role of source characteristics and content attributes in enhancing the credibility of online reviews. The current research examines how perceived similarity between reviewers and consumers, source prestige, and argument quality influence the review credibility and consumer trust in product reviews.

The results from Experiment 1 indicate that hotel reviews produced by a high prestige source induce more trust than those produced by a low prestige source under the low similarity condition while a reversed relation is found under the high similarity condition. The findings from Experiment 2 and 3 suggest that reviews with strong argument quality lead to more consumer trust and higher source credibility than reviews with weak argument quality. These

results indicate that regardless of whether the similarity between the source and the recipient is high or low, argument quality and source prestige influence the effectiveness of online product reviews. Argument quality and source prestige contribute unequally to consumer trust depending on the product categories.

Though the hypothesized effects of the perceived similarity on consumer trust are not supported in Experiment 2 and 3, the results from these experiments reveal that perceived similarity may not be the only influencing factor for source trustworthiness. Furthermore, the results suggest that source prestige serves as a critical indicator for source trustworthiness while argument quality connects both trustworthiness and source expertise.

INDEX WORDS: Online Product Reviews, Consumer Trust, Source Credibility, Perceived Similarity, Source Prestige, Argument Quality

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YAN SHAN

B.A., Nanjing University of Science and Technology, China, 2009

M.A., University of Central Florida, 2011

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by

YAN SHAN

Major Professor:	Karen W. King
Committee:	Dean M. Krugman Joe Phua Spencer F. Tinkham W. Keith Campbell

Electronic Version Approved:

Julie Coffield
Interim Dean of the Graduate School
The University of Georgia
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DEDICATION

To my husband, Ming,

My mother, Li Huang, and

My father, Xueyong Shan, with their continuous love and support

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CHAPTER 1

INTRODUCTION

Consumers' word-of-mouth conversations have migrated to the online media landscape in the contemporary era. Consumer online product reviews, as one type of electronic word-of-mouth (eWOM) communication, are considered to be one of the most influential types of product information in shaping consumer product attitudes and facilitating purchase decisions (Plummer, 2007). According to Nielsen's 2013 "Global Survey of Trust in Advertising", for 70% of global consumers surveyed online, online consumer reviews are the second most trusted source of product information, followed by recommendations from friends and family. Traditionally, consumers search for product reviews when making a critical purchase, such as electronics, automobiles, insurance, and legal services (Streitfeld, 2013). As electronic commerce is growing rapidly with the prevalence of commercial web sites and the increasing acceptance of online transactions by consumers, online product reviews have become an indispensable information source for online shoppers. Consumers shopping online cannot taste, smell or touch products, as would be possible in traditional retail outlets, so their product evaluations must be based on the product information presented online. Consumer-generated content is helpful for making product judgments and influences purchase decisions because it provides information on indirect experiences of products from peer consumers (Park, Lee & Han, 2007).

Marketing practitioners and brands have realized the powerful credibility carried by consumer-generated conversations that advertisers cannot duplicate in traditional advertising campaigns. The majority of online sellers now provide consumers the opportunities to comment and share their product experiences on the retailers' websites (Nielsen, 2013). However, consumers' trust towards online product reviews was relatively low (Williams, 2012). Eighty percent of consumers reported they were concerned about the authenticity of consumer reviews (KRC research, 2012). The skepticism toward online reviews is based on two problems identified by the previous literature: authenticity and usefulness. Chevalier and Mayzlin (2006) note that marketers have numerous incentives to encourage consumer recommendation, which jeopardizes the integrity and intentions of consumers who provide reviews. In addition, opinion spamming, which refers to activities such as writing fake reviews, misleads readers by providing underserved positive opinions to promote certain brands or by providing false negative opinions to competitors to damage their reputations (Mukherjee, Liu & Glance, 2013). Therefore, the problem associated with review authenticity leads to consumer suspicion of the real motivations behind the product endorsement. The second difficulty is posed by the overwhelming number of reviews, which makes it harder for consumers to identify the most useful information associated with their interests and concerns (Park & Lee, 2008). In general, consumers do not follow a structured format when posting their reviews online. Reviews may range from simple recommendations with extremely positive or negative statements, to product evaluations that are supported by extensive reasoning. As a consequence of these variations, it becomes harder for consumers to make inferences about product characteristics and this may bring down consumer trust. Therefore, understanding the factors that drive consumers to trust online reviews will helps retailers work to reduce the skepticism towards online product reviews.

Not all product reviews are evaluated as equal by consumers (Park, Lee & Han, 2007). The persuasiveness of online reviews has often been attributed to their source credibility (Willemsen, Neijens & Bronner, 2012). Product evaluations produced by reviewers who have similar attitudes and demographic characteristics as the recipients of the reviews have a higher level of source trustworthiness than those with low similarity (Racheral, Mandviwalla & Connolly, 2012). Based on a survey conducted by eMarketer, 70% of respondents considered "people like myself" to be trustworthy for product recommendations, and 64% are likely to purchase products recommended by "people like myself" (2010). Some online retailers have created full-fledged reviewers' profiles, so that readers may gain a better understanding of who wrote the reviews. For example, Sephora, a leading beauty and cosmetic products retailer, creates detailed profiles for their reviewers and allows them to disclose their skin type, eye, skin and hair color, and beauty concerns. These profiles allow readers to filter undesired messages and match the most useful product information.

Many review websites have invested in peer-rating systems to recognize expert consumers who know a lot about it a certain product category or who have written an impressive number of reviews (Mackiewicz, 2010). These expert consumers who have proven to be a helpful source of information based on peer ratings, are recognized by some review websites and awarded "Top Reviewer" or "Advisor" badges next to the reviewers' names (e.g. Amazon.com, Epinion.com). Previous literature indicates that reviews produced by peer-rated experts have greater source expertise than those produced by laypeople (Willemsen et al., 2011).

The persuasiveness of product reviews is also determined by the ways in which the arguments are presented in them (Perry & Cacioppo, 1984). Online product reviews are essentially information sources that consumers use to gain product information. Thus, the extent

of information available in each review helps consumers access product attributes and build trust in the source (Furner & Racherla, 2012). Since there is no standard format, the content of online reviews varies from short to long and from subjective to objective (Chatterjee, 2001). A good review contains concrete facts and experiences about a product presented in an understandable way. Previous research has considered informational content as one of the most important antecedents of trust (Mitchell & Dacin, 1996; Buda, 2003).

Understanding how and why consumers trust an online product review provides vital insights as the advertising industry moves into the digital realm (Plummer, 2007). Consumers' online product conversations offer multiple benefits for advertisers and brands. Over the past several years, consumers have had lower opinions of advertising in general and find less personal relevance in messages (Wegert, 2004; Nail, 2005). Online reviews are "free" advertising content consumed by potential or existing customers (Cheung, Luo, Sia & Chen, 2009). Furthermore, online product reviews provide brands with sufficient and cheap data to identify consumers' concerns and needs. Thus, monitoring online consumer comments and feedback is important to any brand in terms of customer service. Extant research on online product reviews has focused mostly on the influence of review quantity and quality (Buttle, 1998; Ratchford, Talukdar & Lee, 2001; Chatterjee, 2001), psychological motivations for online product reviewers (Sundaram et al., 1998; Li, 2001; Hennig-Thurau & Walsh, 2003; Hsieh et al., 2012), and the perceived usefulness of online product reviews (Willemsen et al., 2011; Baek, Ahn & Choi, 2012). The influence of reviewer characteristics has been largely overlooked. Previous literature has long accepted that source credibility has profound effect on consumers' judgment (Brown, Broderick & Lee, 2007; Park & Kim, 2008). However, the contribution of source attributes remains unclear (Willemsen,

Neijens & Bronner, 2012), although several scholars have made mention of the possible influence (Huang & Chen, 2006; Kim et al., 2006; Hu & Sundar, 2010).

Purpose of the Research

The primary purpose of this study is to identify the factors affecting consumer trust in online product reviews from a consumption point of view. Utilizing Uncertainty Reduction Theory (URT) and the assessment of credibility literature, this study will examine questions and hypotheses regarding the relationships between the source characteristics, argumentation, and consumer trust in product reviews. In particular, it will investigate what dynamics influence consumers' decision to trust online product reviews: the effects of source attributes including reviewers' prestige (Racherla, Mandviwalla & Connolly, 2012), the perceived similarity (Forman, Ghose & Wiesenfeld, 2008), and argument quality (Petty & Cacioppo, 1984).

The resulting insights from this study have several implications. First, this study attempts to advance knowledge regarding the determinants of consumer trust on the Internet. How to manage a good online reputation is always a challenging yet urgent question for all businesses. As consumers nowadays become increasingly tech-savvy, monitoring their online conversations and engaging with customers are essential skills for businesses (Pattison, 2009). Prior research has specifically focused on the influence of content attributes of product reviews and has overlooked the effects of source-related characteristics (Wang, 2005; Vermeulen & Seegers, 2009; Willemsen et al., 2011). As more and more online review websites allow reviewers to disclose their personal information, it is important to understand whether the presence of reviewers' personal information affects readers' comprehension of the review in general. Secondly, the results of this study extend the knowledge of source credibility in the context of

online product reviews. A large amount of credibility literature concentrates on the benefits of a high credible source without examining its antecedents (Huang & Chen, 2006; Hu & Sundar, 2010; Buda, 2003), although some research has been conducted to study the assessment of expertise and its influence on source credibility (Mackiewicz, 2010).

This dissertation proceeds as follows: Chapter 2 reviews the relevant literature providing an understanding of online product reviews as a class of eWOM and its key determinants. The factors that influence consumer information processing will also be discussed in this chapter. Chapter 3 outlines the theoretical background of this research examining consumer trust following the Uncertainty Reduction Theory (URT). The insights from the Elaboration Likelihood Model (ELM) and source credibility literature will be incorporated. Hypotheses and research questions are then proposed. Chapter 4 describes the method employed for three online experiments designed to test the hypotheses. Chapter 5 reports findings from the first experiment, which is designed to test the influence of source characteristics on consumer trust in product reviews. Chapter 6 reports findings from the second online experiment, which is conduced to test the dynamics between source characteristics and argumentation, and their effects on consumer trust in product reviews. Chapter 7 reports findings from the third experiment, which is designed to replicate the results from Experiment 2 with a national sample. The research concludes with general discussion, implications, and ideas for future research in Chapter 8.

CHAPTER 2

LITERATURE REVIEW

The following chapter reviews relevant research about consumer-generated product information. It begins by providing a conceptualization of electronic word-of-mouth (eWOM) and its key determinants based on an extant literature review. The benefits of online product reviews for brands and advertisers are then discussed followed by major components of consumers' participation in online product reviews. Next, research about consumer information processing after exposure to online product reviews will be discussed. The chapter will close with a discussion of the influencing factors of consumer trust in an online environment.

Electronic Word-of-Mouth

Prior to the Internet era, consumers shared each other's product-related experiences through traditional word-of-mouth (e.g. discussions with friends and family) (Sundaram, Nitra & Webster, 1998). WOM can be defined as an oral, person-to-person exchange of marketing information among consumers (Katz & Lazarsfeld, 1955; Arndt, 1967). WOM has received attention among advertising practitioners as an effective marketing communication strategy and has been studied by marketing scholars for more than 60 years. Today, the Web makes it possible for consumers to share experiences and opinions about a product via eWOM activities. According to Hennig-Thurau and his colleagues (2004), eWOM is defined as "any positive or negative statement made by potential, actual, or former consumers about a product or company,

which is made available to a multitude of people and institutions via the Internet" (p.39). eWOM is believed to be one of the most influential marketing tactics and has been widely implemented in the evolving environment of advertising (Plummer, 2007). In particular, the effectiveness of eWOM relies on several unique attributes of this communication. First, research suggests that eWOM communication is more persuasive because the information from a personal source has more credibility than information from a marketing source (Hennig-Thurau & Walsh, 2003). eWOM is viewed as existing independently from the persuasive intention of selling something (Phelps et al., 2004; Sun et al., 2006). Consumer-generated content is considered more consumer-oriented than advertising content, as it focuses on consumers' personal experience, feelings, and satisfaction about the product, than advertising content (Bronner & Hoog, 2010). In contrast, firm-created information is more product-oriented, focusing on the product attributes for many and unspecified persons (Park, Lee & Han, 2007). Second, compared to traditional WOM, eWOM is more influential due to the ways in which information is disseminated. In comparison with oral communication, the media vehicles that carry eWOM messages, including social networking sites (SNSs), personal blogs, online discussion forums, virtual communities, instant messages, and emails, have relatively higher reach and broader influence (Phelps et al., 2004; Sun, Wu & Kuntaraporn, 2006; Sandes & Urdan, 2013). Specifically, if the information is delivered within a consumer's personal network, the positive relationship between sender and recipient might result in increased credibility (Kim & Choi, 2011). Finally, the relative high level of return-on-investment of eWOM relies on its cost efficiency. The financial investment of eWOM is generally lower than traditional advertising campaigns in mass media, such as television, radio and newspapers (Plummer, 2007; Chen & Xie, 2008), and eWOM is expected to

generate more influence on consumer attitude formation and to facilitate consumer purchase decisions (Park, Lee & Han, 2007; Park & Lee, 2009; Huang, Hsian & Chen, 2012).

Key Determinants of eWOM

Recent eWOM research generally follows two theoretical threads. One thread of eWOM research is interested in consumers' social and psychological motivations in participating in various eWOM activities (Flynn, Goldsmith & Eastman, 1994; Sundaram, Mitra & Webster, 1998; Hennig-Thurau & Walsh, 2003; Li, 2011; Hsieh, Hsieh & Tang, 2012; San Jose Cabezudo & Camarero-Izquierdo, 2012). In other words, the research purpose of this tradition is to better understand the motivations behind a consumer's decision to engage in eWOM communication, such as opinion-giving and seeking. Hennig-Thurau, Gwinner, Walsh and Gremler (2004) studied the motives that account for online consumers' articulation about product-related experience and found that eWOM participation was associated with consumers' desire for social interaction, desire for economic incentives, concern for other consumers, and the potential to enhance their own self-worth. Their findings are consistent with a series of motivation studies about the generation of eWOM activities. For example, Sundaram, Mitra and Webster (1998) identified the motives of altruism and self-enhancement in driving consumers' WOM behavior on the Internet. Furthermore, consumer involvement is considered as one antecedent of eWOM behaviors (Zhang & Watt, 2003; Bowden, 2009; Beak, Ahn & Choi, 2012; Hunt, Geoger-Oneto & Varca, 2012; Fan et al., 2013). In general, involvement refers to an individual's perceived relevance of an object based on his or her inherent needs, values and interests (Zaichkowsky, 1986). As a motivational factor, involvement plays an important role in affecting consumers' attention, message processing, and purchase decisions (Houston & Rothschild, 1978; Garden,

Mitchell & Russo, 1985; Johnson & Eagly, 1989; Zaichkowsky, 1994; Griffith, Krampf & Palmer, 2001; Aboulnasr, 2007). In terms of participation, Flynn, Goldsmith and Eastman (1994) showed that product involvement was positively correlated with opinion leadership. Yeh and Choi (2011) found product involvement was a significant predictor of opinion-giving.

Consumer Motivations In some contexts, a psychological congruence between brand identity and consumer self-image might influence consumers' engagement in marketing communication (Escalas & Bettman, 2005; Yeh & Choi, 2011; Romaniuk, Bogomolova & Riley, 2012; Lam et al., 2013). Based on the assumption of social identity theory developed by Tajfei and Turner (1970), research identified the role that shared identity between the brand and the consumer played in consumers' engagement in eWOM (Bagozzi & Dholakia, 2006). Brand identification is the extent to which a consumer sees his or her own self-image as overlapping with the brand's image (Escalas & Bettman, 2005). Consistent with this definition, Yeh and Choi (2011)'s results suggest that brand identification affects eWOM intention in giving relevant product information. A high level of consumer-brand identification leads to enhanced brand loyalty, which in turn increases consumers' intention to engage in eWOM in favor of the brand. Their results were found to be parallel with other research about the influence of brand identification on consumer attitudes and behavior (Fournier, 1998; Escalas & Bettman, 2005; Bagozzi & Dholakia, 2006; Carroll & Ahuvia, 2006; Brown, Broderick & Lee, 2007).

Consumers also seek out advice from others. Bailey (2005) showed that consumers who use product review websites place great importance on information and opinions on these sites because the information source was peer consumers. However, Bailey's results did not provide a systematic analysis of motives for seeking out eWOM based on open-ended responses. Goldsmith and Horowitz (2006) addressed the same question by using mixed research methods

approach. Their findings revealed distinct motives for seeking opinions online: to reduce risk, to get information easily, because others do, to secure lower prices, because it is cool, because they were promoted by other media, to get pre-purchase information, and by accident.

Message forwarding or pass-along behavior is an important activity because of the nature of online communication (Norman & Russell, 2006; Sun et al., 2006; Chu, 2011; Chu & Kim, 2011). According to previous studies about eWOM and computer-mediated communication, information is more likely to be passed along via the Internet where multidirectional communication is effortless (Sun et al., 2006). Phelps and his colleagues (2004) examined motivations and behaviors of consumers who pass along email messages through conducting focus group discussions, content analysis, and an online survey. Their findings identify four stages in a typical pass-along email episode: receipt of pass-along email, decision to open the message, reading the pass-along email, and the final decision to forward the messages to others. In particular, they found consumers' emotional connections with pass-along emails (e.g. "This ad is fun"; "I enjoy this ad"; "This ad is entertaining") are strongly associated with their willingness to open the pass-along emails.

Cognitive Processing The second thread of eWOM study examines various factors that affect receivers' cognitive processes. Prior research has identified two fundamental influences (Cheung et al., 2009; Chen, Fay & Wang, 2011). Informational influence is based on the content of the reviews, whereas normative influence reflects the impact of social aggregation mechanisms in eWOM platforms (e.g., product review websites). In a recent study about consumers' perception of eWOM on online product review websites, informational factors were operationalized as argument strength, message framing, source credibility and confirmation with prior belief, whereas normative factors were defined as recommendation consistency and rating (Cheung et

al., 2012). This study indicates that informational influence is significantly associated with perceived credibility of product reviews. The consistency and rating, as normative influences, are found to have positive influence on consumers' evaluation about the products. These findings are essentially parallel with eWOM research following the elaboration likelihood model (ELM). ELM posits two information-processing routes, people use to process persuasive information, depending on their ability and motivation: central and peripheral (Zhang & Watt, 2003). Previous studies reveal that while both peripheral and central cues influence the helpfulness of product reviews, consumers' motivation factors, such as their purposes for reading reviews and product involvement, determine the information process procedures (Eckler & Bolls, 2011; Beak, Ahn & Choi, 2012; Fan et al., 2013; Zhao et al., 2013). In particular, the level of consumer involvement moderates the influence of argument quality on purchasing intention in a positive direction. When the involvement level is low, product rating and popularity, as peripheral cues, have a positive effect on purchase intention (Park, Lee, & Han, 2007).

Online Consumer Reviews

Online consumer reviews are a form of eWOM, which is generated and delivered by consumers who have purchased and used products (Park, Lee & Han, 2007; Bae & Lee, 2011). Online consumer reviews are defined as a type of published online product information created by users based on personal usage and experience (Chen & Xie, 2007). More specifically, "online consumer reviews" have been delineated by other terms such as "electronic word-of-mouth," "consumer-generated information," "user-generated content," and "consumer feedback." Recent marketing trends, however, have made online consumer reviews a distinct class of eWOM communications. On the one hand, most of the online consumer reviews are generated by

anonymous individuals, and this anonymity makes it difficult for review writers to be perceived as knowledgeable and trustworthy sources of information (Pollach, 2006). In the case of large online vendors, product reviewers often display little more than a user name (Sher & Lee, 2009). Thus, compared to eWOM communicated via consumers' social networks such as Facebook, the source credibility of online consumer reviews is difficult to specify based on limited knowledge of reviewers (Chatterjee & Carl, 2001; Mudambi & Schuff, 2010; Eckler & Bolls, 2011). On the other hand, online consumer reviews are considered as more manageable than other forms of consumer-generated content in practical terms (Robson et al, 2013). For example, Amazon.com began offering consumers an option to post their comments on products on its website in 1995, and more than 5 million consumers had posted tens of millions of reviews on Amazon.com by 2009 (*Bloomberg BusinessWeek*, 2009). Consumer reviews are regarded as one of the most popular and successful features of Amazon (*New York Times*, 2004). In recent years, an increasing amount of research has been conducted to examine the effects of various online review tactics on consumers' buying decisions, including website design, brand communities, peer rating systems, and assessment of review expertise (Cheung, 2008; Mackiewicz, 2010; Willemsen et al., 2010; Pan & Chiou, 2011; Chang, 2012).

Major Components of Online Reviews

The body of literature on consumer reviews largely focuses on message content (Richins, 1984; Herr, Kardes & Kim, 1991; Chen et al., 2004; Wangenheim, 2005; Liu, 2006; Etzion & Awad, 2007; Park, Lee & Han, 2007; Sandes & Urdans, 2013), online platform-based effects (Bickart & Schindler, 2001; Brown et al., 2007; Woerndl et al., 2008; Lee, Kim & Kim, 2010; Lee et al, 2011; Kim & Choi, 2012), and source-related attributes (Pornpitakpan, 2004; Chevalier

& Mayzlin, 2006; De Bruyn and Lilien, 2008; Musambi & Schuff, 2010; Willemsen et al., 2011; Willemsen, Neijens & Bronner, 2012; Racherla, Mandviwalla & Connolly, 2012; Li et al., 2013).

Review Content The influence of eWOM communication on consumer attitudes and purchase behavior has been examined by looking at various content attributes. Valence and volume are the two important aspects of eWOM that have been previously examined (Liu, 2006; Etzion & Awad, 2007; Chen et al., 2008). Valence of eWOM captures the nature of the review comments and refers to whether the reviews are positive or negative (Liu, 2011). Negative WOM is defined as interpersonal communication concerning a marketing organization or product that denigrates the object of the communication (Richins, 1984). In general, research shows that negative reviews have more influence on consumer attitudes and behavior than positive reviews. For example, Sandes and Urdan's (2013) research findings indicate that exposure to negative comments posted by consumers on the Internet about a brand worsen the perceived brand image and reduce the purchase intention, and their results are consistent with previous studies (Herr, Kardes & Kim, 1991; Wangenheim, 2005).

The number of online consumer reviews or review quantity of a product represents the product's popularity as the online word-of-mouth effect because it is related to the sales volume of the product (Chatterjee, 2001; Chen & Xie, 2008). The more reviews there are, the more popular and important the product is. Research on review quantity shows that a large number of reviews leads to a more favorable attitude towards the product among consumers (Smith, Menon & Sivakumar, 2005; Sun et al., 2006). In addition, Park, Lee and Han (2007) find that consumers are affected by the quantity of eWOM rather than the quality of reviews, but only when their product involvement level is low. Review quality is defined as the quality of a review's content from the perspective of information characteristics, including relevance, understandability,

sufficiency, and objectivity (Chen & Tseng, 2011; Wu, 2013). If a review contains more understandable and objective comments with sufficient reasons given for the recommendation, it is relatively more persuasive than a comment that expresses feelings or a recommendation without specific reasons (Park, Lee & Han, 2007). Review quality has a positive effect on purchase intention. Prior studies suggest that messages that are understandable and objective are more effective than messages that are emotional and subjective (Petty, Cacioppo & Schumann, 1983; Petty & Cacioppo, 1984). Another study proposed that the presence of consumer reviews with a counter-argument were more effective than reviews expressing one-sided attitudes (Negash, Ryan & Igbaria, 2003).

Platform-Based Effects The platform used to disseminate the consumer-generated content directly affects the transmission of messages by determining the context in which the content is sent and received (Woerndl et al., 2008). Product-related communication is shared online through a wide variety of platforms: product review websites (e.g. epinion.com), retailers' websites (e.g. Amazon.com), brands' forums, commercial websites, personal blogs, message boards, social networking sites (Bickart & Schindler, 2001; Lee et al, 2011), and online consumer communities (Brown et al., 2007).

The limited work on available eWOM and platforms provides valuable insight for the present research. Lee, Kim and Kim (2010) found that consumer engagement intentions are indirectly influenced by different types of brand communities (consumer-generated community vs. marketer-generated community). Furthermore, the findings of Kim and Choi (2012) suggest that online retailer reputation enhances purchase intention through its positive influence on consumer trust toward the retailer.

Source Credibility Source credibility is a prevalent focus in the study of persuasion. The rich evidence of credibility research demonstrates that an information source with higher credibility produces more attitude change than a source with lower credibility (Pornpitakpan, 2004). In general, source credibility, comprises of trustworthiness, expertise, and attractiveness of endorsers (Ohanian, 1990; Soh, Reid & King, 2007). Whereas perceived expertise refers to the degree to which a source is considered to be capable of making valid assertions, perceived trustworthiness reflects the receiver's belief that the source's opinions are unbiased (Dholakia & Sternthal, 1977; Gotlieb & Sarel, 1991). In line with traditional credibility research, studies on eWOM have found source credibility to have a profound effect on consumers' evaluation and adoption of eWOM (Bickart & Schindler, 2001: Cheung et al., 2009; Fan et al., 2013). Previous research about product reviews demonstrates that source credibility is positively correlated with the perceived helpfulness of online product reviews (Chevalier & Mayzlin, 2006; Musambi & Schuff, 2010; Willemsen et al., 2011; Li et al., 2013), consumers' trust in online product reviews (McKnight, 2001; McKnight, Choudhury & Kacmar, 2003; Kim & Benbasat, 2006; Racherla, Mandviwalla & Connolly, 2012; Furner, Racherla & Zhu, 2012), and persuasiveness of online product reviews (Herr, Kardes & Kim, 1991; Xia & Bechwati, 2008; Kim, Bickart & Brunel, 2011).

Extant research on computer-mediated communication suggests that the perceived homophily between opinion providers and recipients is an important variable in supportive relationships (Cline, 1999; Wright, 2000). McCroskey, Richmond and Stewart (1986) found that demographics, attitudes, and background similarity are important dimensions of perceived homophily. De Bruyn and Lilien (2008) identify perception-based similarity and demographic similarity as two major components of homophily. Research indicates that the credibility of

support providers within supporting groups largely derives from the perception that the providers have been through similar circumstances, have had similar problems and engaged in similar behaviors, and have similar attitudes and beliefs about the condition that the support seeker is facing. According to Infante, Rancer, and Womack (1997), people are usually more comfortable when they think others are similar to them, and they feel more confident when confronting familiar attitudes and values. Prior researchers have established relationships among perceived homophily and variables associated with increased affect and trust between providers and recipients, great relational satisfaction, and other positive perceptions of one's relational partner (Cappella, 1984; Berscheid, 1985; Cluck & Cline, 1986; Eagly & Chaiken, 1993; Cawyer & Smith-Dupre, 1995; Cline, 1999).

Implications of Online Product Reviews

The nature of online product reviews creates extraordinary benefits for brands and companies. As online product reviews have become an increasing phenomenon in the integrated marketing communication landscape, it is important to discuss the benefits of online product reviews and their role in brand management.

Online consumer reviews can significantly influence consumer purchase decisions. This assessment has been supported by empirical findings. For example, in an online experiment, Senecal and Nantel (2004) found that participants who consulted product reviews selected these products twice as often as those who did not consult reviews. Chevalier and Mayzlin (2006) showed that online consumer ratings significantly influence book sales. Consistent with these findings, Liu (2006) studied movie reviews and revealed that online movie reviews offer great explanatory power for both aggregate and weekly box office revenues. In particular, online

product reviews have a positive influence on new product sales. According to Cui, Liu and Guo's (2012) research, online reviews significantly affect new product sales in general, and this effect tends to be stronger or weaker depending on the product category. As consumer-created information, online consumer reviews are likely to be more relevant to consumers than seller-created information (Chen & Xie, 2008). Consumer reviews describe product attributes in different usage situations and measure product performance based on personal experiences. When consumers who are hesitate to purchase a new product due to potential risk and uncertainty, consumer reviews can help them in finding the best-matched products or assist them in solving relevant questions about the product. Thus, consumer reviews are viewed by scholars as a new element in the marketing communication mix to help consumers to identify products that best match their needs (Wernerfelt 1994a; Lewis & Sappington, 1994; Chen & Xie, 2004).

Online consumer reviews provide brands with an opportunity for much greater exposure to consumers with a relatively small expenditure compared to the brand presence in traditional media through advertising or product placement (Chen & Tseng, 2011). Specifically, the online environment offers a great platform for brands or companies to interact with existing or future consumers. For some product categories, such as healthy food, beauty products, drugs and baby supplies, insufficient information about product use, ingredients, and safety can cause consumer dissatisfaction and complaints, and thereby may hurt brand image (Petroshius, Tifus & Hatch, 1995; Robinson, Goh & Zhang, 2012). As today's consumers are more educated and concerned about their consumption, product reviews serve as an important source for product related information.

While consumers can use online reviews as a tool to assist decision-making, marketers can use online reviews as a source of valuable feedback (Robson et al, 2013). However, both

marketers and consumers face difficulty extracted meaning from the massive number of product reviews available on the Internet, and specifically, online consumer reviews present in varying formats. For example, reviews can be based on a rating (e.g. a five-star rating), on a rating plus a comment, or on comments alone, and the meaning behind the star rating system is often unclear (e.g., how do consumers identify the threshold between stars?). Limited research has been conducted to examine peer rating systems. Tsang and Prendergast (2009) reveal that consumer comments have a stronger impact in affecting purchase decisions and perceived trustworthiness than do peer ratings. Consistent with this finding, Chevalier and Mayzlin (2006) show that when making decisions consumers are more likely to read and apply information provided in written reviews than star ratings. Finally, a reviewer can be awarded the title of "top reviewer" or "advisor" on some review websites (e.g. Amazon.com, Epinion.com). As the peer rating systems has been adopted by many online retailers and review websites, there is a lack of knowledge about whether and to what extent the "top reviewer" or "advisor" title will influence consumers' product evaluations and purchase behavior. In general, online reviews are unstructured and responses are unsystematic.

Trust in Consumer Research

Trust is a multi-dimensional concept as indicated by previous research (McKnight & Chervany, 2001; McKnight, Chervany & Kacmar, 2002) and people's trusting beliefs change in different phases. According to McKnight, Choudhury & Kacmar (2002), initial trust refers to "trust in an unfamiliar trustee, a relationship in which the actors do not yet have credible, meaningful information about, or affective bonds with each other" (p.335). Researchers have identified that the initial trust plays an important role in e-commerce activities (Bigley & Pierce,

1998). When consumers are first exposed to product reviews, they gain credible information after they assess the trustworthiness of reviewers by observing reviewers' trust-related behavior, such as disclosing personal information or providing strong arguments (McKnight, Choudhury & Kacmar, 2002). Extant research about initial trust follows two perspectives to access the question of how trusting beliefs form. The cognitive-based trust literature posits that trusting beliefs may form before parties have meaningful information about each other (McKnight, Cummings, & Chervany, 1998), and the trusting beliefs can be generated because of social categorization, reputation, disposition, institutional roles and structures, or out of the need to immediately cooperate on a task (Meyerson et al., 1996). On the other hand, the knowledge-based trust literature indicates that trusting beliefs develop gradually through social exchange (Lewicki & Bunker, 1995; Shapiro et al., 1992). Consumers' trust in online reviews has been primarily examined by the cognitive-based literature based on the conviction that people form trusting beliefs in an early phase without experiential interaction, and these beliefs may change as people gain experience with the trustee (McKnight, Choudhury & Kacmar, 2002).

Two types of trust have been identified by previous research. Research shows that people rely on their general disposition to trust in novel situations (Rotter, 1971; Johnson & Swap, 1982). Disposition to trust refers to the extent to which an individual displays a consistent tendency to be willing to depend on others in general across a broad spectrum of situations and persons (McKnight & Chervany, 2001). As a psychological trait, people may grow up with a disposition towards trusting or may develop it later in life (Erikson, 1968), and it is a general propensity to be willing to depend on others whatever the reason is. In the context of online reviews, consumers who score higher on disposition to trust tend to trust online reviews in general more, compared to those who score lower on disposition to trust (Kelly, 1992).

Institution-based trust depicts the trusting beliefs and intentions generated from the interactions between people and the environment (Kelly et al., 1983). It is defined as cognitive-emotional reactions to such interactions in dynamic situations and structures (McKnight & Chervany, 2001). In an online environment, institution-based trust might refer to a specific argument style that consumers are likely to rely on, and it may also indicate a particular information source that consumers perceive as trustworthy.

Consumer Trust in Product Reviews

Trust is central to interpersonal and commercial relationships wherever risk, uncertainty, or interdependence exists (Golembiewski & McConkie, 1975; Morgan & Hunt, 1994). According to Mayer and Davis (1999), trust is defined as "the willingness of a party to be vulnerable to the actions of another party based on the expectation that the other party will perform a particular action important to the trustor, irrespective of the ability to monitor or control that other party" (p. 712). Researchers have found trust to be important to both virtual teams and e-commerce (Jarvenpaa & Leidner, 1998; Hoffman, Novak & Peralta, 1999; Noteberg, Christianse & Wallage, 1999). For instance, Matzat and Snijders (2012) found that consumers' trust toward online sellers has a great impact on their purchase intentions. A low level of trust can lead to consumers' product-switching behavior (McKnight & Chervany, 2001). Furthermore, trust between communication partners in a virtual environment is found to be an important influence on information exchange behavior. Chu and Kim (2011) examined eWOM in social networking sites and found that the positive interpersonal connections among users make eWOM more trustworthy than other eWOM platforms (e.g. online discussion group). Because connections have access to profile information, more social trust is arguably present.

Online product reviews are essentially consumer-to-consumer communication (Racherla, Mandviwalla & Connolly, 2012). It is a sort of computer-mediated communication that primarily occurs among strangers. The reviewers and the readers may have neither a previous history nor an expectancy of future interaction. Due to their limited knowledge about the communication partner, readers of online reviews may not be able to understand reviewers' backgrounds, motivations, and competence (Buda and Zhang, 200). Thus, consumers' trust of the reviewers and the review itself should have a significant impact on the subsequent behavior, such as adopting or rejecting relevant information, which is directly related to consumer purchase behaviors. However, consumers' trust of an online reviewer and the review itself is relatively overlooked by communication researchers (Furner, Racherla & Zhu, 2012).

Influencing Factors of Consumer Trust

Several researchers have identified two distinct sources of influence that affect the persuasiveness of eWOM communication: information influence and normative influence (Park, Lee & Han, 2007; Rachela, Mandiwalla & Connolly, 2012; Furner, Racherla & Zhu, 2012). Informational influence is based on the receiver's judgment of the relevant content of the message (Racherla, Mandviwalla & Connolly, 2012). Traditional communication theories state that informational factors are the major elements that affect a reader's information evaluation (Wathen & Burkell, 2002). Because typical online recommendations are submitted by total strangers in text format, informational factors should play an important role in consumer evaluation when consumers have limited knowledge about review writers (Cheung et al., 2009). Normative influence refers to the influence on individuals to conform to the expectations of others that are implicit or explicit in the choices of a reference group (Burnkrant & Cousineau,

1975). When readers process the information in eWOM communication, they do not simply rely on informational factors as important criteria to judge the credibility of the information, but also use normative cues, such as similarity in opinions, tastes, and preferences (Cheung et al., 2009; Rachela, Mandiwalla & Connolly, 2012).

In line with the above findings, some researchers have examined various information cues that consumers use to evaluate the credibility of online reviews based on the elaboration likelihood model (ELM) (Cheung, Sia & Kuan, 2012). According to ELM, there are two major routes by which persuasive messages can be processed: the central route and the peripheral route (Petty & Cacioppo, 1984). The central route involves a high level of elaboration, while the peripheral route entails a low level of elaboration. When a recipient processes a message through the central route, they will carefully consider the content presented in the message and evaluate the merits of its argument. In contrast, the peripheral route, in which people use heuristics cues as informational indicators to assess the believability of a message, requires less cognitive work (Petty, Cacioppo & Schumann, 1983). Prior research shows that consumers' evaluation of online reviews can be based on both central and peripheral routes (Li et al., 2013), and the degree of elaboration through either the central route or the peripheral route depend on the recipient's ability and motivation (Racherla, Mandviwalla & Connolly, 2012; Furner, Racherla & Zhu, 2012).

The information adoption literature suggests that the persuasiveness of a message is related to 1) the message, 2) the source, and 3) the recipient (Petty & Cacciopo, 1986; Herr, Kardes & Kim, 1991). Researchers have focused on many message-related and source-related variables in the eWOM literature, including argument strength, source credibility, and recipients' level of product involvement (Dholakia, 2000; Huang & Chen, 2006; Park, Lee & Han, 2007;

Walther et al, 2009; Planchon, James & Hoof, 2011; Willemsen, Neijens & Bronner, 2012). The following section will review pertinent research regarding these variables.

Source Credibility The perceived source credibility from the recipient's side is a prevalent focus in persuasion studies. In an early study investigating the influence of media on voting decisions, Lazarsfeld, Berelson, and Gaudet (1948) found that people were more likely to be influenced by face-to-face interaction with others rather than by mass media information. The characters of opinion leaders, which are identified by their study as an important personal influence, contained perceived expertise and trustworthiness. Several credibility research studies support the assessment that more credible sources produce more attitude change than less credible sources (Miller & Baseheart, 1969; Pornpitakpan, 2004; Pan & Choi, 2011). Nevertheless, source credibility is a multifaceted construct. Ohanian (1990) argues that understanding and defining source credibility is often confusing because of the inconsistency in measuring the same construct that appears in the literature. In general, source credibility is believed to consist of expertise and trustworthiness perceptions (Willemsen et al., 2011). Perceived expertise refers to the degree to which a receiver believes a source is able to make accurate assertions, whereas perceived trustworthiness reflects the receiver's belief that the source's opinions are unbiased (Dholakia & Sternthal, 1977; Gotlieb & Sarel, 1991). A trustworthy person is sincere and honest when making assertions; however, this does not mean that a trustworthy person always makes accurate assertions (Mackiewicz, 2010). In fact, research indicates that a trustworthy person is persuasive, whether an expert or not. Thus, a regular consumer who has no persuasive intent might be viewed as more trustworthy than an advertising source. Friedman and Friedman (1979)'s study shows that endorsers who are liked will also be trusted. In line with their finding, an endorser's trustworthiness is also associated with a

respondent's perceived similarity to the source, the level of the source's expertise, and the source's attractiveness (Friedman, Santeramo & Traina, 1979; Ohanian, 1990).

Perceived expertise refers to the degree to which a source is considered to be capable of making valid assertions (Willemsen, Neijens & Bronner, 2012). An expert is viewed as having skills, competence, or knowledge through experience, training, and education (Ohanian, 1990). A rich body of literature supports that the source's perceived expertise has a positive influence on receivers' attitude change (Crisci & Kassinove, 1973; Horai, Naccari, & Fatoullah, 1974; Maddux & Rogers, 1980). Online reviewers who claim to have complete knowledge about the products under review are more likely to be perceived as expert by consumers than those who claim to be a layperson (Willemsen, Neijens & Bronner, 2012). However, a source with perceived expertise is likely to be perceived as less trustworthy than a reviewer who claims to be a layperson (Senecal & Nantel, 2004; Huang & Chen, 2006). Consumers are often skeptical about the truthfulness and motivation of experts because some online product reviews are written by marketers or hired parties (Walther et al, 2009). Some marketers may induce expert consumers to endorse their products by providing an incentive for posting online reviews (Huang & Chen, 2006).

Argument Quality The content quality of online consumer reviews is an important influencing factor for consumer information processing. The presentation of a strong argument may be taken as representing the reviewer's capability and intelligence in evaluating a product or service. A significant body of research has identified the importance of argumentation in terms of credibility, objectiveness, timeliness, and sufficiency (Bailey & Pearson, 1983; Negash, Ryan & Igbaria, 2003; Srinivasan, 1985). These findings suggest that strong messages, which are understandable and objective, are more effective than weak ones, which are emotional and

subjective (Petty & Cacioppo, 1984; Petty, Cacioppo & Schumann, 1983). For instance, Park, Lee and Han (2007) indicate that strong argumentation by product reviewers enhances persuasiveness in generating consumer purchase intentions. Because product reviewers are anonymous on the Internet, people generally prefer messages that contain more factual and pragmatic information about the products and services. In this sense, good content quality increases consumers' willingness to trust product reviews (Award & Ragowsky, 2008).

Product Involvement Another important influencing factor in eWOM research is the concept of consumer involvement. Generally, involvement refers to an individual's perceived relevance of an object based on his or her inherent needs, values, and interests (Zaichkowsky, 1986). Product involvement is defined as consumers' involvement with particular product categories (Zaichkowsky, 1986; 1994). Previous research reveals that product category involvement varies according to different personal characteristics and different social contexts (Howard & Sheth, 1969; Lastovicka, Gardner & Zaichkowsky, 1978; Korganokar & Moschis, 1982). Thus, one product's importance in relation to another product primarily depends on an individual's personal values and needs at a particular time or under a particular circumstance. Furthermore, product involvement is also found to have great influence on consumers' cognitive processing (Chen & Tseng, 2011; Kim & Choi, 2012). Korganokar and Moschis (1982) found that high-involvement products are less susceptible to changes in product evaluation after consumers are exposed to discrepant information than low-involvement products, which implied that consumers held strong beliefs about the high-involvement products. A study conducted by Gardner et al (1985) suggests that the level of involvement is related to consumers' elaborative processing. Thus, high-involvement products are believed to generate more influence on consumers than low-involvement products. Hence, involvement represents a motivation to expend the cognitive

effort in product evaluation and perceived brand value. Consistent with these findings, a large number of studies show that when a product is perceived as relevant to consumer's self-concept, the individual was more likely to be motivated to generate intensive, comprehensive and complex cognition and behavioral responses during the evaluation and decision-making process (Dholakia & Bagozzi, 2001; Constant, Sproull & Kiesler, 1996; Cambetti & Graffigna, 2010).

CHAPTER 3

THEORTICAL FRAMEWORK

The uncertainty reduction theory (URT) of interpersonal communication (Berger & Calabrese, 1975) provides a helpful lens to begin examining consumer trust in the context of electronic commerce. Uncertainty reduction theory was applied in this study based on the assumption that online reviews are essentially consumer-to-consumer communication that has both informational and social components (Wathen & Burkell, 2002; Furner, Racherla & Zhu, 2012; Racherla, Mandviwalla & Connolly, 2012). Further, URT theorizes about the initial interaction between communicators, also called the "entry phase" according to Berger and Calabrese (1975), which assumes that the persons involved in the communication transaction are strangers. Because the source and receiver are more likely to be strangers in the context of online reviews, and future interactions between sources and recipients are less likely to occur (Duhan, Johnson, Wilcox & Harrell, 1997; Buda & Zhang, 2000; Dellarocas, 2003; Kim & Benbasat, 2006), URT is expected to provide insights for this study.

Essentially, a product review is an interpersonal communication between consumers, and the uncertainty produced by this type of communication is partially due to the low trust in the source-receiver relationship (Rampel, Holmes & Zanna, 1985; Wrightsman, 1991; Morgan & Hust, 1994; McKnight & Chervany, 2002). In this study, source identification will be examined in two ways. First, homophily or perceived similarity between sources and receivers has been found as a factor that drives trust in eWOM in previous studies (Wright, 2000; Forman, Ghose &

Wiesenfeld, 2008; Furner, Racherla, & Zhu, 2012). Thus, the first part of this section discusses the influence of perceived similarity between sources and receivers on trust in online product reviews. Second, perceived source expertise as another aspect of source identification is examined (Willemsen, Neijens & Bronner, 2012). Source expertise, which is based on the accumulation of skills, competences, or knowledge through experience, is closely related to consumer trust (Ohanian, 1990; McKnight & Chervancy, 2002).

Source identification should not be the only influence on consumer trust in product reviews. When a consumer is reading a product review written by an unknown individual from an unfamiliar website, the credibility of the information is assessed after the consumer assesses the trustworthiness of the reviewer and the information presented by the reviewer (McKnight, Cummings & Chervany, 1998). Therefore, the argument quality needs to be examined as an influential factor. In general, research demonstrates that the information component and source identification intertwine to influence the effectiveness of eWOM communication (Racherla, Mandviwalla, Connolly, 2012).

The remainder of the chapter will proceed as follows. A discussion of URT outlines the basic assumptions of the paradigm followed by an explication of the emergence of trust in the context of computer-mediated communication and electronic commerce. Source identification is discussed from the perspectives of the source-receiver relationship and the source credibility literature. Finally, argument quality is examined highlighting the information processing theory in the consumer research literature.

Uncertainty Reduction Theory

A major assumption of uncertainty reduction theory is that there is a human drive to reduce uncertainty in initial interactions. According to Beger and Calabrese (1975), central to the uncertainty reduction theory is the assumption that "when strangers meet, their primary concern is one of uncertainty reduction or increasing predictability about the behavior of both themselves and others in the interaction" (p.100). In URT, uncertainty is defined as two aspects. First, uncertainty refers to the predictability of alternative ways in which each interactant might behave at the beginning of a particular encounter. Thus, the task for one is to predict the most likely alternative actions and then select from the available responses. The second sense of uncertainty comes from the motivations or intentions explaining the other's behavior. Individuals make proactive and retroactive attributions regarding others' behaviors as they attempt to reduce their uncertainty (Bradac, 2001). In this study, the uncertainty associated with online product reviews refers to the second sense of uncertainty. The absence of previous and future interactions between source and recipient in the case of online reviews leads to 1) the uncertainty associated with the product or service endorsed in the review, and 2) the uncertainty associated with the motivations and genuineness of the reviewer. Previous eWOM studies suggest that consumers are more likely to depend on eWOM messages when altruism is attributed to the motivation of eWOM communication (Sundaram, Mitra & Webster, 1998; Phelps et al., 2004).

Originally generated to explain the interpersonal communication phenomena, uncertainty reduction theory has been extended to the context of computer-mediated communication (CMC). A number of empirical studies were conducted to apply URT in various topics such as online support groups, massively multiplayer online games (MMOGs), social networking sites (SNS), and electronic commerce (Wright, 2000; Antheunits, Valkenburg & Peter, 2010; Williams, 2011;

Racherla, Mandviwalla & Connolly, 2012). URT is applicable in both face-to-face communication and mediated communication (Walther & Burgoon, 1992; Ramirez, Walther, Burgoon & Sunnafrank, 2002). Specifically, CMC is viewed having more uncertainty compared to face-to-face communication (Tidwell & Walther, 2002) because CMC lacks many of the nonverbal cues that are prevalent in face-to-face communication, and these nonverbal cues are heavily used in the impression formation process (Berger & Calabrese, 1975). However, research found that individuals adapt to the barriers presented in CMC and apply other methods to obtain someone's information to compensate for the limitations that CMC imposes (Lea & Spears, 2001; Marx, 2004). For instance, one study shows that people ask more direct questions and disclose more in CMC than those interacting face-to-face (Westerman & Tamborini, 2006). Furthermore, another study indicates that people adapt their behavior to the relevant social cues about others that are available, such as someone's profiles (Antheunis, Walkenburg, & Peter, 2010).

According to URT, individuals reduce uncertainty through both active and passive strategies when facing an initial interaction (Beger, 1979). Active strategies, including directly seeking relevant information from others, might be used by individuals to reduce uncertainty, especially when there is a high incentive value (Furner et al., 2012). Passive strategies involve social observation in which uncertainty is reduced by observing the behaviors and background of others and then drawing conclusions (Kellermann & Beger, 1984; Beger & Gudykunst, 1991). In the case of online reviews, consumers employ both active and passive strategies to reduce uncertainty. In terms of active strategies, consumers may search for additional information about the endorsed products or services from an outside source, or they might evaluate the arguments of the message to determine the usefulness of the review (Buda & Zhang, 2000). Passive strategies involve witnessing profiles about the source and drawing conclusions about reviewers

or endorsed products (Lea & Spear, 2001). Previous research on CMC suggests that limited social cues that are available online can become highly salient and important in forming attitudes and determining behaviors (Lee, 2008; Williams, 2011). For instance, research shows that consumers' identification with the reviewer based on the presented background information can increase the perceived trustworthiness of the reviewer (Castano, Yzerbyt, Paladino, & Sacchi, 2002; Kusumasondjaja, Shanka & Marchegiani, 2012).

Trust Building and Uncertainty Reduction

Trust is central to interpersonal and commercial relationships especially where risk and uncertainty exist (McKnight, 2001). Lack of trust in online product reviews can deter consumer adoption of product-related information and reduce the effectiveness of eWOM communication. Gefen and Benbasat (2008) argue that consumer trust is difficult to establish in CMC because social cues are minimal on the Internet. According to impression formation theory, social cues refer to any verbal and nonverbal social information about communication partners (Tanis & Postmes, 2003), and social cues provide a rich impression about a person and thereby influence various social interactions (Hancock & Dunham, 2001). As in the case of CMC where anonymity exists and nonverbal cues are eliminated, the need for trust grows (Mishra, 1996). Therefore, it is important to overcome consumer perceptions of uncertainty and risk by understanding the emergence of trust.

Trust is viewed as the most effective uncertainty reduction method (Hart & Saunders, 1997; Gefen, 2000). URT suggests that positive relational outcomes result from uncertainty reduction about another individual, while negative outcomes come from high states of uncertainty (Berger & Calabrese, 1975). More specifically, trusting beliefs about the

communication partner are generated as the uncertainty is reduced in initial interactions, along with the increases in affinity, reciprocity, and intimacy. Previous literature suggests that trust is positively related with uncertainty reduction (Yoo, 2005; Douglas, 1990; Kim & Kim, 2006). Miller and Rogers (1987) argue that if no uncertainty exists between two individuals, it indicates that no risk or threat is found in future interactions with either individual. Since a certain degree of uncertainty always exists in social interactions, individuals need to make an effort to reduce the level of uncertainty and to increase the predictability of outcomes. In the case of online product reviews, if the consumer perceives a high level of uncertainty toward the reviewer, he or she may feel adopting this review or making the relevant purchase is risky. When perceived risk is high, no basis for the development of trust will be established (Miller & Rogers, 1987). Therefore, uncertainty reduction is an indispensable component for developing relational trust (Yoo, 2005). When more uncertainty is reduced via increased verbal communication between strangers (Berger & Calabrese, 1975), perceived predictability should be increased while perceived risk decreases, and positive relational outcomes are likely to occur.

The concept of trust has been defined in different ways. In interpersonal communication literature, trust is defined as one's optimistic expectation of another's behavior when one must make a decision about how to act accordingly (Hosmer, 1995). Trust is also defined as a general psychological state comprising the intention to accept vulnerability based upon positive expectations of the intentions or behavior of another, known as "disposition to trust" (Rotter, 1971). In marketing and electronic commerce, initial trust refers to the trust in an unfamiliar trustee, "a relationship in which the actors do not yet have credible, meaningful information about, or affective bonds with, each other" (McKnight, 2002, p. 335). Initial trust has been applied in various topics about the initial interaction among strangers, and this study focuses on

initial trust because the source-reviewer relationships in the case of online product reviews are largely based on initial interaction. In initial relationships, people use whatever information they have, such as profiles, images, and perceptions, to make trust inferences (McKnight, Cummings & Chervany, 1998).

Trusting beliefs and trusting intentions are applied in the consumer research literature and have been found as closely linked to trust-related behavior, such as product recommendations and product purchases (Bagozzi & Dholakia, 2002; Brown & Reingen, 1987; Buda & Zhang, 2000). Trusting beliefs mean that a confident truster perceives that the trustee – in this context, a specific product reviewer – has attributes that are beneficial to the truster (McKnight, 2002). Three trusting beliefs are examined most often based on previous literature: 1) Competence, the ability of the trustee to do what the truster needs; 2) Benevolence, trustee caring and motivation to act in the truster's interests; and 3) Integrity, trustee honesty and promise keeping (Butler, 1991; Gefen, 1997; Mayer et al., 1995; Bhattacherjee, 2002). Trust intentions refer to when the truster is willing to depend on the trustee (McKnight, 2002). Consumers' willingness to depend indicates that the consumer is volitionally prepared to make herself vulnerable to the other party in a situation by relying on the other party (Dobing, 1993; Mayer, Davis & Schoorman, 1995). In the context of online product reviews, the consumer is willing to depend on the review to make a judgment about the endorsed product. Thus, this study accesses the concept of trust from both trusting beliefs and trusting intentions in order to capture both the cognitive and behavioral components of trust.

Hypotheses and Research Questions

Understanding the trust building process in CMC is crucial to explicate the determinants of consumer trust in online product reviews. This study proposes that consumer trust in online product reviews is determined by three important factors: homophily, prestige, and argument quality.

Homophily

One important aspect of human communication is the relationship between sources and receivers. Communication scholars Rogers and Bhowmik (1970) indicate relations between sources and receivers account for many aspects of communication, such as attraction, credibility, empathy, and directly affect the effectiveness of communication. According to Lazarsfeld and Merton (1954), one of the most fundamental principles of human communication is that the exchange of messages most frequently occurs between individuals who are alike and similar. Homophily is defined as "the degree to which pairs of individuals who interact are similar with respect to certain attributes, such as beliefs, values, education, social status, etc." (Roger & Bhowmik, 1970, p. 525). Some synonyms for homophily are used in many studies, such as similarity (Lott & Lott, 1965; Simons, 1970; Racherla, Mandviwalla, & Connolly, 2012; Furner, Racherla & Zhu, 2012), social distance and social closeness (Barnlund & Harland, 1965). Based on its measurement, homophily is conceptualized at two levels. The subjective level refers to the degree to which a source or a receiver perceives the dyad as similar in attributes; the objective level refers to the degree of observable similarity between a source and a receiver (Roger & Bhowmik, 1970). In this study, the concept of homophily is operationalized in the subjective

level, indicating the degree to which a consumer perceives an online product reviewer as having similar attributes, such as demographics and attitudes.

Homophily between sources and receivers is positively associated with communication effectiveness (Roger & Bhowmik, 1970). In persuasion studies, communication is effective when the transfer of an idea from source to receiver results in a certain change in knowledge, attitude, and behavior (Katz & Lazarsfeld, 1955). Pertinent research findings support the assessment raised by Roger and Bhowmik by examining the influence of homophily on credibility and trust-related behaviors (Wright, 2000; Chu & Kim, 2011). Homophily has a positive effect on source credibility when the source is perceived as trustworthy, defined as the degree of confidence that a source is motivated to communicate valid assertions (Willemsen, Neijens & Bronner, 2012). In eWOM research, homophily is found to be a major driver of consumer trust in both high and low involvement purchases (Furner, Racherla & Zhu, 2012), an important determinant of information forwarding behavior (Chu & Kim, 2011), and a significant predictor of support-related behaviors in online groups (Wright, 2000). A higher level of perceived similarity between sources and receivers leads to higher credibility and greater trust than a less similar source-receiver relationship because a similar dyad reduces the uncertainty and increases the predictability of future interaction based on the proposition of URT (Berger & Calabrese, 1975). URT suggests that communication partners, especially in the initial interaction, apply uncertainty reduction strategies to predict each other's attitudes and behavior. These strategies often involve exchange and collection of socio-demographic information in the initial round of interaction. In this sense, knowing the source shares a similar identification or background helps consumers reduce uncertainty and access source credibility. For instance, perceived similarity between sources and receivers may serve as cues for the consumer that the

product or service might fit into his or her interests, values and needs. Or the consumer may be less likely to associate the source with deception or persuasive intention. Previous research has found that when reviewers shared their demographic information on Amazon.com, it increases the likelihood of purchase from the consumers with similar characteristics (Forman et al., 2008).

H1: Reviews produced by reviewers with higher perceived similarity between reviewers and consumers have greater trust than those produced by reviewers with low perceived similarity.

Source Prestige

In this study, the concept of source prestige was proposed to distinguish the dimension of source expertise in the credibility concept. According to the Oxford dictionary, prestige refers to "widespread respect and admiration felt for someone or something on the basis of a perception of their achievements or quality" (www.oxforddictinaries.com, 2014). The Webster dictionary defines prestige as "the respect and admiration that someone or something gets for being successful and important" (www.merriam-webster.com, 2014). Prestige is often used in social and psychological studies to indicate an individual's social status level (Paulson, 1954; Gorn, 1975). For example, in organizational communication, prestige refers to an individual's occupational ranking (Hovlan & Weiss, 1951). An individual with higher prestige is usually viewed as having more influence and receiving more support than a low prestige individual (Smith & Peterson, 2007). Other researchers suggest that high prestige individuals generally have more relational ties (Knoke & Burt, 1983). In Manis's study (1961) about the influence of source prestige on audiences' message responses, a high prestige source was manipulated based

on three attributes. The source is 1) having a university honor; 2) having a stable and mature status; 3) well-liked and respected. In contrast, a low prestige source is 1) lack of a university honor; 2) having an unstable and immature status; 3) unpopular and unreliable.

Source prestige and source expertise are essentially different. A low prestige individual may be an expertise in some area. Source expertise refers to the perception of the source's ability, knowledge and competence in a subjective level (Pornpitakpan, 2004). Some research assumes that a "top reviewer" source as an expert source (Willemsen, Neijens & Bronner, 2012), however, it might be problematic because it does not guarantee that a "top reviewer" has expertise in the product categories that s/he reviewed. For instance, a radio camera review written by a "top reviewer" in the baby product category or a "top reviewer" in the book category may be less likely to contain expert knowledge. Furthermore, a "top reviewer" may only indicate the individual wrote a large number of product reviews and this status might be irrelevant to his or her expertise. In the case of online reviews, this study defines a high prestige source as a "top reviewer" who wrote a relatively large number of reviews and was a member of the review website for a longer time, and a low prestige source as a reviewer who wrote a relatively small number of reviews and was a member of the review website for a shorter time. This operationalization was believed to mirror the basic principles of source prestige suggested in Manis's study (1961). Furthermore, applying the concept of source prestige tends to differentiate from the perceived source expertise as a subjective perception from the individual. In an objective level, source prestige refers to the observable attributes owned by a specific source.

Yet, for online product reviews in which limited information about the reviewer is presented, source prestige may serve as important social cues to influence perceived source credibility. Given the anonymous nature of online communication and consumer skepticism

towards product reviews, a high prestige source might decrease consumer uncertainty and increase the perceived source credibility. Since there is a scarcity of studies conducted to examine the influence of source prestige on the effectiveness of eWOM communication, current research about opinion leaders in eWOM may provide insights for this study. For example, Sun and his colleagues (2006) conducted research about the influence of online opinion leaders, defined as individuals who transmit information about a topic to other people (King & Summer, 1970) and found opinion leaders were influential members of their social networks and their opinions were most likely to be adopted by followers. This leads to the following hypothesis:

H2: Reviews produced by reviewers with higher source prestige have greater trust than those produced by reviewers with low source prestige.

What is unclear from the literature is whether the differences in consumer trust among the levels of source prestige are the same across the levels of perceived similarity. Thus, the first set of research questions is proposed.

RQ1: Are there any significant interaction effects of perceived similarity and source prestige on consumers' trust in online product reviews?

Argument Quality

Argument quality is an important factor in affecting consumers' trust in information (Kim & Benbasat, 2006). In an online environment, consumers try to evaluate the semantic cues in the information to access credibility and make product judgments (Lucassen & Schraagen, 2012).

Consumers might consider information cues such as factual accuracy, argument valence and completeness of the information. Individuals who make relevant, objective, and verifiable arguments tend to be more persuasive and are perceived more credible (Petty, Cacioppo & Schumann, 1983). The persuasive strength of argument quality has been established in numerous contexts, such as eWOM, advertising, political communication, and health communication (Lee, 2008; Love et al., 2009; Racherla, Mandviwalla & Connolly, 2012). For instance, Dillard and Shen's (2005) research about online healthcare communication found that strong arguments containing concrete facts and valid evidence have a greater impact on uncertainty reduction as opposed to messages lacking in facts and reasoning. Similarly, Cheung and his colleagues (Cheung, et al., 2009) indicate that argument quality in eWOM communication is positively associated with brand attitudes and purchase intentions. Since a product review is an argument made by previous consumers to either encourage or deter product purchase, reviews with stronger argument quality tend to be more trustworthy than reviews with weak argument quality.

H3: Reviews with stronger argument quality have greater trust than reviews with weak argument quality.

In addition, argument quality cannot be independent with source characteristics and these two factors should be interdependent with each other (Petty, Cacioppo, & Schumann, 1983; Racherla, Mandviwalla & Connolly, 2012). However, previous research has viewed these two factors independently as the influence of information adoption (Cheung et al., 2009). Argument quality should be positively related with source credibility. The manner in which the reviewer argues for or against the product influences consumers' perceptions about the specific reviewer

because the source and the content usually go hand in hand. Thus, reviewers who make stronger arguments tend to be more credible than reviewers who make weaker arguments. The lack of relevant theoretical basis and empirical evidence makes it difficult to formulate specific research hypotheses supporting a three-way interaction effect among perceived similarity, source prestige, and argument quality. Therefore, additional research question is put forth:

RQ2: Are there any significant interaction effects of perceived similarity, source prestige, and argument quality on consumers' trust in online product reviews?

Source Credibility

A large number of empirical studies suggest that the effectiveness of persuasive communication can be influenced by the source credibility (Gotlieb & Sarel, 1991; Yilmaz et al., 2011; Kim & Choi, 2012). A credible source or endorser increases positive attitudes about the products or brands and induces more purchase intentions than a less credible endorser (Hovland & Weiss, 1948). Source credibility should be positively associated with consumer trust in online product reviews because the two dimensions of source credibility, trustworthiness and expertise, are important drivers of consumer trust (Lucassen & Schraagen, 2012). First, people often trust experts who have the appropriate knowledge to provide accurate information, such as a doctor or a professor. Second, a trustworthy source, which has the intention to supply correct information, receives more trust from people, such as Consumer Reports. Hence, the following hypothesis is generated for the present study.

H4: Source credibility of the online reviews predicts consumers' trust in reviews.

Source Trustworthiness Source trustworthiness is determined by attributions about the motivation of a source to share specific information (Willemsen, Neijens & Bronner, 2012). In the case of product reviews, consumers' judgments about the trustworthiness of a review source are based upon their inference regarding the reviewer's motivation to endorse a product (McCracken, 1989). Consumers may attribute product endorsement to either the actual performance of the products or factors unrelated to the product attributes. For instance, Sen and Lerman's (2007) study on book reviews found that readers might attribute the reviewer's motivations to internal reasons, such as reviewer's dispositional characteristics. Based on the assessments of attribute theory (Kelly, 1973), consumers discount a product endorsement if they attribute the endorsement to the reviewer's intent to persuade rather than to the product performance. Previous literature identified that consumers were inclined to trust people who they perceived to be homophilous to themselves (McCroskey, Richmond & Daly, 1975; Wang, Walther, Pingree & Hawkins, 2008). Consumers' concerns about a reviewer's persuasive intention may be less likely to occur when the reviewer is viewed to be a layperson. An ordinary consumer who generally has no expert knowledge of the product is more likely to generate trusting attitudes towards a layperson than an expert (Huang & Chen, 2006; Metzger, Flanagin & Medders, 2010).

H5: Reviews with higher perceived similarity between the reviewer and the consumers have greater source trustworthiness than reviews with low perceived similarity.

On the other hand, reviewers might be perceived as trustworthy sources if they are identified based on peer ratings or recognized by the review websites, such as "Top Reviewer" or "Advisor". Reviewers in this category reduce consumer suspicion about the possibility that reviewers are driven by persuasive intents or internal reasons. Reviewer websites such as Amazon.com or TripAdvisor.com only recognize reviewers who consistently provide helpful information across different product categories or within the same category. Thus, when a reviewer is identified as providing valid reviews for different products, it may indicate that s/he does not have a specific intent to promote a product. Based on this argument, the following hypothesis is proposed as:

H6: Reviews with higher source prestige have greater source trustworthiness than reviews with low source prestige.

Argument quality is defined as the persuasive strength of arguments in an informational message (Bhattacherjee & Sanford, 2006). Previous literature has identified that argument quality has positive effects on attitudes toward advertisements (Kao, 2012), trust in online reviews (Racherla, Mandviwalla & Connolly, 2012), perceived usefulness of online reviews (Willemsen et al., 2011), and attitudes toward eWOM (Cheung, et al., 2009; Park, Lee & Han, 2007). Thus, argument quality may service as an informational cue indicating the reviewer has the capacity to make valid assessments about the product, which may influence the perceived trustworthiness of the reviewer.

H7: Reviews with stronger argument quality have greater source trustworthiness than reviews with weak argument quality.

Source Expertise A large amount of research has focused on source expertise (Hass, 1981). As one dimension in source credibility, expertise refers to the extent to which a communication source is perceived to be capable of making accurate assertions based on his or her relevant knowledge and skills (Homer & Kahle, 1990). As advertisers and communication researchers are particularly interested in the communication effectiveness of various source characteristics, studies have found that sources high in expertise are more persuasive than low-expertise sources, particularly in inducing more positive attitudes and behavior change (McGuire, 1969; Sternthal, Phillops, & Dholakia, 1978; Hass, 1981). For instance, Heesacker, Petty and Cacioppo (1983) found that strong arguments have more impact on recipient attitudes than weak arguments when these arguments were delivered by an expert than a non-expert.

Previous research about online product reviews suggests that a reviewer can be perceived to be an expert when 1) the reviewer claims to have topic mastery because of professional training or a hobby relevant to the product under review; 2) the reviewer is highly rated by peer users when they find the review helpful and informative (Resnick et al., 2000; Willemsen, Neijens & Bronner, 2012; Winter et al., 2012). Based on such ratings, review sites such as Amazon.com or Epinion.com recognize reviewers by granting them "Top Reviewer" or "Advisor" badges that are visible in their online profiles. As more online retailers adopt the peer rating system, this study focuses on the peer-rated expertise to access the source expertise. Furthermore, a study found that reviewers as peer-rated experts are likely to be perceived as

having more expert knowledge than self-proclaimed expertise, because rated experts are not able to manipulate the peer rating systems (Willemsen, Neijens & Bronner, 2012).

H8: Reviews produced by reviewers with higher source prestige have greater perceived source expertise than those produced by reviewers with lower source prestige.

According to the persuasion literature, persuasion has been defined as the presentation of persuasive arguments (Petty & Cacioppo, 1984). Previous studies have suggested that increasing the number of arguments in the message enhance persuasion by giving people more information to think about (Eagly & Warren, 1976; Norman, 1976). The number of available arguments may serve as either a central cue or peripheral cue to the validity of the persuasion (Petty & Cacioppo, 1984). For example, the greater the amount of information presented by a group member, the more likely that person is to be rated or chosen as a leader (e.g., Jaffe & Lucas, 1969; Regula & Julian, 1973; Sorrentino & Boutillier, 1975). Thus, this study proposes that a reviewer is more likely to be perceived as having more expertise when making a stronger argument than a weak argument.

H9: Reviews with stronger argument quality have greater source expertise than reviews with low argument quality.

CHAPTER 4

METHOD

Overview of Experiments

Three experiments were conducted to demonstrate the factors that influence consumer trust in online product reviews. Experiment 1 investigated the influence of perceived similarity and source prestige on trust in product reviews. To increase external validity, real online product reviews in two product categories were employed in this study. Participants were asked to read two product reviews on a fictitious consumer review website. Each product review contained two parts: the reviewer's profile and the review content. Reviewer profiles were created to manipulate perceived similarity (high v. low) and source prestige (high v. low). Review content was identical for each product category. Experiment 1 was conducted using a student sample.

Experiment 2 attempted to add argument quality as another influence of trust in reviews with a student sample. Real online product reviews in two product categories were employed to manipulate argument quality (high v. low). Experiment 3 was executed to replicate and extend the main findings obtained in Experiment 2 by using a national sample.

The experiments were administered through the online Qualtrics. Participants were contacted via an email invitation to access a hyperlink to the questionnaire URL. Qualifying questions and random experimental condition selection procedures were embedded within the questionnaire. Although the online environment offers less control than a laboratory environment, the Internet is a more natural environment for the present subject matter (online product reviews).

Previous research indicated the psychological studies conducted in an online environment and a laboratory environment generated close comparative results (Krantz & Dalal, 2000).

The experiments in this study used hypothetical brands and a fictitious review website to allow for more experiment control. Choosing well-known brands (e.g. Nikon, Hilton) or a well-known review website (e.g. Amazon.com, TripAdvisor.com) might add confounding factors to access consumer trust and credibility because these brands or websites might be widely trusted by consumers.

Stimuli Development

Two pretests were conducted in order to identify experiment stimulus, select appropriate product reviews and product categories that are relevant to the target sample. Pretest 1 examined students' perceived similarity regarding reviewers' online profiles and selected two pairs of reviewers that have the most and least similarity compared with the target sample. Manipulations for source prestige were also checked. To select two appropriate product categories, participants were asked to indicate their willingness to search for product reviews before making a purchase decision based on five product categories. Subsequently, Pretest 2 tested students' perceived argument quality and product involvement level based on the product categories identified from Pretest 1. Strong and weak arguments were selected within the hotel and digital camera categories. These procedures ensured successful manipulations of independent variables increasing internal validity of the main experiments.

Pretest 1

The purpose of Pretest 1 is (1) to identify two brand categories that are appropriate in the study context, (2) to select appropriate reviewer profiles that are relevant to the target sample, (3) to confirm the source prestige manipulations, (4) to examine reliabilities of adapted scales.

A total of 123 undergraduate students in mass communication elective courses (82.9% female, M_{age} = 20.4) participated in an online experiment for one extra class credit as previously agreed upon by course instructors.

Product Categories In order to select product categories relevant to participants in the study context, the product reports from Simmons database (2012) were used to identify popular product categories that are frequently used by consumers within the chosen 18-34 demographic for this research. This information was cross-referenced with industry report on electronic commerce (Fornell, 2013). Participants were asked two questions, "I like to check _____reviews before making a purchase related behavior", and "I always check _____reviews before making a purchase related behavior" against five product categories: *restaurant, running shoes, hotel, digital camera*, and *sunscreen*. Based on the results, the product categories chosen were *hotels* and *digital cameras* (see Table 1). These two product categories were widely employed to study consumer product reviews by previous research (e.g. Willemsen, et al., 2011; Racherla, Mandiwalla & Donnolly, 2012).

Perceived Similarity The perceived similarity between reviewers and consumers was manipulated using socio-demographic information (photo, screen name, age, occupation, place of origin, and a short biography). These variables were drawn from Marx's (2004) study, which found that people use 11 different types of information to access the identity of a source in online interpersonal communication. To ensure that the names do not reveal the gender, the

Table 1. Product Categories

	"I like to check reviews before making a purchase related behavior."		"I always check reviews before making a purchase related behavior."		Average of the Two Questions	
	M	SD	M	SD	M	SD
Restaurant	5.16	1.38	2.64	1.64	3.90	1.27
Running Shoes	4.56	1.59	3.62	1.78	4.09	1.57
Hotel	5.83	1.06	5.34	1.49	5.58	1.18
Digital camera	5.65	1.19	5.17	1.57	5.41	1.31
Sunscreen	2.96	1.31	2.24	1.79	2.60	1.19

Note. Mean values on a 7-point scale, where 1 indicated "strongly disagree" and 7 indicated "strongly agree".

reviewer names adopted in this study are all common male and female names. Under the high similarity conditions, reviewers' ages and occupations are similar to the average age of the target sample (college students with an average age of 20). The reviewer was depicted as an undergraduate at the university that the participants attended. The school mascot was employed as the reviewer's profile photo and the geographic location of the reviewer was chosen as the one in which the students resided. The short biographies for similar reviewers mirrored college students' life and interests (see Figure 1). Under the low similarity conditions, the socio-demographic information was designed to be distinct from the target sample (see Figure 2).

Figure 1. Example of High Similarity

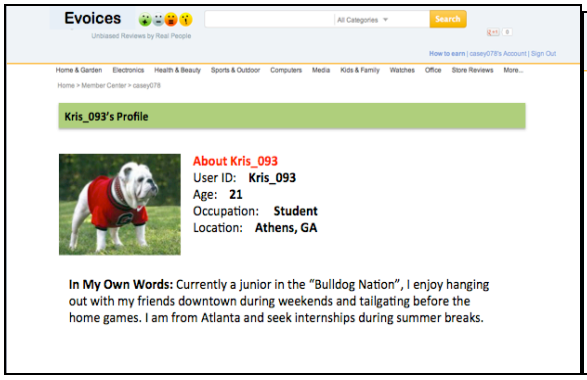
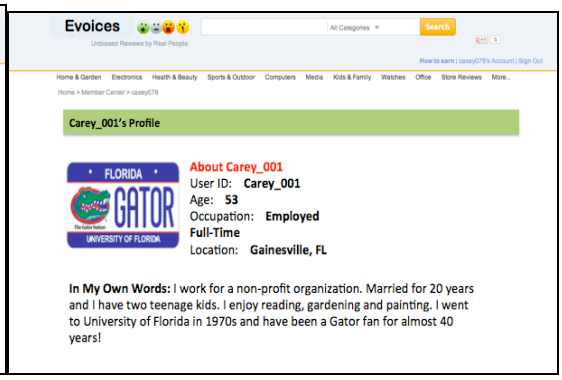


Figure 2. Example of Low Similarity



To access perceived similarity, participants were asked to complete appropriately phrased semantic differential questions regarding their feelings about the reviewers consistent with the homophily scale developed by McCroseky, Rachmond and Daly (1975). This scale has been widely adopted as a measure of perceived homophily or interpersonal similarity in human communication in on-line and off-line contexts (Duran & Kelly, 1988; Wright, 2009; Sun & Kim, 2010). Participants who were exposed to the reviewers' profile received eight, seven-point semantic differential items anchored with "this reviewer is like me/is unlike me," "is different from me/is similar to me," "thinks like me/does not think like me," "doesn't behave like me/behavior like," "has status like me/has status different from me," "is from a different social class/is from a same social class," "is culturally different/is culturally similar," "has an economic situation like me/does not have an economic situation like me." Coefficient alpha for this scale was .79, above the acceptable .70 (Nunnally, 1967).

Descriptive statistics were employed to identify the reviewers with the highest and lowest scores of perceived similarity. Table 2 summarizes results. The reviewer *Kris* was found to have the highest similarity (M = 4.92, SD =1.02) and the reviewer *Casey* was found to have the second highest similarity (M = 4.05, SD = .78). The reviewer *Taylor* was found to have the lowest similarity (M= 2.36, SD = 1.06), and *Carey* was found to have the second lowest similarity (M=2.43, SD = .98). Paired-sample t-tests were conducted to compare the mean differences for two pairs (high similarity vs. low similarity). Table 3 summarizes results. The perceived similarity for the reviewer *Kris* (M= 4.92) was found to be significant higher than that of the reviewer *Carey* (M= 2.43, t (122) = 15.5, p = .000) and the reviewer *Taylor* (M= 2.36, t (122) = 18.1, p= .000). Likewise, the perceived similarity for the reviewer *Casey* (M = 4.05) was found to be significantly higher than that of the reviewer *Carey* (M = 2.43, t (122) = 12.5, p

= .000) and the reviewer *Taylor* (M= 2.36, t (122) = 15.14, p= .000). Paired-sample t-tests did not find a significant difference between 1) *Kris* and *Casey* and 2) *Carey* and *Taylor* (Table 3).

Table 2. Perceived Similarity of Reviewer Profiles

	Perceived Similarity of Reviewer Profiles	
	M	SD
Casey	4.05	.78
Taylor	2.36	1.06
Hollis	2.56	1.02
Carey	2.43	.98
Kris	4.92	1.02

Table 3. Results of Paired Sample t Tests for Reviewer Profiles

Reviewer Profiles	**Cronbach's α**	**Perceived Similarity Means (SD)**	***t***	***df***
High Similarity				
Kris	.85	4.92 (1.02)	15.5* 18.1*	122
Casey	.79	4.05 (.78)	12.5* 15.14*	122
Low Similarity				
Carey	.85	2.43 (.98)		122
Taylor	.85	2.36 (1.06)		

Note: * = p = .000. Standard deviations appear in parentheses beside means.

Source Prestige To best preserve a realistic environment, the top reviewer reputation system employed by major online review websites (e.g. Amazon.com, Epinion.com) was employed to manipulate the construct of source prestige. Under the high prestige conditions, the

reviewer's profile indicated that s/he started to write reviews in 2008 and has written 250 separate reviews (Figure 3). The reviewer in this condition also has a "Top Reviewer" badge next to his or her username. Under the conditions of low prestige, the reviewer's profile indicated that s/he started to write reviews in 2013 and have only written one review in that time (Figure 4).

Figure 3: Example of High Source Prestige

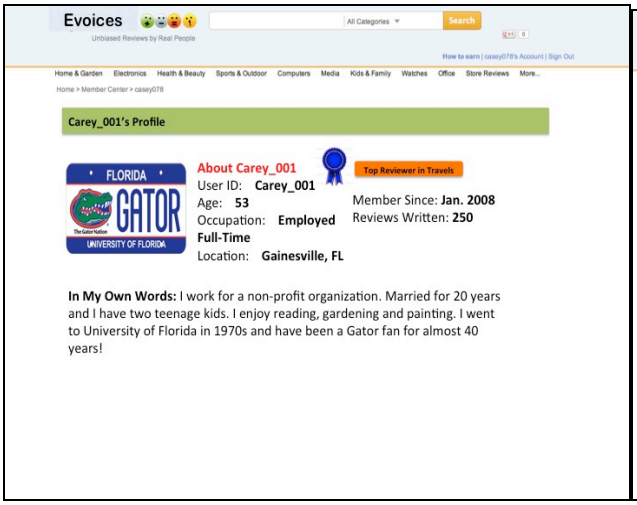
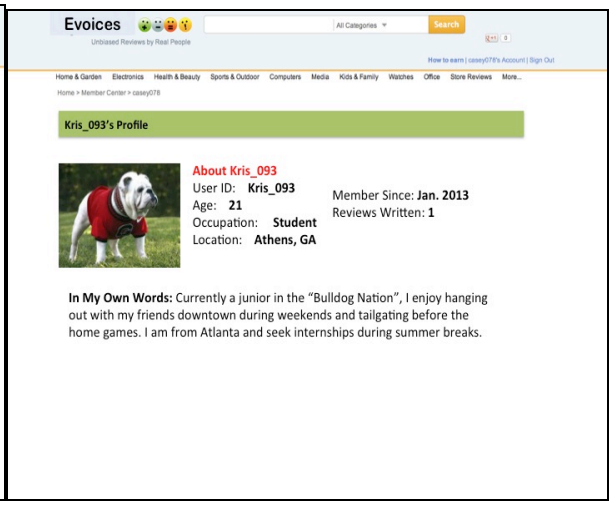


Figure 4: Example of Low Source Prestige



To confirm the manipulation of source prestige, participants were assigned to both conditions in a random order in which they were asked to read the profiles and rate them in terms of the perceived source prestige. Two questions were created to access the perceived source prestige: "This reviewer has a high ranking on the review website" and "This reviewer is a prominent member of the review website". The results indicated the manipulation for the source prestige was successful. Paired sample t-tests found that the perceived source prestige for "top reviewer" ($M = 5.12$, $SD = .91$) was significantly higher than "laypeople" ($M = 2.12$, $SD = 1.05$, $t(122) = 20.5$, $p = .000$).

Pretest 2

Pretest 2 was conducted to 1) select appropriate review content to create a strong and weak argument in product reviews within the product categories of hotels and digital cameras, to 2) check participants' product involvement for these product categories.

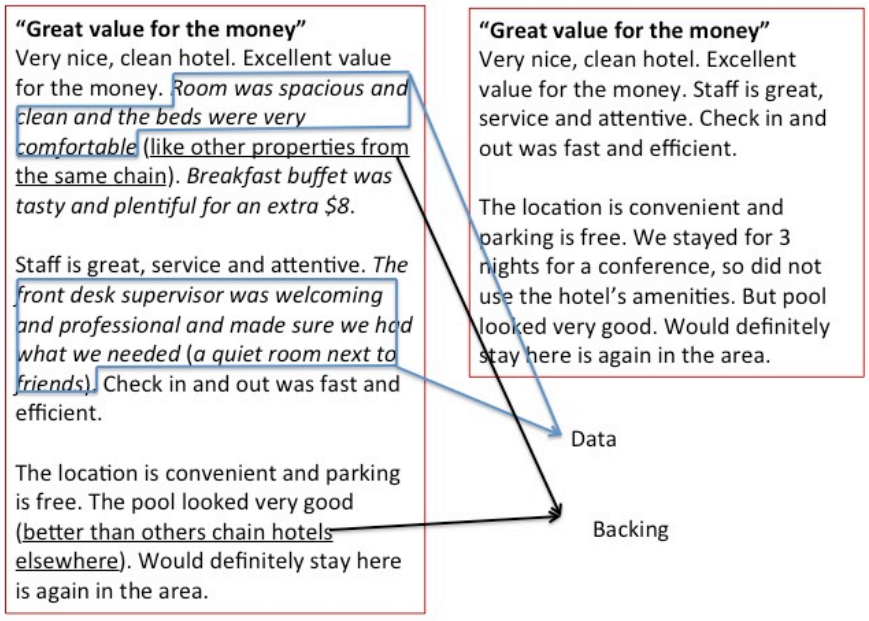
A total of 134 undergraduate students in mass communication elective courses (84.3 % female, M_{Age} = 20) participated in an online survey for one extra class credit as previously agreed upon by course instructors. Participants were recruited via an online participation system with a URL link to the instrument.

Argument Quality The argument quality of review content was manipulated using Toulmin's (1958) model of argumentation as applied by Furner, Racherla, and Zhu in 2012. According to Toulmin, trust-inducing communication content should be well organized and supported. A trust-assuring argument should have the following components:

1. A claim or conclusion that is put forward for general acceptance. This assertion reflects "what is one arguing for?"
2. Evidence presented in the argument to support the claim or what can be known as the basis for the claim.
3. Backing, the part of the argument that explains why the evidence and claim should be accepted.

Figure 5 shows a comparison of two reviews used in this study. These reviews are from a popular online review website for hotels. As can be seen, review 1 has all three components. The review claims that the hotel is great value for money and presents enough evidence to support the argument. In the review text on the left side, the reviewer explained why s/he made the particular claim and went into extensive detail to support the initial claims. Further, the

Figure 5: Toulmin's (1958) Argumentation Model Applied to Online Reviews



review on the left contained specific examples or data to back up the initial claims whereas the review text on the right side merely reflected a general satisfaction with the hotel's quality. This process provided the basis for manipulating argument quality.

Based on Toulmin's argumentation model, ten real consumer-generated reviews were selected from popular review websites (e.g. Amazon.com, TripAdvisor.com), and the selected reviews varied in the aspects of argument quality. Specifically, this study applied real consumer reviews in order to increase external validity of the experiments. In pretest 2, participants read the review content and rated each review based on argument quality measures adopted from Rains's (2007) study on healthcare communication in a computer-mediated environment. The participants were asked to rate the reviews on six attributes: compelling, well-supported, contained specific facts, contained detailed information, listed concrete examples, and did not include detailed information (the last item was coded reversely in data analysis). The coefficient alpha for this scale was .85, above the acceptable .70 levels. The results from the pretest met the

previous expectation, and the selected reviews with strong arguments were all significantly different from the selected reviews with weaker arguments (Table 4). In terms of hotel reviews, the argument quality for Review 1 (M=5.99) was found to be significant higher than that of the Review 2 (M= 4.50, t (133) = 13.29, p = .000) and Review 3 (M= 4.57, t (133) = 11.45, p = .000). Likewise, the argument quality for *Review 5* (M=5.64) was found to be significantly higher than that of Review 2 (M=27.04, t (133) = 12.56, p = .000) and Review 3 (M= 27.45, t (133) = 9.79, p= .000). Paired-sample t-tests did not find a significant difference between 1) Review 2 and Review 3*,* and 2) Review 1 and Review *5.* Similar analysis was conducted for camera reviews and the results revealed significant differences between reviews with strong arguments and those with weak arguments: *Review 1* (M = 4.11) and *Review 2* (M=6.11, t (133) = 10.23, p = .000), *Review 3* (M= 4.42) and *Review 5* (M = 5.25, t (133) = 9.74, p = .000).

Table 4. Argument Quality

	Review 1		Review 2		Review 3		Review 4		Review 5	
	M	SD	M	SD	M	SD	M	SD	M	SD
Hotel	5.99	.98	4.50	6.41	4.57	1.1	2.52	1.05	5.64	.91
Camera	4.11	1.35	6.11	.74	4.42	1.20	4.72	1.05	5.25	1.08

Category Involvement The product category involvement was measured using Zaichkowsky's (1994) personal involvement inventory, which is a reduced scale from her 1986 involvement measurement. Participants' category involvement is measured in this study to allow analysis of the influence of involvement. The personal involvement inventory is a ten-item semantic differential scale designed to measure people's involvement level regarding specific issues or objects. This scale has been applied in various research topics in advertising and

marketing. In this study, subjects were asked to judge two products (hotels and digital cameras) against a series of descriptive scales and to indicate their feelings about the product based on ten, seven-point semantic differential items such as "selecting the right hotel is important/unimportant," "selecting the right hotel is irrelevant/relevant", and "selecting the right hotel means a lot to me/means nothing to me."

Results from pretest 2 indicated that this scale was reliable. Coefficient alpha for hotel involvement (M = 4.55, SD = .85) was .86, and for camera involvement (M = 4.75, SD = 1.22) was .93. An independent t-test was conducted to compare the mean differences between hotels and digital cameras. The difference found between the means of the two product categories was not significant (t (133) = 3.65, p = .56).

In sum, pretest 1 and 2 resulted in the selection of reviewer profiles with high and low similarity, high and low source prestige, and strong-weak review arguments within two product categories: hotels and digital cameras. The experimental stimuli were developed based on the outcomes of the two pretests. A series of main experiments was conducted to test hypotheses and research questions. Figure 6 summarizes the research procedure.

Figure 6: Summary of Research Procedures

Stimuli Development

1. **Pretest**
   - Selection of reviewer profiles with high and low similarity, and appropriate product categories that are relevant to product reviews, test the manipulation of reviewer prestige
   - 123 undergraduate students (18% male, 82% female)
   - Two product categories were identified (hotel and digital camera), manipulation of reviewer profiles and reviewer prestige were successful, scale reliabilities acceptable

2. **Pretest**
   - Selection strong-weak review argument quality within two product categories (hotel and digital camera), examine adopted scale reliabilities
   - 134 undergraduates (16% male, 84% female)
   - Two strong arguments and two weak arguments were identified within two product categories, scale reliabilities acceptable

Main Experiments

1. **Experiment**
   - 2 (high v. low perceived similarity) X 2 (high v. low source prestige) design
     - Hotel: MANCOVA with simple and multiple regression
     - Camera: MANCOVA with simple and multiple regression
   - 132 Undergraduate students (16% male, 84% female)
   - Influence on source credibility and trust in reviews
2. **Experiment**
   - 2 (high v. low perceived similarity) X 2 (high v. low source prestige) X 2 (strong v. weak argument) design
     - Hotel: ANCOVA with simple and multiple regression
     - Camera: ANCOVA with simple and multiple regression
   - 265 undergraduate students (20% male, 80 % female)
   - Influence on source credibility and trust in reviews
3. **Experiment**
   - 2 (high v. low perceived similarity) X 2 (high v. low source prestige) X 2 (strong v. weak argument) design
     - Hotel: ANCOVA with simple and multiple regression
     - Camera: ANCOVA with simple and multiple regression
   - 238 participants from Qualtrics national panel age 22-32 (45% male, 55% female)
   - Influence on source credibility and trust in reviews

CHAPTER 5

EXPERIMENT 1

The following chapter describes the research design and sample characteristics for Experiment 1 prior to reporting and discussing results. Experiment 1 sought to test the influence of source characteristics on consumer trust in online reviews across two product categories through an online experiment. By examining source-related factors, the aim is to better understand the roles of perceived similarity and source prestige on trust in online product reviews.

Research Design

A 2 (Similarity high v. low) X 2 (Source prestige high v. low) between-subjects factorial design was conducted via a questionnaire with randomization built into the instrument. Participants were randomly assigned to different experimental conditions within two product categories (hotels and cameras). Perceived similarity between consumers and reviewers and the source prestige were both measured and manipulated in the experiment. The online questionnaire took approximately 15 minutes.

Perceived similarity was manipulated by using reviewer profiles with high similarity and low similarity based upon the outcomes from pretest 1. For the hotel reviews, reviewer's profiles with the screen names "*Carey*" and "*Kris*" were applied to develop the experimental stimulus. In this experiment, "*Carey*" is depicted as a 65-years-old Florida resident who is currently retired from a non-profit organization and has two teenage kids. His/her profile was used in the

conditions of low similarity. In contrast, "*Kris*" was depicted as a 21-years-old University of Georgia student who currently lives close to campus.

Source prestige was manipulated by using high and low reviewer reputation on the presented review website. In the high prestige conditions, the reviewer was a member of the review website since 2008 and wrote more than 200 reviews on this website. In addition, the reviewer with high source prestige had a "Top Reviewer in Travels" or "Top Reviewer in Camera" badges next to his/her screen name. In the low prestige condition, the reviewer was a member since 2013 and wrote one review on this website. Meanwhile, the reviewer with low source prestige didn't have "Top Reviewer" badge next to his/her screen name.

To avoid pre-existing bias toward a specific online review website (e.g. Amazon.com or TripAdvisor.com, Epinion.com), this experiment used a factitious online review website. Specifically, the screen names for online reviewers are all neutral-gender names in order to avoid any compounding influence caused by gender differences. The argument content within each product category was maintained the same. The content with the middle-level argument quality according to the results of pretest 2 was applied in experiment 1. This manipulation was expected to decrease compounding effects that caused by a relatively strong or weak argument.

Participants and Procedure

A total of 133 undergraduate students (14% male, 86% female) recruited from University of Georgia participated in Experiment 1 in exchange for extra course credit. Participants ranged in age from 18 to 23 (M=20), and 78% of the participants were Caucasian, 8% African American, 5% Latino, 2% Asian, and 7% Multi-Racial. This information matches the demographics of students entering the University of Georgia in 2013. Online study

participation system allowed students to voluntarily select and participate in various research projects within the college. Students needed to log in this system and register for the study in which they want to participate, and a URL link to an online questionnaire was given to students. Participants were informed that they would be asked to answer questions about their attitudes toward online product reviews. Following an introduction and welcome to the study, participants answered questions to examine their level of involvement within each product category, general trust disposition, and identification with the college peers. Subsequently, respondents were then randomly assigned to one of four review conditions within each product category. Figure 7 illustrates the randomization procedures.

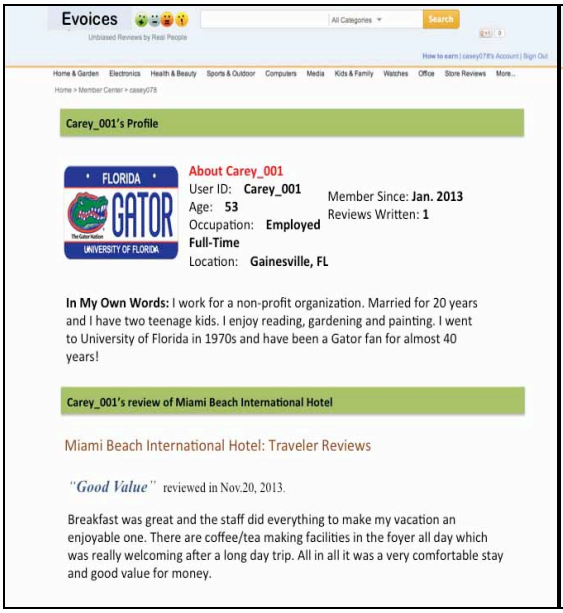
Within the respective review conditions, participants were first presented with the following instruction "*The following review is about the "Miami Beach International Hotel', Please carefully read ALL information in this review"* and *"The following review is about the 'Maxell L820 Digital Camera', please carefully read All the information in this review".* After exposure to the assigned review conditions (Figure 8 and 9), participants were asked to indicate their perceived similarity to the reviewer, source prestige, source credibility, and their trust in the product reviews. Upon completion of the questionnaire, respondents were asked to provide their name and their instructor's name if extra credit was desired. All identifying information was deleted after instructors were notified of student participation. Additionally, participants were given the option to submit or discard their answers upon completion.

Figure 7. Randomization Procedures

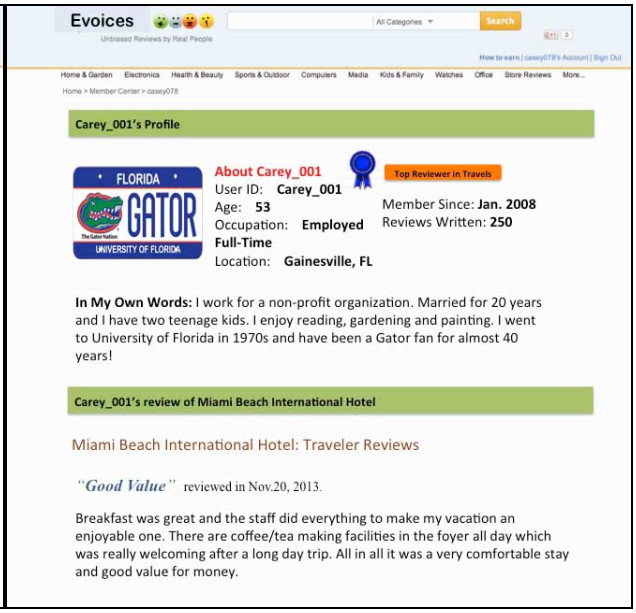
Perceived Similarity	Source Prestige
High Similarity	Low
	High
Low Similarity	Low
	High

Figure 8. Experiment Stimuli for Hotel Reviews

a. Low Similarity v. Low Prestige



b. Low Similarity v. High Prestige



c. High Similarity v. Low Prestige

d. High Similarity v. High Prestige

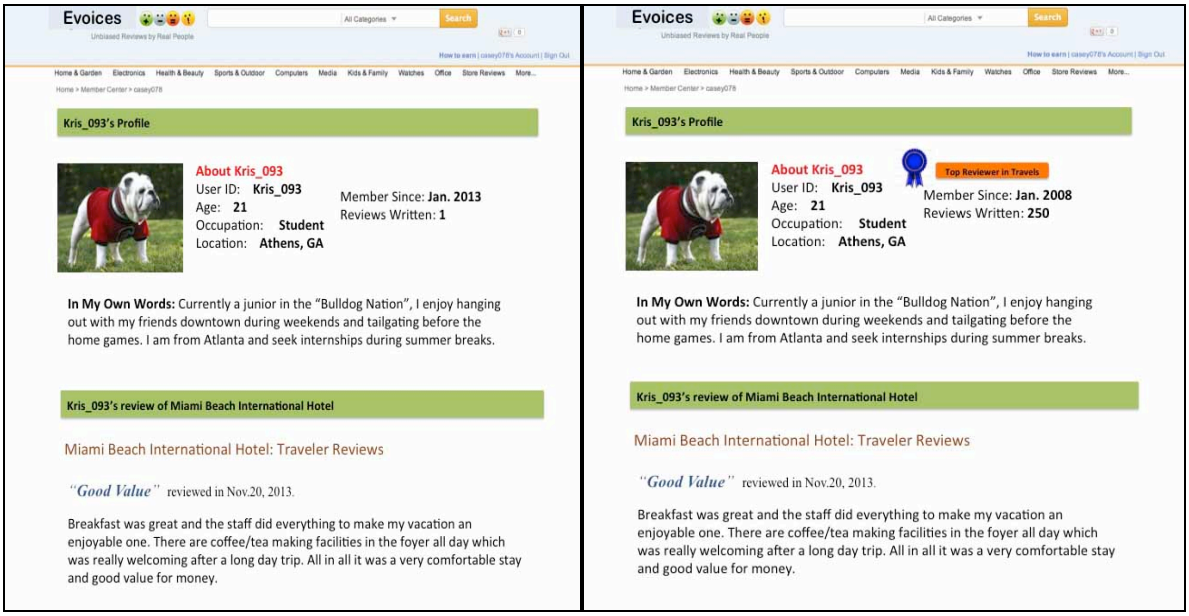
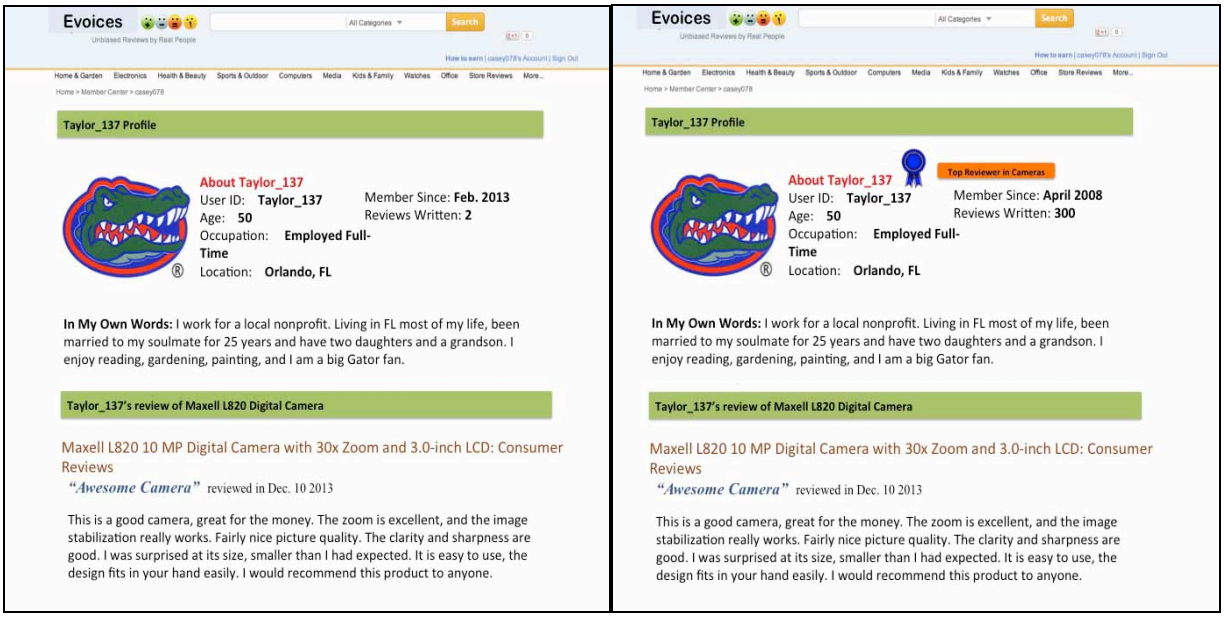


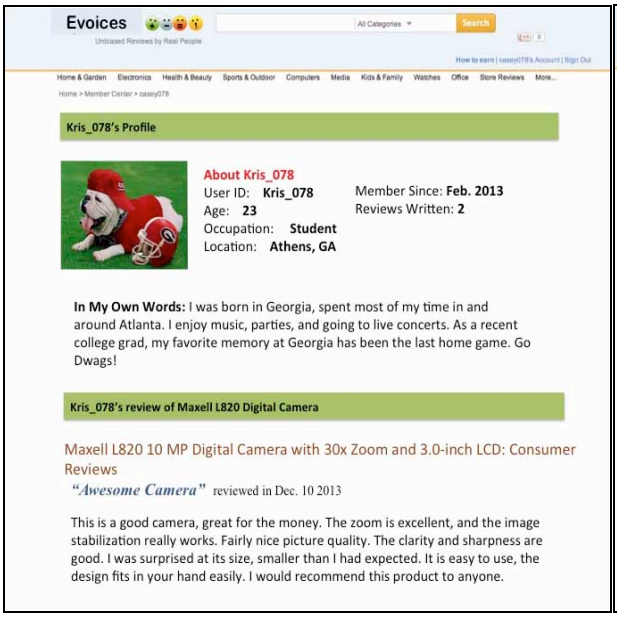
Figure 9. Experiment Stimuli for Camera Reviews

a. Low Similarity v. Low Prestige

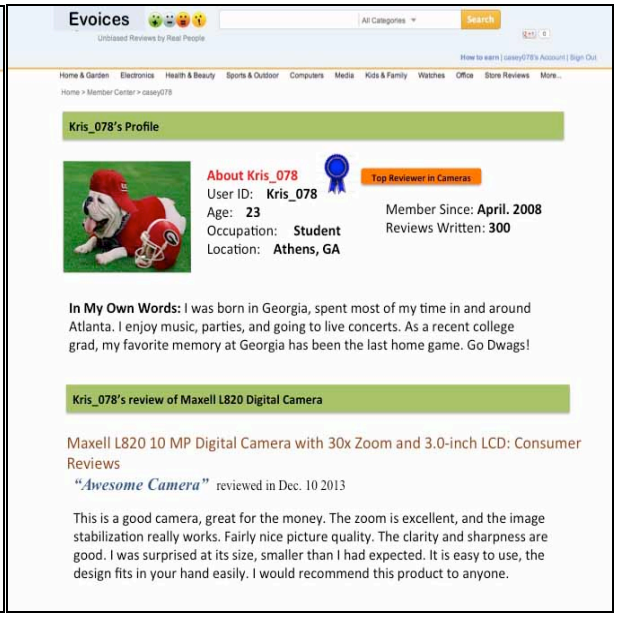
b. Low Similarity v. High Prestige



c. High Similarity v. Low Prestige



d. High Similarity v. High Prestige



Dependent Measures

Ohanian's (1990) scale was applied in this study to measure the perceived source credibility and trust in reviews. This scale composed of five, seven-point sematic differential items anchored with "Dependable/Undependable," "Dishonest/Honest," "Reliable/Unreliable," "Sincere/Insincere," "Trustworthy/Untrustworthy" for measuring source trustworthiness, and five, seven-point sematic differential items anchored with "Not an expert/Expert," "Experienced/Inexperienced", "Knowledgeable/Unknowledgeable", "Unqualified/Qualified", and "Skilled/Unskilled" for measuring the source expertise. Coefficient alphas for these items ranged from .81 to .94 across four review conditions.

Trusting beliefs and trusting intentions are applied in this study to measure consumers' trust in online product reviews. Trusting beliefs and intentions have been widely used in consumer research and were found to closely link to trust-related behaviors such as product recommendations and purchase intention (Brown & Reingen, 1987; Buda & Zhang, 2000;

Bagozzi & Dholakia, 2002). In the context of online product reviews, trust is related with the consumer's willingness to depend on the message to make a purchase-related decision. Thus, this study adopted McKnight, Choudhury and Kacmar's (2002) trust scale to measure consumer trust. In particular, participants were asked to indicate their level of agreement toward the following statements: "*I am willing to rely on this review when making purchase-related decisions." "I am willing to make important purchase-related decisions based on this review." "I am not willing to consider this review when making purchase-related decisions,"* and *"I am willing to recommend the product in this review to my friends or family."* Participants' responses were based on a seven-point Likert scales from "strongly disagree" to "strongly agree". Table 5 contains scales for all major factors and their coefficient alphas.

Table 5. Major Factors Scale in Experiment 1

Factors	**Items**	**Source**
Product Category Involvement (α = .86 to .94)	Selecting the right hotel/digital camera is _____ Important / Unimportant Irrelevant / Relevant * Means a lot to me / Means nothing to me Valuable / Worthless Interesting / Boring Unexciting / Exciting * Appealing / Unappealing Mundane / Fascinating * Not needed / Need * Involving / Not involving *(This scale is based on seven-point sematic differential items)*	**Zaichkowsky (1994)** *adopted from Zaichkowsky (1985)*
Trust Proposition (α = .83)	– In general, people really do care about the well-being of others. – The typical person is sincerely concerned about the problems of others. – Most of the time, people care enough to try to be helpful, rather than just looking out for themselves. – In general, most folks don't keep their promises. * – I think people generally try to back up their words with their actions.	**McKnight, Choudhury, & Kacmar (2002)**

	– Most people are honest in their dealings with others.	
Identity with Peers (α = .84)	– I identify with my college peers at XX University. – My attitudes and beliefs are similar to my college peers at XX University. – I feel strong bonds to my college peers at XX University. – My college peers at XX University are important to my sense of who I am.	**Bagozzi & Dholakia (2002)**
Perceived Similarity (α = .84 to .98)	The person who wrote this review _____. is like me / is unlike me is different from me / is similar to me * thinks like me / does not think like me doesn't behave like me / behaves like me * has a status like me / has status different from me is from a different social class / is from the same social class * is culturally different / is culturally similar * has a same economic situation / has a different economic situation *(This scale is based on seven-point sematic differential items)*	**Mccroskey, Richmond & Daly (1975)**
Source Prestige (α = .95 to .98)	– This review has a high ranking on the review website. – This review is a prominent member of the review website.	
Source Credibility ***Trustworthiness*** (α= .90 to .96) ***Expertise*** (α = .93 to .98)	The person who wrote this review is _____. Dependable / Undependable Dishonest / Honest * Reliable / Unreliable Sincere / Insincere Trustworthy / Untrustworthy Not an expert / Expert * Experienced / Inexperienced Knowledgeable / Unknowledgeable Unqualified / Qualified * Skilled / Unskilled *(The scales are based on seven-point sematic differential items)*	**Ohanian (1990)**
Trust in Reviews (α = .87 to .95)	– I am willing to rely on this review when making purchase-related decision. – I am willing to make important purchase-related decisions based on this review.	**McKnight, Choudhury, & Kacmar (2002)**

	– I am not willing to consider this review when making purchase-related decision. * – I am willing to recommend the product in this review to my friends or family.	

Results

Manipulation Checks

To verify the manipulation of perceived similarity and source prestige, scores for the perceived similarity and source prestige were computed and compared for each of the review conditions. Independent T-tests confirmed the significant differences between the conditions of high and low similarity. For hotel reviews, the similarity perception score for reviewer *Kris* (M = 5.09) was significantly higher than that of the reviewer *Carey* (M= 3.59; t (131) = 8.35, p = .000). For camera reviews, the score of perceived similarity for reviewer *Casey* (M = 5.16) was significantly higher than that of the reviewer *Taylor* (M= 3.44; t (131) = 10.35, p = .000). The perceived similarity manipulation was successful.

The source prestige manipulation was checked by comparing the perceived source prestige scores for each review condition. For hotel reviews, the reviewers in the "Top Reviewer" conditions (M = 4.76) were found to have significantly higher source prestige scores than the reviewers in the laypeople conditions (M= 3.91, t (115) = 3.47, p= .000). For camera reviews, the reviewers in the "Top Reviewer" conditions (M = 5.52) were found to have significantly higher source prestige scores than the reviewers in the laypeople conditions (M= 3.15, t (116) = 9.33, p = .000). The manipulation for source prestige was successful.

The Hotel Reviews

Trust in Reviews (H1, H2, RQ1)

A 2 x 2 ANCOVA was conducted to evaluate the effects of perceived similarity under the low and high source prestige conditions proposed by H1, H2 and RQ1. Hotel involvement level, identification with college peers, and trust disposition were entered as covariates for statistical control. According the previous literature, the term "nuisance variable" is often applied to variables that are believed to affect scores of the dependent variable but are of no experimental interest (Huntema, 2011). This study used ANCOVA to employ a statistical control for nuisance variance by viewing these variables as covariates when conducting statistical analysis. This strategy has been widely adopted in previous experiments (Wright, 2000; Willliams, 2011). A Leven's test was conducted to test the homogeneity among variances. The results showed that the variances were homogeneous. The main effects were compared with the Bonferroni's adjustment for multiple comparisons.

The results for the ANCOVA didn't find a significant main effect for the perceived similarity, F (3, 129) = 2.93, p= .08, partial η^2 = .002. On the other hand, there was no significant main effect found for source prestige (F (3, 129) = .153, p = .69, partial η^2 = .001).

As shown in Table 6, a significant interaction between perceived similarity and source prestige was found on consumer trust (F (3, 129) = 11.31, p= .001, partial η^2 = .084). A series of planned comparisons was conducted to test the hypotheses. As recommended by Winer (1971), "specific comparisons that are built into the design or are suggested by the theoretical basis for the experiment can and should be made individually" (p.384). Planned comparisons indicated that when the similarity between consumers and reviewers is perceived to be high, participants have greater trust in reviews produced by reviewers with low source prestige than those by

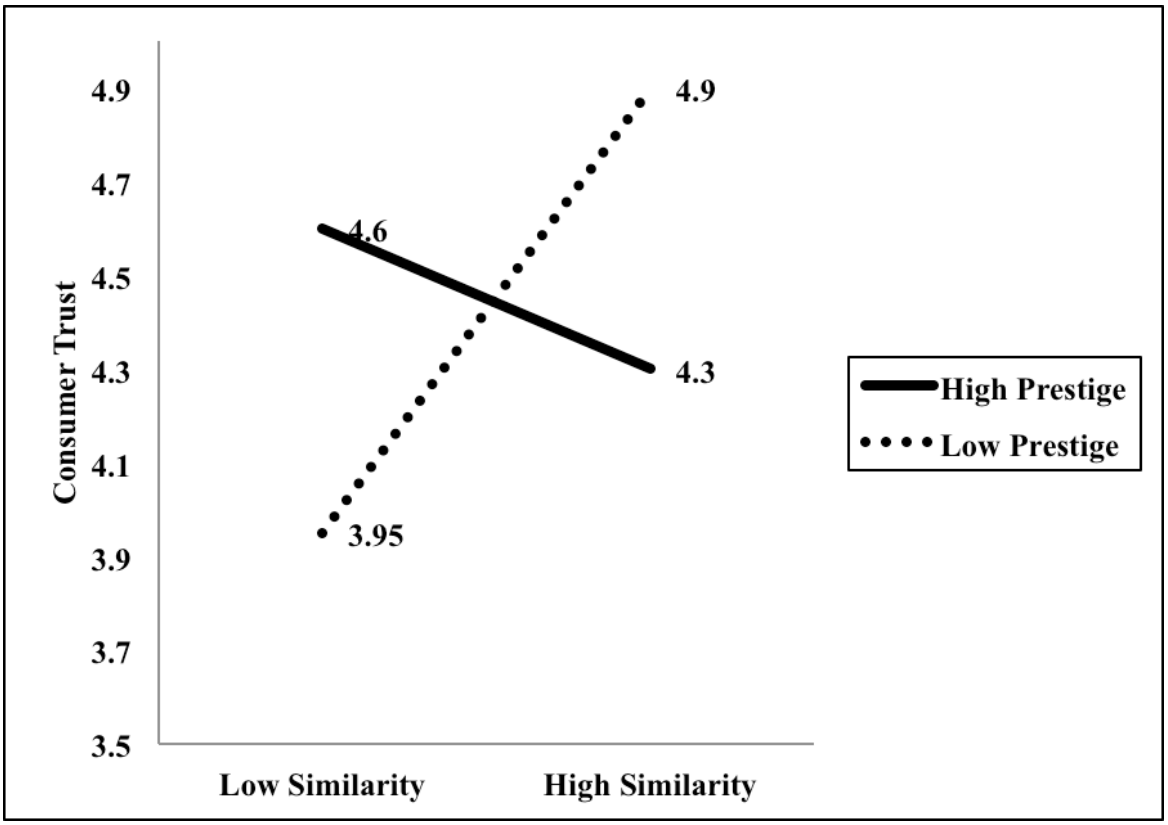
reviewers with high source prestige ($M_{low\ prestige} = 4.90$ v. $M_{high\ prestige} = 4.30$, $F(1, 32) = 3.09$, $p = .002$, partial $\eta^2 = .065$). In contrast, when the perceived similarity between consumers and reviewers is low, participants have greater trust in reviews produced by reviewers with high source prestige than those by reviewers with low source prestige ($M_{low\ prestige} = 3.95$ v. $M_{high\ prestige} = 4.60$, $F(1, 33) = 7.75$, $p = .009$, partial $\eta^2 = .104$), see Figure 10.

Based on the results, H1 and H2 were partially supported. Reviews with higher perceived similarity between the reviewer and the consumer have greater trust than reviews with low perceived similarity, but only when the source prestige is low. H2 was partially supported indicating that reviews with higher source prestige are considered more trustworthy than reviews with low source prestige, but only when the perceived similarity is low. The results answered RQ1, which examined the interaction between the perceived similarity and source prestige.

Table 6. The Interaction Effect of Perceived Similarity and Source Prestige on Consumer Trust in Product Reviews (Experiment 1: Hotel Reviews)

	High Perceived Similarity		**Low Perceived Similarity**	
	High Source Prestige (n=33)	**Low Source Prestige (n=33)**	**High Source Prestige (n=33)**	**Low Source Prestige (n=34)**
Consumer Trust in Reviews	4.30 (1.28)	4.90 (.94)	4.60 (1.15)	3.95 (1.06)
	F =3.09, p < .01		F= 7.75, p < .01	

Figure 10. The Interaction Effect of Perceived Similarity and Source Prestige on Trust (Experiment 1: Hotel Reviews)



Trustworthiness and Expertise (H5, H6, H8)

A two-way multivariate analysis of covariance (MANCOVA) was conducted to evaluate the effects of similarity under the low prestige and high prestige conditions. The trustworthiness and expertise as the two dimensions of source credibility, were entered as the dependent variables. The means and standard deviations for the trustworthiness and expertise as the functions of the two factors are presented in Table 7. Hotel involvement level, identification with college peers, and trust proposition were entered as the covariates for statistical control. A Leven's test was conducted to test the homogeneity among variances, and the results showed that the variances were homogeneous, indicating the assumption of MANCOVA analysis was

satisfied. The main effects were compared with the Bonferroni's adjustment for multiple comparisons.

Significant differences were found within the similarity conditions on the dependent measures (Wils's Λ =. 91, F (1, 125) = 5.71, p < .01). The results indicated there were no significant differences within the high/low prestige conditions on the dependent measures, Wils's Λ =. 98, F (2, 125) = .818, p = .44. The results also indicated a significant interaction between the perceived similarity and source prestige (Wils's Λ =. 93, F (1, 125) = 4.73, p < .05).

Analysis of variance (ANCOVA) on each dependent variable was conducted as a follow-up to the MANCOVAs. Using the Bonferroni method, each ANCOVA was tested at the .025 level. The ANCOVA on trustworthiness was significant, indicating a significant main effect for perceived similarity, F (1, 126) = 5.40, p < .025, partial η^2 = .041), This supported H5, as it indicated that reviewers with high similarity have higher trustworthiness than reviewers with low perceived similarity. The results indicated the effect for source prestige was not significant (F (6, 126) = 1.25, p= .264, partial η^2 = .01). A significant interaction between perceived similarity and source prestige was found (F (1, 126) = 6.84, p < .025, partial η^2 = .051).

The ANCOVA on expertise indicated the main effect for the perceived similarity was not significant, F (1, 126) = .494, p= .483, partial η^2 = .004. The results also indicated the main effect for source prestige was not significant (F (1, 126) = .016, p= .899, partial η^2 = .00). There was a significant interaction between perceived similarity and source prestige on source expertise (F (6, 126) = 8.094, p= .005, partial η^2 = .060).

Because the interaction between the perceived similarity and source prestige on trustworthiness was significant, the following analysis examined the interaction effects. Under the high similarity conditions, reviews produced by reviewers with low source prestige (M =

5.76) had higher trustworthiness than those by reviewers with high prestige (M = 5.11, F (1, 32) = 8.51, p= .005, partial η^2 = .122). When the similarity between consumers and reviewers is low, reviews produced by reviewers with high prestige (M= 5.20) had higher trustworthiness than those by reviewers with low source prestige (M= 4.94, F (1, 32) = 1.49, p = .022, partial η^2 = .024).

For the interaction between the perceived similarity and source prestige on perceived source expertise, the results indicate that when the perceived similarity between consumers and reviewers was low, reviews produced by high prestige sources (M = 4.66) had higher perceived expertise than those by low prestige sources (M = 4.2, F (1, 32) = 4.28, p < .025, partial η^2 = .065). When the perceived similarity was high, reviews produced by low source prestige reviewers (M = 4.56) had higher expertise than those produced by high source prestige reviewers (M= 4.02, F (1, 33) =8.01, p < .025, partial η^2 = .06), See Table 7.

Based on the results, H5 was supported, indicating that reviews with higher similarity between consumers and reviewers had higher trustworthiness than reviews with low source prestige. H6 was partially supported and the results showed that reviews with high source prestige had higher trustworthiness than reviews with high source prestige when the perceived similarity is low. H8 was partially supported, which indicated that reviews with high source prestige have greater source expertise than reviews with low source prestige only when the perceived similarity is low.

Table 7. Source Trustworthiness and Expertise as a Function of Perceived Similarity and Source Prestige (Experiment 1)

	High Perceived Similarity		**Low Perceived Similarity**	
	High Source Prestige (n=33)	**Low Source Prestige (n=33)**	**High Source Prestige (n=33)**	**Low Source Prestige (n=34)**
Trustworthiness	5.11 (.92)	5.76 (.86)	4.66 (1.10)	4.21 (.89)
	F =8.51, p < .025		F =1.49, p< .025	
Expertise	4.04 (.91)	4.59 (.95)	4.04 (.91)	4.59 (.95)
	F =4.82, p < .025		F=8.01, p < .025	

Figure 11. The Interaction Effect of Source Similarity and Prestige on Trustworthiness (Experiment1: Hotel Reviews)

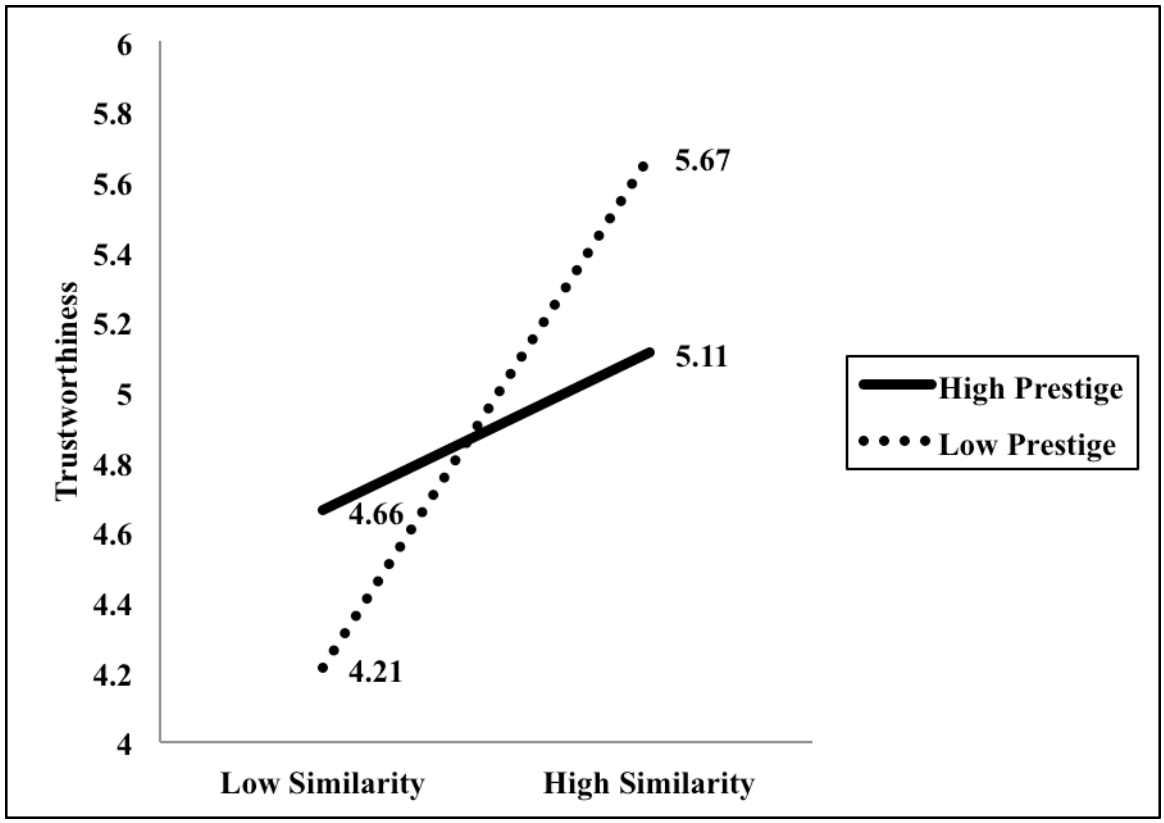
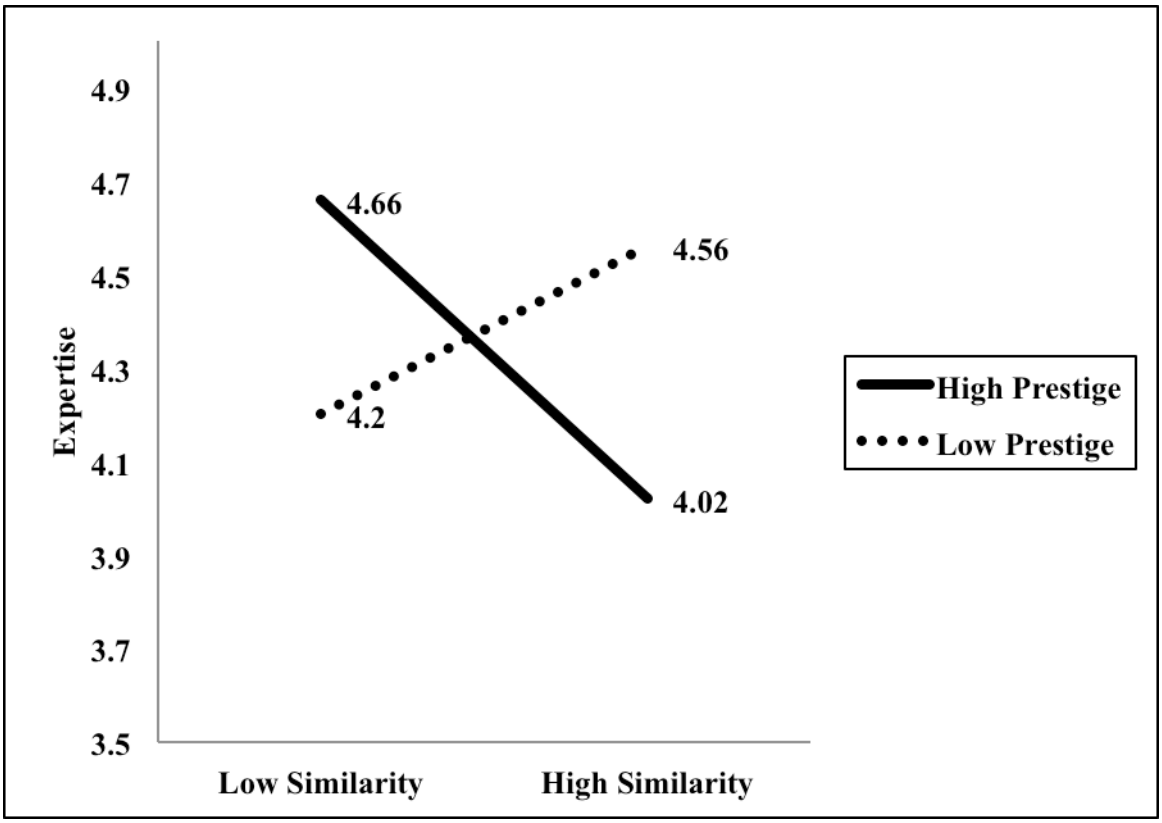


Figure 12. The Interaction Effect of Source Similarity and Prestige on Expertise (Experiment1: Hotel Reviews)

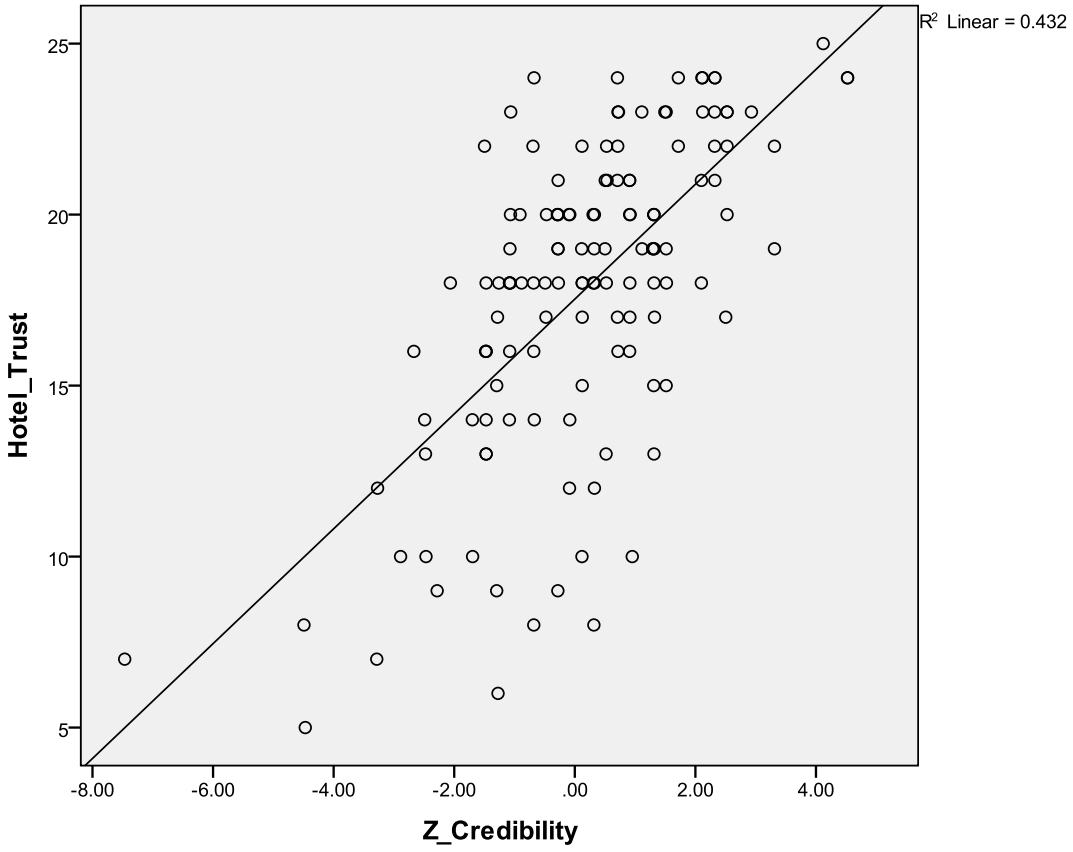


Source Credibility and Trust (H4)

A liner regression analysis was conducted to evaluate if the source credibility predicted consumer trust in online product reviews. Before the regression analysis, a standardized score "Z_credibility" was created by computing the z-scores for source credibility. The scatterplot for the two variables, as shown in Figure 17, indicates that the two variables are linearly related such that as the source credibility increases the trust in reviews increases as well. The regression equation for predicting the trust in reviews is: *Trust in reviews = 1.67 Source Credibility + 17.53.* The 95% confidence interval for the slope, 1.34 to 2.01 does not contain the value of zero, and therefore source credibility is significantly related to the trust in reviews. As hypothesized,

the reviewers who have higher source credibility tended to generate higher trust. Accuracy in predicting trust was strong. The correlation between the source credibility and trust was .65. Approximately 43% of the variance in trust was accounted for by the source credibility. Thus, H4 was supported.

Figure 13. Scatterplot between Source Credibility and Trust in Hotel Reviews



The Camera Reviews

Trust in Reviews (H1, H2, RQ1)

A 2 x 2 ANCOVA was conducted to evaluate the effects of perceived similarity under the conditions of low and high source prestige. Level of involvement with cameras, identification

with college peers, and trust disposition were entered as the co-variances for statistical control. A Leven's test was conducted to test the homogeneity among variances, and the results showed that the variances were homogeneous. The main effects were compared with the Bonferroni's adjustment for multiple comparisons.

The results for the ANOVA failed to reveal any significant effect for the main effects, for perceived similarity ($F(6, 126) = 2.51$, $p = .115$, partial $\eta^2 = .002$), for source prestige ($F(6, 126) = 1.104$, $p = .295$, partial $\eta^2 = .009$), and the interaction between perceived similarity and source prestige was not significant ($F(6, 126) = 1.121$, $p = .292$, partial $\eta^2 = .009$). Thus, H1 and H2 were not supported. The results answered RQ1, indicating there was no interaction between perceived similarity and source prestige on consumer trust in reviews about camera.

Trustworthiness and Expertise (H5, H6, H8)

A two-way multivariate analysis of covariance (MANCOVA) was conducted to evaluate the effects of similarity under the conditions of low and high source prestige. Trustworthiness and expertise were entered as the dependent variables. Level of involvement with cameras, identification with college peers, and trust disposition were entered as the covariates for statistical control. The results of Leven's test showed that the variances were homogeneous, indicating the assumption of MANCOVA analysis was satisfied. The main effects were compared with the Bonferroni's adjustment for multiple comparisons.

Significant differences were found within the low/high sorce prestige conditions on the dependent measures (Wils's $\Lambda = .957$, $F(2, 123) = 7.62$, $p < .01$). The results indicated that the differences within the similar/dissimilar conditions on the dependent measures were not significant (Wils's $\Lambda = .997$, $F(2, 123) = .167$, $p = .847$). The results failed to reveal significant

interaction between the perceived similarity and source prestige (Wils's Λ =. 999, F (2, 123) = .05, p = 951).

Analysis of Variance on each dependent variable was conducted as a follow-up test to the MANCOVA. Using the Bonferroni method, each ANCOVA was tested at the .025 level. The ANCOVA on trustworthiness indicated that the main effect for perceived similarity was not significant, F (6, 126) = .299, p= .585, partial η^2 = .002. The effect of source prestige was not significant, F (6, 126) = 2.77, p= .098, partial η^2 = .022. The results revealed that the interaction between perceived similarity and source prestige was not significant, F (6, 126) = .003, p= .958, partial η^2 = .000.

The ANCOVA on expertise found there was not a main effect for the perceived similarity, F (6, 126) = .021, p= .986, partial η^2 = .004. A significant main effect for source prestige was revealed, F (6, 126) =5.12, p =. 003, partial η^2 = .039, indicating that reviews produced by higher prestige source had higher levels of perceived expertise than those produced by a low prestige source, supporting H8. The results failed to indicate a significant interaction between perceived similarity and source prestige, F (6, 126) = .072, p= .789, partial η^2 = .001. Thus, only H8 was supported in the analysis while H5 and H6 were not supported.

Source Credibility and Trust (H4)

A liner regression analysis was conducted to evaluate the prediction of source credibility for the trust in online product reviews. A standardized score for source credibility was developed by computing the z-score for source credibility. The regression equation for predicting the trust in camera reviews is: *Trust in reviews = .664 Source Credibility + 18.40.* The 95% confidence interval for the slope, 1.33 to 1.98 does not contain the value of zero, and therefore source

credibility is significantly related to trust in reviews. As hypothesized, the reviewers who have higher source credibility tended to generate higher trust in camera reviews. Accuracy in predicting the level of trust was strong. The correlation between source credibility and trust was .66. Approximately 44% of the variance in trust was accounted for by source credibility. Thus, *H4* was supported.

Figure 14. Scatterplot between Source Credibility and Trust in Camera Reviews

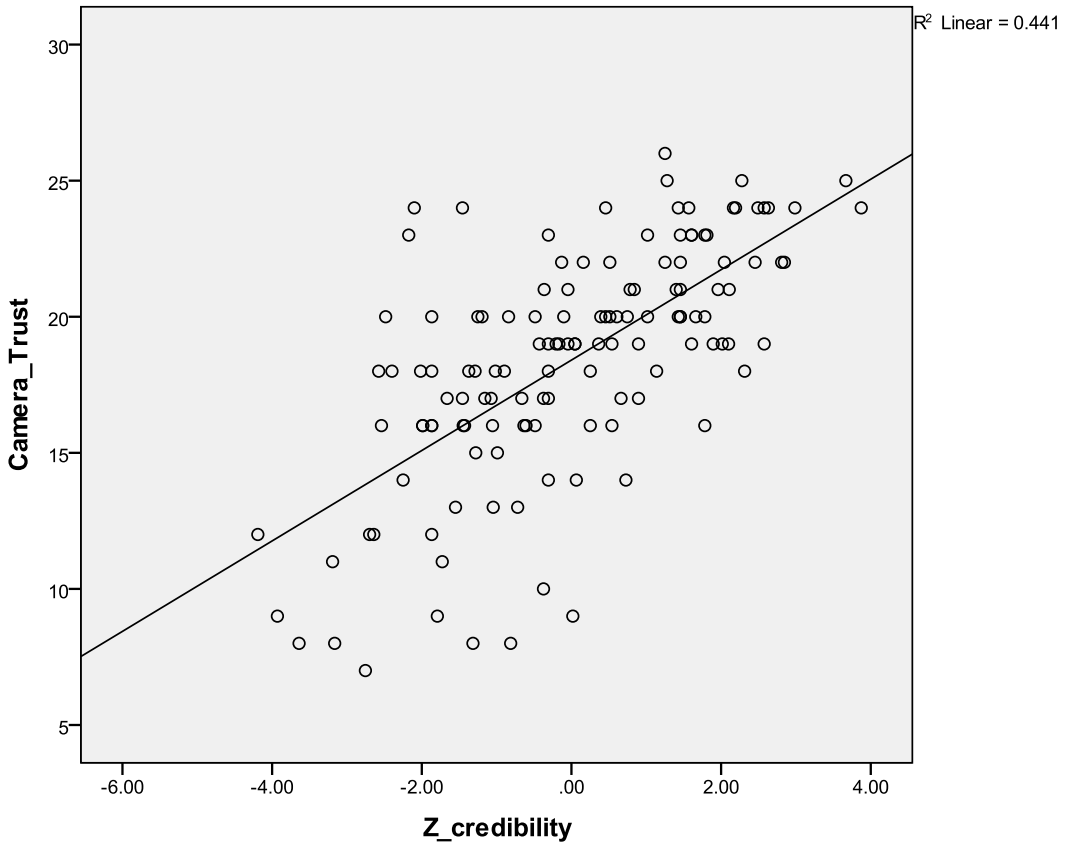


Table 8: Summary of Hypotheses, Research Questions and Results for Experiment 1

	Hypotheses and Research Questions	Results for Hotel Reviews	Results for Camera Reviews
H1	Reviews produced by reviewers with higher perceived similarity between reviewers and consumers have greater trust than those produced by reviewers with low perceived similarity.	Partially supported	Not supported
H2	Reviews produced by reviewers with higher source prestige have greater trust than those produced by reviewers with low source prestige.	Partially supported	Not supported
RQ1	Are there any significant interaction effects of perceived similarity and source prestige on consumers' trust in online product reviews?	Yes	No
H4	Source credibility of the online reviews predicts consumers' trust in reviews.	Supported	Supported
H5	Reviews with higher perceived similarity between the reviewer and the consumers have greater source trustworthiness than reviews with low perceived similarity.	Supported	Not supported
H6	Reviews with higher source prestige have greater source trustworthiness than reviews with low source prestige.	Partially supported	Not supported
H8	Reviews produced by reviewers with higher source prestige have greater perceived source expertise than those produced by reviewers with lower source prestige.	Partially supported	Supported

Discussion

Experiment 1 was conducted to examine the influence of source prestige and perceived similarity between sources and recipients on source credibility and trust regarding online reviews within two product categories by using a student samples.

First, the results consistently indicated a strong correlation between source credibility and trust in reviews across product categories. For the hotel and the camera reviews, the regression models revealed that source credibility explained more than 44% of the variance in consumer trust, which suggests source credibility is a strong predictor of consumer trust in product reviews. As previous studies on the eWOM or consumer-generated content have primary focused on the informational content of the message, this study suggested that the effects of source-related components shouldn't be ignored.

In terms of the influence of source prestige, this study consistently revealed that reviews produced by high prestige sources have greater source expertise than those produced by lower prestige sources across product categories. In other words, a reviewer who was identified as a "Top Reviewer" with more experience in a certain product category is more likely to be viewed as having more expertise regardless of demographics and personal attributes. For hotel reviews, reviews with higher source prestige generated more trust than those with low source prestige, but only when the perceived similarity is high. This result was not found for camera reviews.

Examination of the perceived similarity between reviewers and recipients presented interesting differences in the findings. For the hotel category, when the perceived similarity between the consumer and the reviewer is at a lower level, consumers are more likely to trust a "Top Reviewer" than a laypeople. However, when consumers view a reviewer as similar to themselves, they tend to trust a laypeople rather than a "Top Reviewer". Furthermore, the

perceived similarity was positively associated with source trustworthiness for hotel reviews. In particular, reviews produced by reviewers with a higher level of perceived similarity and low source prestige generated higher trustworthiness than other conditions. Reviews produced by reviewers with a lower level of perceived similarity and a higher level of source prestige generated greater source expertise than other conditions. The camera reviews failed to duplicate these findings. There was no significant difference in terms of the dependent variables between male and female participants.

Experiment 1 confirmed that consumers' trust in online product reviews was influenced by source characteristics. This study provides empirical evidence that the perceived similarity between consumers and reviewers interact with source prestige in influencing trust. However, a question arises as to whether argument content affects consumers' trust in reviews. This issue is the focus of Experiment 2.

CHAPTER 6

EXPERIMENT 2

The following chapter describes the research design and sample characteristics for Experiment 2 prior to reporting and discussing results. Experiment 2 sought to test the influence of source characteristics and content attributes on consumer trust in online reviews within two product categories by conducting an online experiment with a student sample. Experiment 1 generated mixed findings for different product categories, and this difference might attribute to the content presented in the online reviews. Previous research suggests that the proportion of arguments in messages is positively related to people's intention to comply with those messages (e.g. Petty & Cacioppo, 1984; Price, Nir & Cappella, 2006; Raju, Unnava, & Montgomery, 2009). Thus, the presence of arguments consequently leads people to have more confidence in a communicator and to find his/her judgment more persuasive.

Research Design

A 2 (similarity low v. high) X 2 (source prestige low v. high) x 2 (argument quality weak v. strong) between-subjects factorial design was conducted via a questionnaire with randomization built into the survey instrument. Participants were randomly assigned to different experimental conditions within two product categories (hotels and cameras). Perceived similarity of the reviewers, source prestige, and argument quality were both measured and manipulated in

the experiment. The online questionnaire and experimental manipulations took approximately 15 minutes.

Perceived similarity and source prestige were measured and manipulated via the same procedures used in the Experiment 1. The argument quality was manipulated according to the results of Pretest 2. Review content with the highest score of argument quality was applied in the conditions of strong argument while the content with the lowest score was adopted in the conditions of weak argument. Rains's (2007) scale about argument quality was applied in this study as a measure of manipulation check.

Participants and Procedure

A total of 247 undergraduate students (20% male, 80% female) recruited within a mass communication college at University of Georgia participated in Experiment 2 in exchange for extra course credit. Participants ranged in age from 18 to 33 (M=20.4), and 80% of the participants is Caucasian, 8.1% African American, 4% Latino, 4.5% Asian, and 2.4% Multi-Racial. The ethnicity distribution was consistent with the demographics of students entering the University of Georgia in 2013. Similar to Experiment 1, participants first completed the measures for the level of product category involvement, trust disposition, and identification with college peers. Next, participants were randomly assigned to one of eight conditions within the hotel and camera product categories. Then they completed the manipulation checks, dependent measures and demographic questions. Table 9 contains scales for all major factors and their coefficient alpha.

Table 9: Main Factor For Reliability in Experiment 2

Variables	Cronbach's α
Trust Disposition	.81
Identity with Peers	.90
Perceived Similarity	.90 to .93
Source Prestige	.94 to .98
Argument Quality	.91 to .94
Product Involvement For hotel For camera	 .90 .94
Source Credibility Trustworthiness Expertise	 .92 to. 93 .85 to .92
Trust in Reviews	.74 to .85

Results

Manipulation Checks

To verify the manipulation of perceived similarity and source prestige, scores for the perceived similarity and source prestige were computed and compared for each of the review condition. Independent T-tests confirmed the significant differences between each review condition. For hotel reviews, the scores of perceived similarity for reviewer *Kris* (M = 5.10) was significantly higher than that of the reviewer *Carey* (M=3.31; t (247) = 13.76, p = .000). For

camera review, the scores of perceived similarity for reviewer *Alex* (M = 4.91) was significantly higher than that of reviewer *Taylor* (M= 3.31; t (247) = 11.38, p = .000). The perceived similarity manipulation was successful.

The manipulation for source prestige was checked by comparing the perceived source prestige against each review condition. For hotel reviews, the reviewers in the "Top Reviewer" conditions (M = 5.91) were found to have significantly higher source prestige than the reviewers in the layperson condition (M= 3.07, t (247) = 18.51, p = .000). For camera reviews, the reviewers in the "Top Reviewer" conditions (M = 5.92) were found to have significantly higher source prestige than the reviewers in the layperson conditions (M= 2.99; t (247) = 17.25, p = .000). The manipulation for source prestige was successful.

For argument quality manipulation, independent T-tests were performed to determine if a significant difference existed between the conditions of reviews with strong and weak argument quality. For hotel reviews, the reviews with stronger argument quality (M=5.44) were found to have higher argument quality scores than the reviews with weak argument quality (M=4.23, t (247) = 9.67, p =. 000). For camera reviews, the reviews with stronger argument quality (M=5.67) were found to have higher argument quality scores than the reviews with weak argument quality (M=4.17, t (247) = 8.97, p =. 000). The manipulation for argument quality was successful.

The Hotel Reviews

Trust in Reviews (H1, H2, H3, RQ1, RQ2)

A three-way analysis of covariance (ANCOVA) was conducted to evaluate the effects of similarity and source prestige under the strong and weak argument quality proposed by H1, H2,

H3, RQ1 and RQ2. The independent variables are perceived similarity, source prestige, and argument quality, and each of the variables has two levels.

The level of involvement for hotels, trust disposition, and identification with college peers were entered as covariates for statistical control. A preliminary analysis evaluating the homogeneity assumption indicated that the relationship between the covariance and the dependent variable did not differ significantly as a function of the independent variables, F (7, 239) = 1.22, p = .292. This indicates that the assumption of ANCOVA analysis was satisfied.

The results indicated a significant main effect for source prestige (F (10, 236) = 7.77, p= .006, partial η^2 = .032), and argument quality (F (10. 236) = 16.37, p= .000, partial η^2 = .065). However, no significant main effect was found for the perceived similarity (F (10, 236) = 1.33, p= .25, partial η^2 = .006). The outcomes failed to identify any significant interactions among the independent variables: similarity and prestige (F (10, 236) = .5, p= .48, partial η^2 = .002); similarity and argument (F (10, 236) = .568, p= .452, partial η^2 = .002); prestige and argument (F (10, 236) = 1.36, p= .244, partial η^2 = .006); similarity, prestige, and argument (F (10, 236) = 1.24, p= .266, partial η^2 = .005) (Table 10).

Based on the results, H2 and H3 were supported while H1 was not supported, which indicated that no effects were found for the perceived similarity on consumers' trust in reviews. Reviews with higher source prestige or stronger argument quality generated higher trust than the reviews with low source prestige or weak argument quality although the size of effects for source prestige is smaller than argument quality. To answer RQ1 and RQ2 about if there are interactions within the independent variables, the results failed to identify any interaction.

Table 10. ANCOVA: Trust in Reviews (Experiment 2 - Hotel Reviews)

Source	Sum of Squares	*Df*	Mean Square	F	Sig.	Partial η^2
Corrected Model	610.418	10	61.042	4.727	.000	.167
Intercept	744.466	1	744.466	57.656	.000	.196
Involvement	11.094	1	11.094	.859	.355	.004
Trust Disposition	20.979	1	20.979	1.625	.204	.007
Identification	74.423	1	74.423	5.764	.017	.024
Similarity	17.206	1	17.206	1.333	.250	.006
Prestige	100.312	1	100.312	7.769	**.006**	.032
Argument Quality (AQ)	211.353	1	211.353	16.368	**.000**	.065
Similarity x Prestige	6.457	1	6.457	.500	.480	.002
Similarity x AQ	7.336	1	7.336	.568	.452	.002
Prestige x AQ	17.621	1	17.621	1.364	.244	.006
Similarity x Prestige x AQ	16.021	1	16.021	1.241	.266	.005
Error	3047.283	236	12.912			
Total	88323.000	247				
Corrected Total	3657.700	246				
Note: R^2 = .167 (Adjusted R^2 = .132)						

Trustworthiness and Expertise (H5, H6, H7, H8, H9)

A three-way multivariate analysis of covariance (MANCOVA) was conducted to evaluate if source credibility, which has two dimensions (trustworthiness and expertise), was affected by the perceived similarity, source prestige, and argument quality. The level of involvement with hotels, trust disposition, and identification with college peers were entered as the covariates for statistical control. A Leven's test was conducted to test the homogeneity among variances, and the results showed that the variances were homogeneous, which indicates the basic assumption of MANCOVA analysis was satisfied. The main effects were compared with the Bonferroni's adjustment for multiple comparisons.

Significant differences were found within the high/low similarity conditions on the dependent measures (Wils's Λ =. 96, F (2, 235) = 13.13, p = .009). The results indicated a significant difference within the high/low source prestige conditions on the dependent measures (Wils's Λ =. 84, F (2, 235) = 23.01, p = .000). A significant difference was also found within the strong/weak argument quality on dependent measures (Wils's Λ =. 89, F (2, 235) = 14.54, p =.000).

Analysis of variance on each dependent variable was conducted a follow-up test. The ANCOVA indicated a significant main effect for argument quality on source trustworthiness (F (10, 236) = 19.31, p= .000, partial η^2 = .076). This supported H7 and indicated reviewers who produce strong arguments are more trustworthy than those produce weak arguments (Table 14). There was no significant main effect found for the perceived similarity (F (10, 236) = .628, p= .429, partial η^2 = .003), and source prestige (F (10, 236) = .524, p= .542, partial η^2 = .002). Thus, H5 and H6 were rejected. The results failed to indicate interactions within the three independent variables on source trustworthiness.

ANCOVA on source expertise resulted in a significant main effect for the perceived similarity (F (10, 236) =8.88, p= .003, partial η^2 = .036), which indicated that reviewers who have low similarity with consumers generated greater source expertise than those who have high similarity. A significant effect was found for source prestige (F (10, 236) =37.32, p= .000, partial η^2 = .137). Thus, H 8 was supported. The results revealed a significant main effect for argument quality, F (10, 236) = 24.81, p= .000, partial η^2 = .095, H9 was supported. No interactions were found based on the results.

The results failed to support H5 and H6. Perceived similarity and source prestige had no effects on source trustworthiness for hotel reviews. H7 was supported indicating that reviewers

who produce stronger argument were more trustworthy than those who produce weak argument. H8 was supported indicating that reviewers with higher source prestige were perceived having greater source expertise than reviewers with low source prestige. H9 was supported as reviews with stronger argument quality generated greater expertise than those with low argument quality.

Table 11. ANCOVA: Trustworthiness (Experiment 2 - Hotel Reviews)

Source	Sum of Squares	*Df*	Mean Square	F	Sig.	Partial η^2
Corrected Model	1016.393	10	101.393	4.665	.000	.165
Intercept	1261.058	1	1261.058	57.875	.000	.197
Involvement	67.966	1	67.966	3.119	.079	.013
Trust Disposition	107.609	1	107.609	4.939	.027	.020
Identification	79.675	1	79.675	3.657	.057	.015
Similarity	13.683	1	13.683	.628	.429	.003
Prestige	8.870	1	8.870	.407	.524	.002
Argument Quality (AQ)	420.641	1	420.641	19.305	**.000**	.076
Similarity x Prestige	16.346	1	16.346	.750	.387	.003
Similarity x AQ	8.124	1	8.124	.373	.542	.002
Prestige x AQ	2.178	1	2.178	.100	.752	.000
Similarity x Prestige x AQ	16.758	1	16.758	.769	.381	.003
Error	5142.254	236	5142.254			
Total	180490.000	247				
Corrected Total	6158.648	246				
Note: R^2 = .165 (Adjusted R^2 = .130)						

Table 12. ANCOVA: Expertise (Experiment 2 - Hotel Reviews)

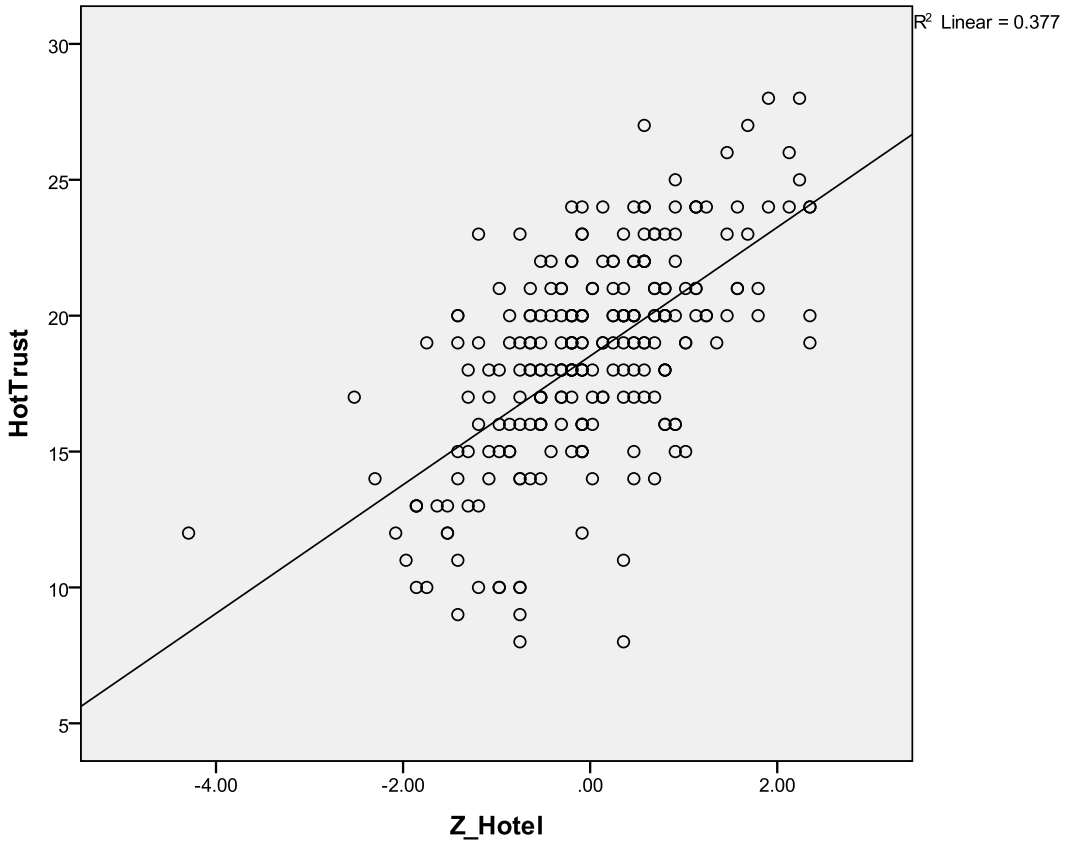
Source	Sum of Squares	*Df*	Mean Square	F	Sig.	Partial η^2
Corrected Model	1851.466	10	185.147	9.134	.000	.279
Intercept	894.323	1	894.323	44.122	.000	.158
Involvement	83.350	1	83.350	4.112	.044	.017

Trust Disposition	36.981	1	36.981	1.824	.178	.008
Identification	60.207	1	60.207	2.97	.086	.012
Similarity	179.971	1	179.971	8.879	**.003**	.036
Prestige	756.372	1	756.372	37.316	**.000**	.137
Argument Quality (AQ)	502.883	1	502.883	24.810	**.000**	.096
Similarity x Prestige	4.623	1	4.623	.228	.633	.001
Similarity x AQ	23.454	1	23.454	1.157	.283	.005
Prestige x AQ	8.364	1	8.364	.413	.521	.002
Similarity x Prestige x AQ	.038	1	.038	.002	.965	.000
Error	4783.586	236	20.269			
Total	128482.000	247				
Corrected Total	6635.053	246				
Note: R^2 = .279 (Adjusted R^2 = .248)						

Source Credibility and Trust (H4)

A liner regression analysis was conducted to evaluate if source credibility predicted consumer trust. A standardized z_score for source credibility was computed for the regression model. The regression equation for predicting the trust in reviews was: *Trust in reviews = 2.298 Source Credibility + 11.318.* The 95% confidence interval for the slope, 1.98 to 2.75 did not contain the value of zero, and therefore source credibility was significantly related to the trust in reviews. As hypothesized, the reviewers with higher level of source credibility generated more trust than those with low level of source credibility. Accuracy in predicting the level of trust was strong. The correlation between the source credibility and trust was .62. Approximately 39% of the variance in trust was accounted for by the source credibility (Figure 22). Thus, H4 was supported.

Figure 15: Scatterplot between Source Credibility and Trust in Reviews (Experiment 2_Hotel)



The Camera Reviews

Trust in Reviews (H1, H2, H3, RQ1, RQ2)

A three-way analysis of covariance (ANCOVA) was conducted to evaluate the effects of perceived similarity, source prestige, and argument quality on trust in hotel reviews as proposed by H1, H2, H3, RQ1 and RQ2. The independent variables are perceived similarity, source prestige, and argument quality, and each of variables has two levels.

The level of involvement with camera, trust disposition, and identification with college peers were entered as the covariates for statistical control. A preliminary analysis evaluating the homogeneity assumption indicated that the relationship between the covariance and the

dependent variable did not differ significantly as a function of the independent variables (F (7, 239) = 2.65, p = .012).

The results revealed a significant main effect for source prestige (F (10, 236) = 12.81, p= .000, partial η^2 = .051), and argument quality (F (10, 236) = 23.82, p = .000, partial η^2 = .091). However, there was no significant effect found for perceived similarity (F (10, 236) = .708, p= .401, partial η^2 = .003). The outcomes failed to identify any interactions within the three independent variables: similarity and prestige (F (10, 236) = 1.76, p= .186, partial η^2 = .007); similarity and argument (F (10, 236) = .048, p= .827, partial η^2 = .000); prestige and argument (F (10, 236) = .354, p= .553, partial η^2 = .001); similarity, prestige, and argument (F (10, 236) = .840, p= .360, partial η^2 = .004).

Based on the results, H2 and H3 were supported while H1 was not supported, which indicated that no effects were found for perceived similarity on consumers' trust in reviews. Reviews with higher source prestige or stronger argument quality generated more trust than the reviews with low source prestige or weak argument quality although the size of effects for source prestige is smaller than argument quality. To answer RQ1 and RQ2 about if there were any interactions within the independent variables, the results failed to identify any interactions.

Table 13. ANCOVA: Trust in Reviews (Experiment 2 - Camera Reviews)

Source	**Sum of Squares**	***Df***	**Mean Square**	**F**	**Sig.**	**Partial η^2**
Corrected Model	977.028	10	97.703	4.441	.000	.158
Intercept	816.616	1	816.616	37.116	.000	.136
Involvement	46.482	1	46.482	2.113	.147	.009
Trust Disposition	16.446	1	16.446	.784	.388	.003
Identification	15.994	1	15.994	.727	.395	.003

Similarity	15.568	1	15.568	.708	.401	.003
Prestige	281.795	1	281.795	12.808	**.000**	.051
Argument Quality (AQ)	524.103	1	524.103	23.821	**.000**	.092
Similarity x Prestige	38.794	1	38.793	1.763	.186	.007
Similarity x AQ	1.058	1	1.058	.048	.827	.000
Prestige x AQ	7.780	1	7.780	.345	.553	.001
Similarity x Prestige x AQ	18.489	1	18.489	.840	.360	.004
Error	5192.389	236	12.912			
Total	86766.000	247				
Corrected Total	6169.417	246				
Note: R^2 = .158 (Adjusted R^2 = .123)						

Trustworthiness and Expertise (H5, H6, H7, H8, H9)

A three-way multivariate analysis of covariance (MANCOVA) was conducted to evaluate if source credibility was affected by the perceived similarity, source prestige, and argument quality in the case of camera reviews. Level of product category involvement, trust disposition and identification with college peers were entered as the covariates for statistical control. A Leven's test was conducted and the results showed that the variances were homogeneous. This suggested the basic assumption of MANCOVA analysis was satisfied. The main effects were compared with the Bonferroni's adjustment for multiple comparisons.

Significant differences were found within the strong/weak argument quality on the dependent measures (Wils's Λ =. 90, F (2, 235) = 13.14, p = .000, partial η^2 = .126). The results revealed a significant main effect for source prestige (Wils's Λ =. 87, F (2, 235) = 16.91, p = .000). The results failed to reveal any significant differences within the high/low similarity conditions (Wils's Λ =. 99, F (2, 235) = .924, p =.39).

Analysis of variance on each dependent variable as conducted as a follow-up test. The ANCOVA on trustworthiness suggested a significant main effect for argument quality (F (10, 236) = 19.04, p= .000, partial η^2 = .075). This supported H7 and indicated that reviews with strong argument quality had higher trustworthiness than these with weak argument quality. The results indicated a significant effect for source prestige (F (10, 236) = 18.71, p= .000, partial η^2 = .075), supporting H6. There was no a significant effect found for the perceived similarity (F (10, 236) = 1.42, p= .234, partial η^2 = .006). Thus, H5 was rejected.

ANCOVA on source expertise did not reveal a significant main effect for the perceived similarity (F (10, 236) =1.42, p= .235, partial η^2 = .006). Significant main effects were found for source prestige (F (10, 236) =31.42, p= .000, partial η^2 = .118), and argument quality (F (10, 236) =21.27, p= .000, partial η^2 = .083).

Based on the results, H5 was rejected, indicating that similarity had no effect on source trustworthiness in the case of camera reviews. H6 and H7 were supported, which suggested that reviews with stronger argument quality or higher source prestige had higher source trustworthiness than reviews with weak argument quality or low source prestige. H8 was supported indicating that reviews with higher source prestige had greater source expertise than those with low source prestige. H9 was supported as reviews with stronger argument quality had greater expertise than those with low argument quality.

Table 14. ANCOVA: Trustworthiness (Experiment 2 - Camera Reviews)

Source	**Sum of Squares**	***Df***	**Mean Square**	**F**	**Sig.**	**Partial η^2**
Corrected Model	1498.799	10	149.880	5.894	.000	.200
Intercept	1498.512	1	1498.512	58.928	.000	.200
Involvement	287.228	1	287.228	11.295	.001	.046

Trust Disposition	20.884	1	20.884	.821	.366	.003
Identification	22.738	1	22.738	.894	.345	.004
Similarity	36.152	1	36.152	1.422	.234	.006
Prestige	475.887	1	475.887	18.714	**.000**	.073
Argument Quality (AQ)	484.268	1	484.268	19.044	**.000**	.075
Similarity x Prestige	96.100	1	96.100	3.779	.053	.016
Similarity x AQ	20.721	1	20.721	.815	.368	.003
Prestige x AQ	32.629	1	32.629	1.283	.258	.005
Similarity x Prestige x AQ	16.850	1	16.850	.663	.416	.003
Error	6001.355	236	25.426			
Total	176454.000	247				
Corrected Total	7500.154	246				
Note: R^2 = .141 (Adjusted R^2 = .103)						

Table 15. ANCOVA: Expertise (Experiment 2 - Camera Reviews)

Source	**Sum of Squares**	***Df***	**Mean Square**	**F**	**Sig.**	**Partial η^2**
Corrected Model	2152.084	10	215.208	6.306	.000	.212
Intercept	1392.791	1	1392.791	41.162	.000	.149
Involvement	241.552	1	241.552	7.139	.008	.029
Trust Disposition	.143	1	.143	.004	.948	.000
Identification	5.950	1	5.950	.176	.675	.001
Similarity	48.028	1	48.028	1.419	.235	.006
Prestige	1063.405	1	1063.405	31.427	**.000**	.118
Argument Quality (AQ)	719.825	1	719.825	21.273	**.000**	.083
Similarity x Prestige	.261	1	.261	.008	.930	.000
Similarity x AQ	.765	1	.765	.023	.881	.000
Prestige x AQ	81.505	1	81.505	2.409	.122	.010
Similarity x Prestige x AQ	65.389	1	65.389	1.932	.166	.008
Error	7985.544	235	7985.544			
Total	138374.000	247				
Corrected Total	10137.628	246				
Note: R^2 = .212 (Adjusted R^2 = .179)						

Source Credibility and Trust (H4)

A liner regression analysis was conducted to investigate if source credibility predicts consumer trust. The regression equation for predicting the trust in reviews was: *Trust in reviews = 3.78 Source Credibility + 17.52.* The 95% confidence interval for the slope, 3.35 to 4.02 did not contain the value of zero, and therefore source credibility was significantly related with the trust in reviews. As hypothesized, the reviewers with higher level of source credibility generated more trust than those with low level of source credibility. The correlation between the source credibility and trust was .75. Approximately 57% of the variance in trust was accounted for by the source credibility. Thus, H4 was supported.

Figure 16: Scatterplot between Source Credibility and Trust in Reviews (Experiment 2_Camera)

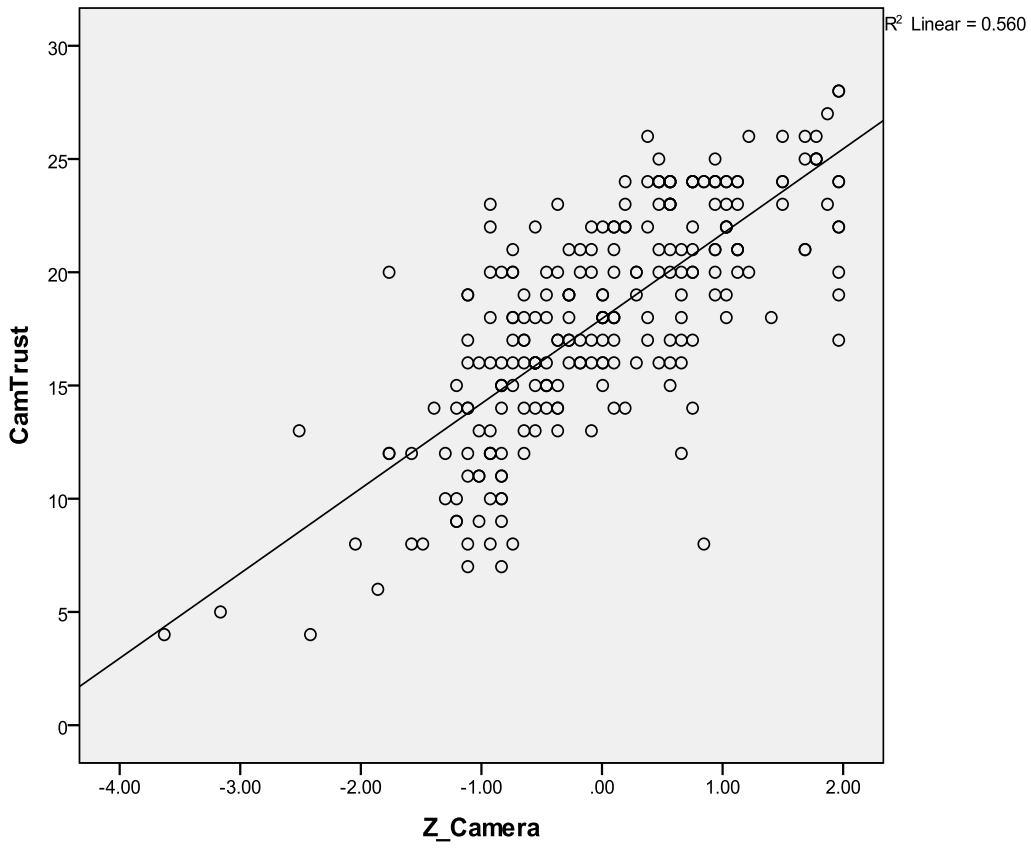


Table 16: Summary of Hypotheses, Research Questions and Results for Experiment 2

	Hypotheses and Research Questions	Results for Hotel Reviews	Results for Camera Reviews
H1	Reviews produced by reviewers with higher perceived similarity between reviewers and consumers have greater trust than those produced by reviewers with low perceived similarity.	Not supported	Not supported
H2	Reviews produced by reviewers with higher source prestige have greater trust than those produced by reviewers with low source prestige.	Supported	Supported
RQ1	Are there any significant interaction effects of perceived similarity and source prestige on consumers' trust in online product reviews?	No	No
H3	Reviews with stronger argument quality have greater trust than reviews with weak argument quality.	Supported	Supported
RQ2	Are there any significant interaction effects of perceived similarity, source prestige, and argument quality on consumers' trust in online product reviews?	No	No
H4	Source credibility of the online reviews predicts consumers' trust in reviews.	Supported	Supported
H5	Reviews with higher perceived similarity between the reviewer and the consumers have greater source trustworthiness than reviews with low perceived similarity.	Not supported	Not supported
H6	Reviews with higher source prestige have greater source trustworthiness than reviews with low source prestige.	Not supported	Supported
H7	Reviews with stronger argument quality have greater source trustworthiness than reviews with weak argument quality.	Supported	Supported
H8	Reviews produced by reviewers with higher source prestige have greater perceived source expertise than those produced by reviewers with lower source prestige.	Supported	Supported
H9	Reviews with stronger argument quality have greater source expertise than reviews with low argument quality.	Supported	Supported

Discussion

This study was designed to investigate the influence of source characteristics and content attributes on consumers' evaluations about online product reviews. Previous research on eWOM suggests that source characteristics, apart from the quality of messages, have an impact on consumers' evaluations about product-related communication. In particular, prior studies indicated the perceived similarity between the source and the recipient, according to the theory of homophily, had positive influence on attitude change and purchase behavior (Racherla, Mandviwalla & Connolly, 2012; Furner, Racherla & Zhu, 2012). However, the present study suggested that the influence of content attributes could override the effects of perceived similarity on consumer trust in online reviews depending on the product category.

A main effect of argument quality was found to be significant, indicating the reviews with higher argument quality were more trusted by consumers. This result suggests that for computer-mediated communication in which nonverbal cues are absent or limited, consumers adopt to the linguistic cues that are available on the website. The outcomes of this study suggest that reviewers who produce strong arguments are perceived as more trustworthy and competent across two product categories, which are more likely to be trusted by consumers.

For the source-related characteristics, this study indicated that source prestige had a great impact on consumer judgments about the endorsed products. In other words, a "Top Reviewer" is perceived as having more source expertise than a laypeople. In addition, source prestige is positively related with trustworthiness for certain product category. Thus, in the context of online review sites, perceived similarity may not be the only factor accounting for source trustworthiness. Prior research demonstrates consumers are more likely to trust people who they perceive to be homophilous because consumers may perceive them as a reference

group for purchase decisions (McCroskey et al., 1975; Huang & Chen, 2006). Yet, this study suggested that source prestige had a positive effect on trustworthiness depending on which product was evaluated. For example, a "Top Reviewer" can be perceived more trustworthy than a low prestige source in the case of camera reviews.

In addition, this study indicated source prestige and argument quality had positive effects on source expertise. Interestingly, the effect size of source prestige is greater than the effect size of argument quality. Source prestige contributed to a greater increase in source expertise. Thus, the reviewer whose status has been obtained through peer ratings may serve as a social cue that the reviewer has expert knowledge about the endorsed product.

Consistent with experiment 1, the results in experiment revealed source credibility was a strong predictor for consumer trust in online product reviews. The results indicated source credibility accounted for 40% to 57% of the variance in trust.

However, this study is limited by using a student sample that was skewed towards more female participants. Using a student sample might pose some problems on the generalization and inference. Therefore, Experiment 3 replicated Experiment 2 by using a national sample.

CHAPTER 7

EXPERIMENT 3

Research Design

Experiment 3 investigated the influence of perceived similarity, source prestige, and argument quality on consumers' trust in online product reviews by replicating Experiment 2 with a national sample. Employing a national sample gives greater external validity by allowing broader inference and generalization. As in Experiment 2, a 2 (Perceived similarity higher v. lower) x 2 (Source prestige higher v. lower) x 2 (Argument quality stronger v. weak) between-subjects factorial design was implemented to investigate consumer trust in online reviews. Online experiment sessions lasted for approximately 15 minutes.

The same procedures used in Experiment 2 were applied to manipulate independent variables. The manipulation of perceived similarity was identical compared to the earlier experiments except one modification. In reviewers' profile, location information was substituted by gender. Therefore, in the conditions of high similarity, participants were shown reviews produced by reviewers with same sex, while participants in the low perceived similarity conditions were shown reviews written by reviewers with opposite sex. A screening question for gender was embedded in the questionnaire prior to assign appropriate conditions. Other components in the experiment remained the same.

Participants and Procedures

A total of 250 participants recruited from Qualtrics' national panel (www. qualtrics.com) participated in this study. Invalid respondents were discarded from analysis based on the length of participation. Responses who completed the survey less than 3 minutes were removed from the results. Finally, 238 valid responses were qualified for this study. Participants ranged in age from 22 to 32 (M=26.9) with 44.1% male and 55.9% female. In terms of the ethnicity, there were 59.7% Caucasian, 12.6% African-American, 9.2% Hispanic, 5.5% Asian, 4.2 % Multi-Racial, 2% Native American, 1.7% Pacific Islander, and 5% identified themselves in the "other" category. The ethnicity distribution was consistent with the demographics of online consumers according to the Pew Internet & American Life Project (2013). For employment status, 54.6% indicated they were full-time employers, 34.9% part-time employers, 4.6% self-employers, 5.9% of the participants were currently unemployed. For education level, 32% of the participants were graduated from 4-year college, 26% some college, 25% high school graduates, 9.2% 2-year college graduates, and 5.9% had post-graduate degrees.

Once arriving at the questionnaire, procedures and measures mirrored Experiment 2 with two notable exceptions: (1) the introduction to the questionnaire was altered to reflect sample differences and (2) no participant identification procedure was included. Participants were informed that they would answer questions about their perceptions of online product reviews. Participants also received an introductory note about viewing embedded reviews to ensure that participants would be able to read the experimental stimulus throughout the session. Questions about their age and gender followed to ensure that participants would be assigned to appropriate experimental conditions.

Qualified individuals proceeded forward to a section of questions about their levels of product category involvement regarding hotels and cameras (Zaichkowsky, 1994) and their trust disposition (McKnight, Choudhury & Kacmar, 2002). All scale reliabilities were confirmed for Experiment 3. Coefficient alphas and Pearson's r (for 2-item scales) for all major factors were reported in Table 17.

Next, participants were randomly assigned to one of eight conditions within the hotel and camera product categories. After the experimental conditions, participants were presented with the measures of the perceived similarity, source prestige and argument quality used in Experiment 2 to allow manipulation check. Coefficient alphas ranged from .82 to .93. Lastly, the perception of source credibility and trust in reviews were measured employing Ohanian's (1990) source credibility scale and the trust in review scale (Racherla, Mandviwalla & Connolly, 2012). Coefficient alphas ranged from .85 to .92 for source credibility and trust measures.

Table 17: Main Factor For Reliability in Experiment 3

Variables	**Cronbach's α**
Trust Proposition	.87
Perceived Similarity	.82 to .86
Source Prestige	.90 to .93
Argument Quality	.88 to .92
Product Involvement For hotel For camera	 .90 .88
Source Credibility Trustworthiness	 .86 to. 91

Expertise	.85 to .89
Trust in Reviews	.85 to .92

Results

Manipulation Checks

To verify the manipulation of perceived similarity, scores for the perceived similarity were computed and compared for each review condition. Independent T-tests was conducted to identify significant differences within the review conditions. For hotel reviews, reviewer *Kris*'s perceived similarity (M = 4.49) was significantly higher than reviewer *Carey*'s perceived similarity (M= 3.99; t (236) = 3.37, p = .001). For camera review, reviewer *Alex*'s perceived similarity (M = 4.41) was significantly higher than reviewer *Taylor*'s perceived similarity score (M= 3.62; t (236) = 5.57, p = .001). The perceived similarity manipulation was successful.

Manipulation for source prestige was checked by comparing the perception of source prestige against each review condition. For hotel reviews, reviewers in the "Top Reviewer" conditions (M = 5.58) had significantly higher source prestige than reviewers in the low source prestige conditions (M= 3.83, t (236) = 9.26, p = .000). For camera reviews, reviewers in the "Top Reviewer" conditions (M = 5.36) were found having significantly higher source prestige than reviewers in the low source prestige conditions (M= 3.96; t (236) = 7.03, p = .000). The manipulation for source prestige was successful.

For argument quality, independent T-tests were performed to investigate if significant differences existed between the conditions of strong and weak argument quality. For hotel reviews, the reviews with stronger argument quality (M=5.26) had higher argument quality

scores than the reviews with weak argument quality (M=4.71, t (236) = 4.47, p =. 000). For camera reviews, the reviews with stronger argument quality (M=5.46) had higher argument quality scores than the reviews with weak argument quality (M=4.30, t (236) = 8.65, p =. 000). The manipulation for argument quality was successful.

The Hotel Reviews

Trust in Reviews (H1, H2, H3, RQ1, RQ2)

A three-way multivariate analysis of covariance (ANCOVA) was conducted to evaluate the effects of perceived similarity, source prestige, and argument quality on consumers' trust c proposed by H1, H2, H3, RQ1 and RQ2.

The level of involvement with hotels, trust disposition and argument quality were entered as the covariates for statistical control. A preliminary analysis evaluating the homogeneity assumption indicated that the relationship between the covariance and the dependent variable did not differ significantly as a function of the independent variables (F (7, 230) = 1.98, p = .058). This result suggested the basic assumption of ANCOVA was satisfied.

A significant man effect of source prestige emerged for consumer trust (F (10, 227) = 7.45, p= .007, partial η^2 = .032). However, there were no significant effects found for the perceived similarity (F (10, 227) = 2.10, p= .148, partial η^2 = .009), and argument quality (F (10, 227) = 2.78, p= .097, partial η^2 = .012). The results failed to identify any interactions within the three independent variables: similarity and prestige (F (10, 227) = .088, p= .767); similarity and argument (F (10, 227) = 2.97, p= .586); prestige and argument (F (10, 227) = .581, p= .447); similarity, prestige, and argument (F (10, 227) = 1.40, p= .237).

Based on the results, H1 and H3 were rejected while H2 was supported. Reviews with higher perceived similarity or strong argument quality did not significantly differ from reviews with low similarity and weak argument. However, reviews produced by a high prestige source generated more trust than those produced by a low prestige source. Regarding RQ1 and RQ2, there were no significant interactions within the independent variables.

Table 18. ANCOVA: Trust in Reviews (Experiment 3 - Hotel Reviews)

Source	Sum of Squares	*Df*	Mean Square	F	Sig.	Partial η^2
Corrected Model	743.769	10	74.377	4.945	.000	.179
Intercept	735.502	1	735.502	48.897	.000	.177
Involvement	69.675	1	69.675	4.632	.032	.020
Trust Disposition	293.862	1	293.862	19.536	.000	.079
Similarity	31.725	1	31.725	2.109	.148	.009
Prestige	112.121	1	112.121	7.454	**.007**	.032
Argument Quality (AQ)	41.818	1	41.818	2.78	.097	.012
Similarity x Prestige	1.321	1	1.321	.088	.767	.000
Similarity x AQ	4.469	1	4.469	.297	.586	.001
Prestige x AQ	8.737	1	8.737	.581	.447	.003
Similarity x Prestige x AQ	21.169	1	21.169	1.407	.237	.006
Error	3414.521	227	15.042			
Total	87999.000	238				
Corrected Total	4158.290	237				
Note: R^2 = .179 (Adjusted R^2 = .143)						

Trustworthiness and Expertise (H5, H6, H7, H8, H9)

A three-way mutivariate analysis of covariance (MANCOVA) was conducted to evaluate if source trustworthiness and expertise were affected by the independent variables. The level of involvement with hotels and trust disposition were entered as the covariates for statistical

control. A Leven's test was conducted to test the homogenous among variances, and the results showed that the variances were homogeneous. The main effects were compared with the Bonferroni's adjustment for multiple comparisons.

Significant differences were found within the high/low prestige conditions on the dependent measures (Wils's Λ =. 89, F (2, 227) = 13.13, p = .000). The results also indicated a significant difference within the strong/weak argument quality conditions on the dependent measures (Wils's Λ =. 97, F (2, 227) = 13.13, p < .05). A significant interaction was also found between the similarity and argument quality (Wils's Λ =. 98, F (2, 227) = 6.15, p = .003).

Analysis of variance on each dependent variable was conducted as a follow-up test. Using the Bonferroni method, each ANCOVA was tested at the .025 level. A significant main effect of the source prestige emerged for source trustworthiness (F (10, 227) = 6.52, p= .011, partial η^2 = .028). This supported H6 and indicated reviews produced by high prestige sources had higher source trustworthiness than those produced by low prestige sources. There was no significant effect found for the perceived similarity (F (10, 227) = 1.47, p= .226, partial η^2 = .006). A significant interaction between perceived similarity and argument quality was found based on the results (F (10, 227) = 9.22, p= .008, partial η^2 = .051) (Table 19).

For source expertise, the main effect of the perceived similarity was not significant (F (10, 227) =2.37, p= .125, partial η^2 = .010). The results indicated a significant main effect of source prestige for source expertise (F (10, 227) =25.92, p= .000, partial η^2 = .103), supporting H8. A significant main effect of argument quality was also found (F (10, 227) = 6.25, p= .013, partial η^2 = .027). Thus, H9 was supported.

Based on the results, H5 was partially supported. Reviews with higher perceived similarity between the reviewer and the consumer had higher trustworthiness than reviews with

low perceived similarity only when the argument quality was high. H6 was supported, suggesting that reviews with higher source prestige had higher trustworthiness than reviews with low source prestige. H7 was partially supported as reviews with stronger argument quality had higher trustworthiness than reviews with weak argument quality, but only when the perceived similarity between the reviewer and consumer was low. H8 was supported indicating that reviews with higher source prestige had greater source expertise than reviews with low source prestige. H9 was supported as reviews with stronger argument quality had greater expertise than those with low argument quality.

Table 19. The Interaction Effect of Perceived Similarity and Argument Quality on Trustworthiness (Experiment 1: Hotel Reviews)

	High Perceived Similarity		**Low Perceived Similarity**	
	Strong Argument Quality (n=60)	**Weak Argument Quality (n=61)**	**Strong Argument Quality (n=57)**	**Weak Argument Quality (n=60)**
Trustworthiness	5.29 (1.05)	5.28 (1.03)	5.72 (1.15)	5.29 (.96)
	F =1.23, p = n.s		F=9.22, p < .025	

Figure 17: Interaction of the Perceived Similarity and the Argument Quality on Trustworthiness (Experiment 3_Hotel)

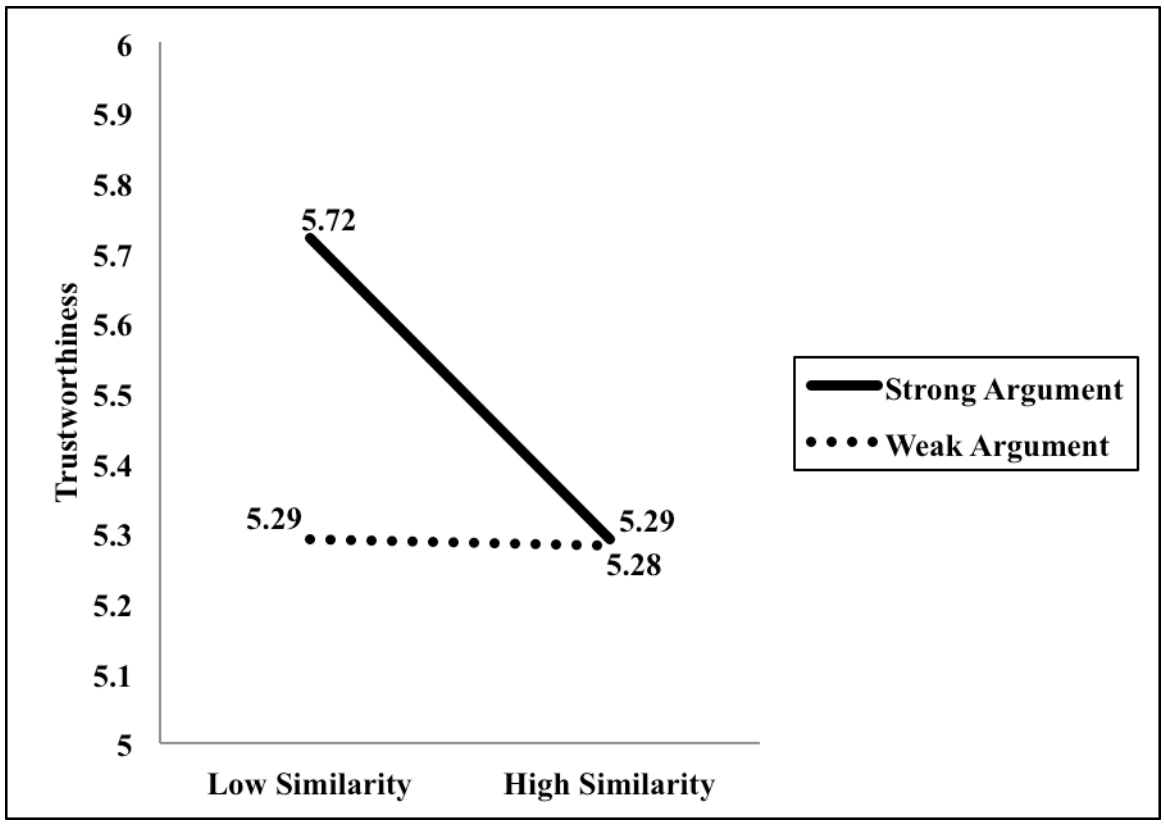


Table 20. ANCOVA: Expertise (Experiment 3 - Hotel Reviews)

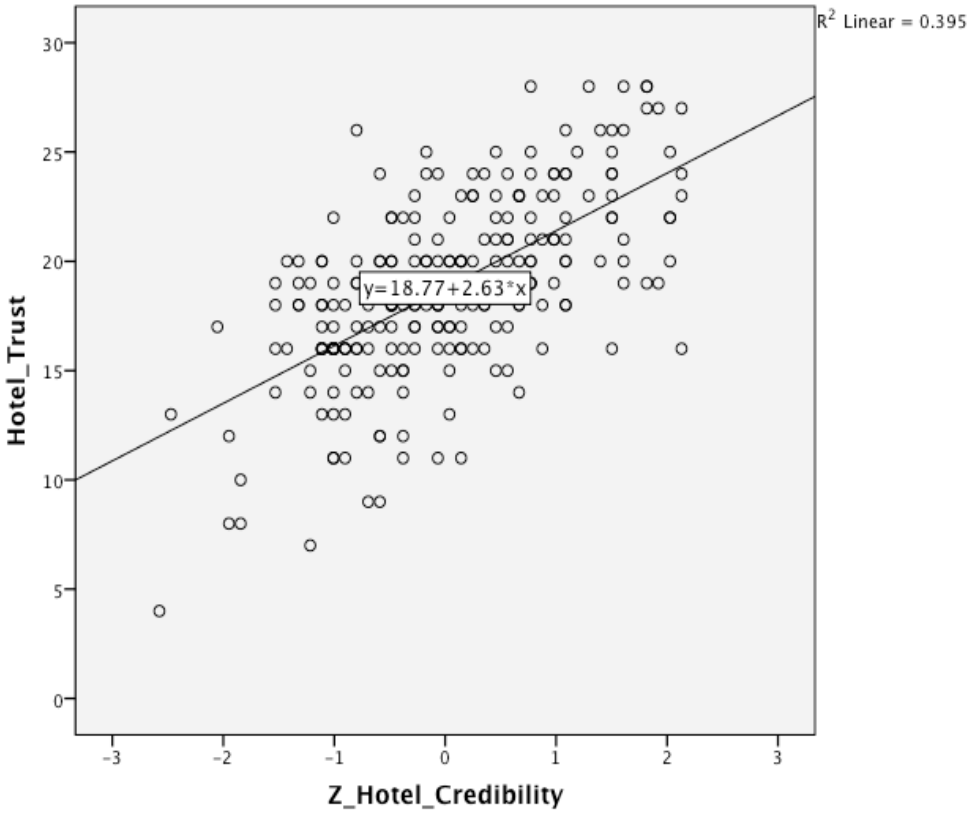
Source	Sum of Squares	*Df*	Mean Square	F	Sig.	Partial η^2
Corrected Model	1681.132	10	168.113	8.470	.000	.272
Intercept	855.340	1	855.340	43.096	.000	.160
Involvement	618.486	1	618.486	31.162	.000	.121
Trust Disposition	140.981	1	140.981	7.103	.008	.301
Similarity	47.115	1	47.115	2.374	.125	.010
Prestige	514.547	1	514.547	25.925	**.000**	.103
Argument Quality (AQ)	124.050	1	124.050	6.250	**.013**	.027
Similarity x Prestige	55.894	1	55.894	2.816	.095	.012

Similarity x AQ	7.413	1	7.413	.200	.655	.001
Prestige x AQ	3.968	1	3.968	.565	.453	.002
Similarity x Prestige x AQ	.929	1	.929	.047	.829	.000
Error	4505.305	227	19.847			
Total	138894.000	238				
Corrected Total	6186.437	237				
Note: R^2 = .272 (Adjusted R^2 = .240)						

Source Credibility and Trust (H4)

A liner regression analysis was conducted to evaluate if source credibility predicted consumer trust. The scatterplot for the two variables, as shown in Figure 18, indicates that the two variables were linearly related. The regression equation for predicting the trust in reviews was: *Trust in reviews = .614 Source Credibility + 17.6.* The 95% confidence interval for the slope, 2.11 to 3.02 did not contain the value of zero, and therefore source credibility is significantly related to the trust in reviews. As hypothesized, the reviews with higher source credibility generated more trust than those with low source credibility. This prediction was strong as the correlation between the source credibility and trust was .65. Approximately 42% of the variance in trust was accounted for by the source credibility. Thus, H4 was supported.

Figure 18: Scatterplot between Source Credibility and Trust in Reviews (Experiment 3_Hotel)



The Camera Reviews

Trust in Reviews (H1, H2, H3, RQ1, RQ2)

A three-way multivariate analysis of covariance (ANCOVA) was conducted to evaluate the effects of independent variables proposed by H1, H2, H3, RQ1 and RQ2. The independent variables are perceived similarity, source prestige, and argument quality, and each of variables has two levels.

The level of involvement with cameras and trust proposition were entered as covariates for statistical control. A preliminary analysis evaluating the homogeneity assumption indicated

that the relationship between the covariance and the dependent variable did not differ significantly as a function of the independent variables (F (7, 230) = .561, p = .787).

The results indicated a significant main effect of the perceived similarity for consumer trust (F (10, 227) = 4.23, p < .05, partial η^2 = .018), and a significant main effect of the argument quality (F (10, 227) = 22.20, p = .000, partial η^2 = .013). However, there was no significant effect found for the source prestige (F (10, 227) = 2.87, p= .091, partial η^2 = .013). The outcomes failed to identify any interactions within the three independent variables: similarity and prestige (F (10, 227) = .316, p=.575, partial η^2 = .001); similarity and argument (F (10, 227) = .104, p= .747, partial η^2 = .000); prestige and argument (F (10, 227) = .211, p=.646, partial η^2 = .001); similarity, prestige, and argument (F (10, 227) = .111, p= .749, partial η^2 = .000).

Based on the results, H2 and H3 were supported, H1 was rejected, which indicated that perceived similarity and argument quality had positive effects on consumer trust while source prestige has no influence. Regarding RQ1 and RQ, the results failed to identify any interactions within the three independent variables.

Table 21. ANCOVA: Trust in Reviews (Experiment 3 - Camera Reviews)

Source	Sum of Squares	*Df*	Mean Square	F	Sig.	Partial η^2
Corrected Model	659.936	10	73.326	4.022	.000	.137
Intercept	1199.187	1	1199.187	65.773	.000	.224
Involvement	65.041	1	65.041	3.567	.060	.015
Trust Disposition	77.782	1	77.782	4.266	.040	.018
Similarity	77.604	1	77.604	2.885	.091	.012
Prestige	52.592	1	52.592	7.454	**.007**	.032
Argument Quality (AQ)	405.907	1	405.907	22.263	**.000**	.089
Similarity x	5.848	1	5.848	.321	.572	.001

Prestige						
Similarity x AQ	1.850	1	1.850	.101	.750	.000
Prestige x AQ	3.858	1	3.858	.212	.646	.001
Similarity x Prestige x AQ	1.982	1	1.982	.109	.742	.000
Error	4156.959	228	18.232			
Total	85829.000	238				
Corrected Total	4816.895	237				
Note: R^2 = .137 (Adjusted R^2 = .103)						

Trustworthiness and Expertise (H5, H6, H7, H8, H9)

A three-way multivariate analysis of covariance (MANCOVA) was conducted to evaluate if source credibility, which has two dimensions (trustworthiness and expertise) was affected by perceived similarity, source prestige, and argument quality in the case of camera reviews. The level of involvement with cameras and trust disposition were entered as the covariates for statistical control. A Leven's test was conducted to test the homogenous among variances, and the results showed that the variances were homogeneous. The main effects were compared with the Bonferroni's adjustment for multiple comparisons.

Significant differences were found within the strong/weak argument quality on the dependent measures (Wils's Λ =. 89, F (2, 226) = 7.856, p = .001, partial η^2 = .001). The results indicated the source prestige had a significant effect on expertise (F (2, 227) = 4.11, p < .05). The results failed to find significant difference within the high/low similarity conditions.

Analysis of variances on each dependent variable as conducted as follow-up tests to the MANCOVA. The ANCOVA on trustworthiness was significant, indicated a significant main effect for the argument quality (F (10, 227) = 9.74, p= .002, partial η^2 = .041). This supported H7 and indicated that reviews with strong argument quality had higher trustworthiness than those with weak argument quality. There were no significant effects of the perceived similarity for

trustworthiness (F (10, 227) = .076, p= .783, partial η^2 = .000), rejecting H5, and source prestige (F (10, 227) = 1.511, p= .220, partial η^2 = .007), rejecting H7.

ANCOVA on expertise did not find significant main effect of the perceived similarity (F (10, 227) =2.2, p= .139, partial η^2 = .010). The results indicated significant main effects for source prestige (F (10, 227) =4.11, p < .05, partial η^2 = .018) and argument quality (F (10, 227) =14.86, p= .000, partial η^2 = .061).

Based on the results, H5 and H6 were rejected, indicating that similarity and source prestige didn't influence trustworthiness. H7 was supported, which suggested that reviews with stronger argument quality had higher trustworthiness than reviews with low weak argument quality. H8 was supported indicating that reviews with higher source prestige had greater source expertise than reviews with low source prestige. H9 was supported as reviews with stronger argument quality had greater expertise than those with low argument quality.

Table 22. ANCOVA: Trustworthiness (Experiment 3 - Camera Reviews)

Source	**Sum of Squares**	***Df***	**Mean Square**	**F**	**Sig.**	**Partial η^2**
Corrected Model	1280.846	10	128.085	3.727	.000	.141
Intercept	1218.622	1	1950.436	56.761	.000	.200
Involvement	837.775	1	837.775	24.381	.000	.097
Trust Disposition	9.649	1	9.649	.281	.597	.001
Similarity	2.610	1	2.610	.076	.783	.000
Prestige	51.934	1	51.934	1.511	.220	.007
Argument Quality (AQ)	334.908	1	334.908	9.746	**.002**	.041
Similarity x Prestige	.023	1	.023	.001	.979	.000
Similarity x AQ	72.082	1	72.082	2.098	.149	.009
Prestige x AQ	1.412	1	1.412	.041	.840	.000
Similarity x Prestige x AQ	8.242	1	8.242	.240	.625	.001

Error	7800.234	227	34.362			
Total	162619.000	238				
Corrected Total	9081.080	237				
Note: R^2 = .141 (Adjusted R^2 = .103)						

Table 23. ANCOVA: Expertise (Experiment 3 - Camera Reviews)

Source	**Sum of Squares**	***Df***	**Mean Square**	**F**	**Sig.**	**Partial η^2**
Corrected Model	1341.924	10	134.192	3.951	.000	.148
Intercept	1486.310	1	1486.310	43.766	.000	.162
Involvement	528.705	1	528.705	15.568	.000	.064
Trust Disposition	18.441	1	18.441	.543	.462	.002
Similarity	74.861	1	74.861	2.204	.139	.010
Prestige	139.698	1	139.698	4.114	.044	.018
Argument Quality (AQ)	504.721	1	504.721	14.862	**.000**	.061
Similarity x Prestige	75.498	1	75.498	2.223	.137	.010
Similarity x AQ	21.214	1	21.214	.625	.430	.003
Prestige x AQ	29.824	1	29.824	.878	.350	.004
Similarity x Prestige x AQ	1.993	1	1.993	.059	.809	.000
Error	7708.971	227	33.960			
Total	139923.000	238				
Corrected Total	9050.895	237				
Note: R^2 = .148 (Adjusted R^2 = .111)						

Source Credibility and Trust (H4)

A liner regression analysis was conducted to evaluate if source credibility predicts consumer trust. The scatterplot for the two variables, as shown in Figure 19, indicates that the two variables were linearly related. The regression equation for predicting the trust in camera reviews was *Trust in reviews = .663 Source Credibility + 18.324.* The 95% confidence interval for the slope, 2.52 to 3.44 did not contain the value of zero, and therefore source credibility was significantly related to the trust in reviews. As hypothesized, the reviews with higher level of

source credibility generated more trust than those with low level of source credibility. The correlation between the source credibility and trust was .65. Approximately 42% of the variance in trust was accounted for by the source credibility. Thus, H4 was supported.

Figure 19: Scatterplot between Source Credibility and Trust in Reviews (Experiment 3_Camera)

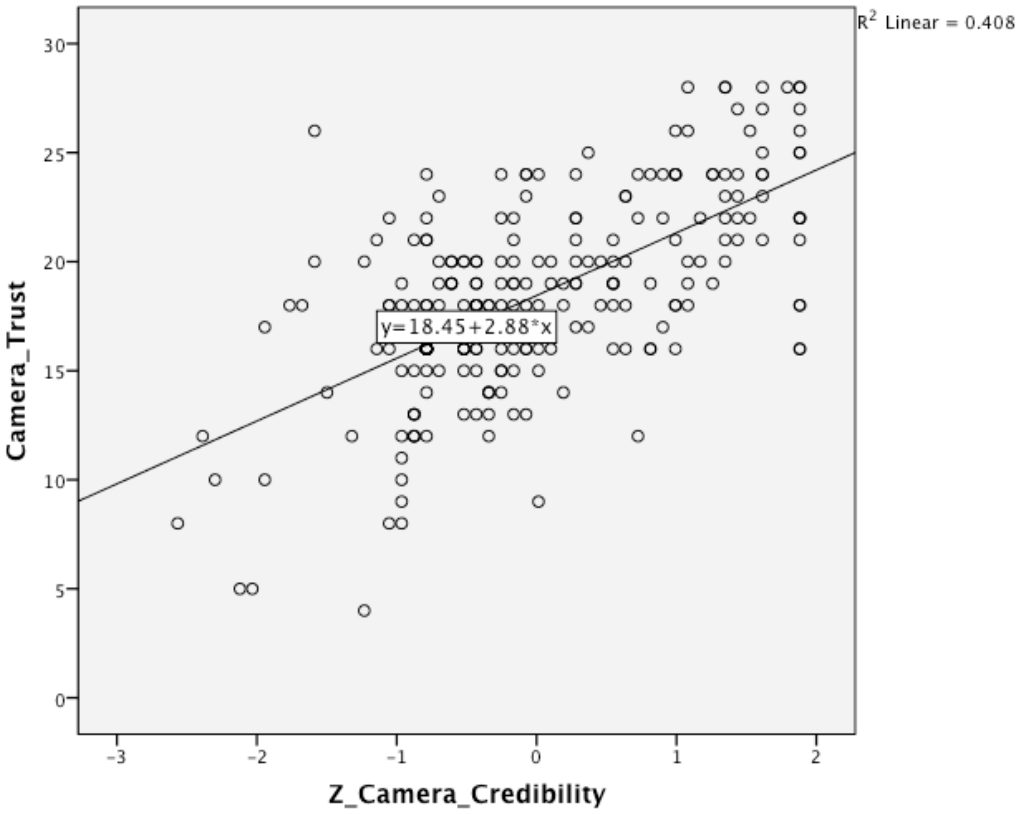


Table 24: Summary of Hypotheses, Research Questions and Results for Experiment 3

	Hypotheses and Research Questions	Results for Hotel Reviews	Results for Camera Reviews
H1	Reviews produced by reviewers with higher perceived similarity between reviewers and consumers have greater trust than those produced by reviewers with low perceived similarity.	Not supported	Not supported
H2	Reviews produced by reviewers with higher source prestige have greater trust than those produced by reviewers with low source prestige.	Supported	Supported
RQ1	Are there any significant interaction effects of perceived similarity and source prestige on consumers' trust in online product reviews?	No	No
H3	Reviews with stronger argument quality have greater trust than reviews with weak argument quality.	Not supported	Supported
RQ2	Are there any significant interaction effects of perceived similarity, source prestige, and argument quality on consumers' trust in online product reviews?	No	No
H4	Source credibility of the online reviews predicts consumers' trust in reviews.	Supported	Supported
H5	Reviews with higher perceived similarity between the reviewer and the consumers have greater source trustworthiness than reviews with low perceived similarity.	Partially supported	Not supported
H6	Reviews with higher source prestige have greater source trustworthiness than reviews with low source prestige.	Supported	Not supported
H7	Reviews with stronger argument quality have greater source trustworthiness than reviews with weak argument quality.	Partially supported	Supported
H8	Reviews produced by reviewers with higher source prestige have greater perceived source expertise than those produced by reviewers with lower source prestige.	Supported	Supported
H9	Reviews with stronger argument quality have greater source expertise than reviews with low argument quality.	Supported	Supported

Discussion

The aim of the present study was to understand the effects of content characteristics and source identification on consumer in online product reviews. The findings suggested that the effects of online reviews might not be as straightforward as suggested in previous literature. Although this study found consistent evidences showing that source characteristics and content attributes influenced consumer trust in product reviews, it also found consumers weight source attributes and content attributes of the message differently depending on the product categories that were evaluated. This study indicates that the effects of online product reviews are complex and should not be generalized.

The finding showed the relations between independent variables (perceived similarity, source prestige, and argument quality) and trust differ for two product categories. Perceived similarity and argument quality generated positive effects on trust in hotel reviews, while argument quality had a strong impact on trust in camera reviews.

Source prestige and argument quality exhibited strong positive effects on the perceptions of source expertise for both hotel and camera reviews, which is consistent with earlier experiments. This study revealed that reviews with stronger argument quality were perceived more trustworthy than those with low argument quality, although this observation was found to be valid when the similarity between the reviewer and the consumer was low. The results suggests that, in the context of online product reviews, the perceived similarity may not be the only factor that drives source trustworthiness. Prior research demonstrates that consumers are more likely to trust people who they perceive to be homophilous, that is, people who have the same social-economic status (McCroskey et al., 1975; Huang & Chen, 2006) based on the proposition that the perceived similarity serves as a cue for the similar taste, preference or

interest of products or services. The present study suggested that other components of online reviews, such as a reviewer's reputation may serve as an important indicator for source trustworthiness. A record of good performs as evaluated by the review community indicates that the reviewer does not have persuasion intention and can be trusted as an information source.

Furthermore, the results consistently identified a strong prediction of the source credibility on consumers' trust in reviews across product categories. For hotel and camera reviews, the regression models indicated that source credibility explained more than 42% of the variance in consumer trust. The findings also broaden the understanding of the relationship between source credibility and consumer trust by applying to a less homogeneous sample.

CHAPTER 8

DISCUSSION AND IMPLICATIONS

The objective of this research is to examine how perceived similarity between consumers and reviewers, source prestige, and argument quality influence consumers' evaluation of online product reviews. Previous studies have shown that the persuasiveness of online consumer reviews relies on several factors, including source characteristics (Bickart & Schindler, 2001), content attributes (Park, Lee & Han, 2007), the relationship between the source and the recipient (Cheung, Sia & Kuan, 2012), the perceived persuasive intent (Furner, Racherla, & Zhu, 2012), consumers' psychological motivations (Sundaram, Mitra & Webster, 1998), level of product category involvement (Baek, Ahn & Choi, 2012), and the credibility of review websites (McKnight & Chervany, 2002). Among these determinants, the dominant approaches have emphasized the roles of source characteristics and content attributes in the consumer evaluation process. Present research offers evidence that source characteristics and content attributes impact the perception of source credibility and consumer trust in online product reviews.

Source Trustworthiness

Nishishiba and Ritchie (2000) suggest that people enter each interaction with predetermined ideas of what constitutes a trustworthy person in a given context, and apply these ideas in making judgments about others. In the context of online product reviews, when consumers' concept of a trustworthy reviewer is met, consumers tend to develop feelings of trust.

In particular, source characteristics had an impact on the evaluation of source trustworthiness. Previous research has demonstrated that the homophily between opinion providers and recipients was associated with increased affect, trust and other positive perceptions (Rogers & Bhowmik, 1970). Racherla, Mandviwalla, and Connolly (2012) found in an examination of the hotel reviews that the reviews with higher similarity generated higher trust than those with low similarity. The findings in Experiment 1 are congruent with previous research that shows reviews with higher perceived similarity between reviewer and consumer are evaluated as more trustworthy than those with low perceived similarity. This suggests that source trustworthiness can be induced by the perceptions that the source has similar attributes with the consumers, such as demographics, attitudes and background. However, additional consideration arises when the reviews contain information about source prestige. Since reviews might be produced by a "Top Reviewer" on the review website, this study was conducted to investigate the influence of source prestige on consumers' evaluation of online product reviews (Willemsem, Neijens, & Bronner, 2012).

The results of this study provide evidence that peer-rating systems or reputation systems have a signaling function as suggested by Dellarocas (2007). A "top reviewer" status may serve as a cue for perception of the reviewer's competence or trustworthiness. However, the results show that relationships between source prestige and perceived trustworthiness are modified by perceived similarity. Experiment 1 found an interaction between perceived similarity and source prestige on source trustworthiness. That is, a high prestige source elicited higher source trustworthiness than a low prestige source when the perceived similarity was low. In contrast, a low prestige source elicited higher source trustworthiness than a high prestige source when the perceived similarity was high.

The findings from Experiment 1 may be explained by the ironic effect of source identification on the perceived credibility of online product reviewers identified by Willemsen, Neijens, and Bronner (2012). Their study showed that experts were perceived as having more expert knowledge, but at the same time as having less trustworthiness than laypeople. Thus, despite the fact that a reviewer with higher perceived similarity is more favorably evaluated in terms of source trustworthiness, being a "Top Reviewer" at the same time may discount trustworthiness by creating the impression that the reviewer wants to maintain or boost his/her reputation on the review website. On the other hand, a review produced by low prestige source generates higher trustworthiness because authenticity stems from the impression that the endorsement is based on product performance rather than non-product related factors, such as a reviewer's intent to persuade. Interestingly, Experiment 1 found that the effect was reversed when the perceived similarity between the consumer and the source was low. That is, a review produced by a high prestige source has higher source trustworthiness than a review produced by a low prestige source under the low similarity conditions. This can be explained by the influence of different reference groups. According to White and Dahl (2007), reference groups consist of two categories: in-groups and out-groups. Out-groups refer to groups to which a person does not belong and consist of three versions: aspirational, neutral, and dissociative. An aspirational group refers to an aggregation of individuals who are thought to possess one or more desired characteristics (e.g. the rich, intellectuals). Thus, the endorsement from someone in an aspirational group generates positive attitudes toward the products. In this research, because the reviewers in the low similarity conditions were manipulated by using reviewers from an older age group, they might be perceived as having more life experience than individuals from a younger group. Therefore, having a higher prestige on the review website may increase the

positive evaluation of the reviewer in terms of the source trustworthiness, which may generate higher trust in the reviews produced by this individual.

Interestingly, the significant interactions between perceived similarity and source prestige identified in Experiment 1 were not significant in Experiments 2 and 3. The findings from Experiments 2 and 3 suggest that argument quality generates greater impact than perceived similarity and source prestige in the evaluation process of source trustworthiness. Experiments 2 and 3 found that source trustworthiness could be influenced by source prestige and argument quality. Reviews produced by a high prestige source or those containing strong argument quality had higher trustworthiness than those produced by a low prestige source or those that contained weak argument quality. In particular, results in Experiment 3 indicate a significant interaction between perceived similarity and argument quality. Thus, when the perceived similarity between reviewers and consumers is low, reviews with stronger argument quality have higher trustworthiness than those with weak argument quality. When the perceived similarity is high, there is no significant difference between the strong and weak argument quality conditions. These findings suggest that, in the context of online product reviews, the perceived similarity may not be the only factor that drives source trustworthiness. Prior research demonstrates that a reviewer with similar demographics, attitudes and values to the consumer is perceived as more trustworthy because the perceived similarity serves as a cue for similar taste, preference or interest in the products or services (Huang & Chen, 2006, Racherla, Mandiwalla & Connolly, 2012). Nevertheless, findings from the present study suggest that other components of online product reviews, such as a reviewer's status or reputation that has been guaranteed by others, could serve as an important indicator of source trustworthiness. Furthermore, higher source

trustworthiness might be induced by a strong argument in the review content regardless of the source characteristics.

Source Expertise

The findings from this research indicate that source prestige and argument quality exhibited strong positive effects on perceptions of source expertise across two product categories, which were consistent with previous literature about the influence of source characteristics and content attributes on the perception of source credibility (Willemsen, Neijens, & Bronner, 2012; Wathen & Burkell, 2002). Interestingly, the size of the effects is different across product categories. For hotel reviews, the effect size of argument quality was much smaller when compared to source prestige, whereas for camera reviews the effect size of argument quality was larger than the effect size of source prestige. This indicates that the source expertise might be induced differently depending on which product is under evaluation, despite the fact that source prestige and argument quality are both important determinants of source expertise. It suggests that for search products or products with technical qualities, such as digital cameras, informational content about the product attributes may be perceived as more important; for experience products, such as tourism and hospitality services, the reviewers' experience with the products, their reputation, or their status may play more significant roles in the consumer decision-making process.

This research reveals that source trustworthiness stems from perceived similarity, source prestige, and argument quality, and that source expertise is driven by source prestige and argument quality. However, only argument quality connects both trustworthiness and expertise. This can be explained by the degree of cognitive elaboration through either the central route or

the peripheral route proposed by Elaboration Likelihood Model (ELM). According to ELM, when a recipient processes a message through the central route, they will carefully consider the content presented in the message and evaluate the merits of its argument. In contrast, the peripheral route, in which people use heuristics cues as informational indicators to access the persuasiveness of a message, requires less cognitive work (Petty, Cacioppo & Schumann, 1983). In Experiments 2 and 3, in which a strong argument was presented, a higher level of cognitive elaboration might be generated compared to when is a weak argument exists. Therefore, attitude change would be closely related to the influence of argument attributes.

The results support previous calls in the literature (Pornpitakpan, 2004) to access the isolated effect of perceived source expertise and trustworthiness. This study finds that perceived source expertise and trustworthiness operate separately and produced differential effects on attitude formation, depending on the information availability and the product categories.

Trust in Product Reviews

Trust has been conceptualized as a cognitive and behavioral outcome of communicative interactions (Huh, DeLorme & Reid, 2005). Previous research suggests that source credibility has a significant impact on consumer trust. This study provides consistent evidence and suggests that source credibility is an important determinant for consumers' trust in online product reviews across different product categories. The higher the perceived source credibility was in the online product review, the more likely the consumer was to trust the reviews in the decision-making process.

This study identified three influencing factors for consumers' trust in online product reviews: perceived similarity, source prestige and argument quality. The results in Experiment 1

indicate that consumer trust is influenced by the interaction between source prestige and the perceived similarity between reviewers and consumers. In particular, when the perceived similarity is low, reviews produced by a higher-prestige source generate more trust than reviews produced by a lower-prestige source. When the perceived similarity is high, consumers are more likely to trust in reviews produced by a lower-prestige source than those produced by a higher-prestige source. This might be explained by how the effects of trustworthiness and expertise on consumer trust wax and wane depending on which one is in power. Thus, under the low similarity conditions in which source trustworthiness is low, perceiving a higher-prestige source, which has greater source expertise, increases consumer trust. In contrast, under the high similarity conditions in which source trustworthiness is high, there is a decrease in consumer trust when perceiving a higher-prestige source with less trustworthiness.

This research also finds that perceived similarity, source prestige and argument quality contribute different influences on consumer trust depending on product category. More specifically, the findings in Experiment 1 showed that the relations between independent variables (perceived similarity and source prestige) and consumer trust differ for the two product categories tested. The interaction between perceived similarity and source prestige influenced consumers' evaluation of hotel reviews. However, the results of Experiment 1 did not find significant effects of perceived similarity and source prestige for camera reviews. Thus, Experiment 2 and 3 were conducted to identify alternative determinants for consumer trust in camera reviews. The results from Experiment 2 and Experiment 3 suggested that argument quality had greater impact on consumers' trust of camera reviews than the influence of source prestige. Furthermore, these results suggest that regardless of whether the perceived similarity between the consumers and the reviewers is high or low, the perception of argument quality in

review content could influence the persuasiveness of online product reviews. In particular, reviews with strong argument quality have higher source trustworthiness and more expertise than those with low argument quality. This might be explained by the presence of technical quality in products such as cameras. As in Experiments 2 and 3, participants are likely to consider a camera to be a product that requires a level of higher technological knowledge to evaluate than a hotel. When the product under evaluation is considered as a product category with a level of higher technology, consumers might anchor their evaluative judgments based on the perceived technological competence of the reviewers, which can be reflected in their arguments.

Another possible explanation relies on the different evaluative reactions toward search products and experience products. According to Nelson (1970), products can be classified into search and experience goods according to consumers' ability to obtain product quality information before purchase. Consumer behaviors can differ when consumers make product judgments and purchase decisions regarding search products and experience products. According to previous studies, hotels can be classified as experience products (Racherla, Mandviwalla & Connolly, 2012) and cameras are identified as search products (Willemsen, Neijens & Bronner, 2012). Furthermore, prior research reported that positive review content was perceived to be more useful than negative content when the product under consideration was classified as a search product (e.g. cameras), whereas the reverse was observed for an experience product (e.g. hotels) (Huang, Hsian & Chen, 2012; Willemsen et al., 2011). As the present study applied only positive content within the two product categories, the effects of argumentation were salient for camera reviews. In other words, consumers put more trust in reviews with strong argument quality than those produced by a "Top Reviewer" when they evaluated reviews for digital cameras. Nevertheless, for hotel reviews, the source prestige had strong positive effects on

consumer trust. In particular, consumers may trust the reviews produced by a "Top Reviewer" regardless of the argument quality and perceived similarity presented in the reviews.

Based on the outcomes from the three experiments, no gender differences emerged in the evaluation process of online product reviews. Previous research has suggested that females are more likely to be influenced by reference groups than male participants (White & Dahl, 2007). However, the results in this dissertation did not find significant differences in consumer trust and perceived source credibility. This might be explained by the product categories selected in this study, as the levels of involvement toward hotels and cameras were not significantly different between males and females.

The results of this dissertation suggest that consumers' trust in product reviews can be influenced by perceived similarity, source prestige, and argument quality. It is justified that reviews with higher perceived similarity had greater trust than those with low perceived similarity when the level of source prestige is low. Nevertheless, consumers tend to have more trust in reviews with strong argument quality than those with weak argument quality.

Theoretical and Managerial Implications

The findings of this research have several theoretical implications. The extant research identified the determinants that influence the evaluation and persuasiveness of eWOM. Source credibility is shown to serve as a key predictor for consumer trust. This view leads to the interpretation of the findings from Tanis and Postmes (2003) that indicate that the perceived risk and uncertainty in online communication can be reduced by the presence of a credible source.

Theoretically, the findings provide further evidence that consumers' trust in online product reviews is determined by their perception of source credibility (Buda & Zhang, 2000). In

the context of computer-mediated communication in which anonymity may repress the persuasiveness of communication, this study suggests that consumers would use other cues to access source credibility on the Internet. More importantly, the perceived similarity between the source and the recipient contributes to the difference in consumer trust and perceived source trustworthiness. According to the theory of homophily, Racherla, Mandviwalla and Conolly (2012) report that consumers are more likely to trust reviewers with higher perceived similarity than those with low similarity. However, this study found that the influence of perceived similarity should be interpreted within different levels of source prestige based on the interaction between perceived similarity and source prestige.

The interaction between perceived similarity and source prestige proposed here is intended to contribute to a more comprehensive theory on how different components of source-related characteristics work in online product review contexts. The perceived similarity between the reviewer and the consumer can play a moderating role for the relationships between source prestige and the evaluation of a message. Prior study found that reviews produced by a peer-rated expert (a high-prestige source) on the review website received more positive evaluations than those produced by a layperson (a low-prestige source) (Willemn, Neijens & Bronner, 2012). However, this study revealed that the positive influence of source prestige might vary based on the perceived similarity. In other words, when the perceived similarity is high, reviews produced by a low-prestige source should generate a more positive evaluation than those produced by a high-prestige source.

This study suggests that source expertise and source trustworthiness are indispensable conditions for developing the feelings of trust. Consumer trust in product reviews can be developed when perceiving a high level of source trustworthiness or source expertise. In terms of

the determinants of source credibility, this study indicates alternative influencing factors for source trustworthiness and expertise. Extant research suggests that perceived similarity has a positive impact on source trustworthiness and that source prestige generates positive influence on source expertise. In particular, this study provides consistent observation while suggesting that argument quality is positively related to both source trustworthiness and expertise.

From a managerial standpoint, the results of this dissertation can provide guidance to advertisers and marketers when managing their online review websites. The study provides practical implications for review sites to develop effective mechanisms that help consumers to gauge information that enhance consumer trust. For example, based on the result that argument quality in reviews is positively related to the perceived source credibility and consumer trust, website developers might want to adopt a review format in which reviewers can address their opinions in a structured way. In particular, Toulmin's (1958) argument model can be applied in the context of online reviews. As consumers generally face an overwhelming number of reviews for a given products, product review sites can use methods such as data mining and document indexing tools to sort reviews based on their content and structure, which allow consumers to access necessary information on demand.

Secondly, the result suggests that the influence of online reviews cannot be generalized based on a single determinant. As the "Top Reviewer" system has been adopted by a number of product review websites, the website developers should be aware that reviews produced by a high-prestige source do not necessarily have higher trust than the reviews produced by a lower-prestige source. More specifically, a "Top Reviewer" might be viewed as less trustworthy than a low-prestige reviewer.

The findings also suggest that websites need to include information related to the identification of the reviewers. Reviewers' social-demographic information is one of the crucial determinants for consumer trust. Online review websites need to provide a social platform that encourages information exchange among consumers. Prior studies indicate that a simple aggregation of information presented in review websites creates difficulties in consumers' decision-making process as people have varied tastes and preferences (Yaniv, 2004). Website developers should consider the personal match between individual reviewers and consumers.

In addition to the strategic selection of source characteristics and review content, the difference in product categories should also be considered as the effects of online product reviews vary depending on the evaluated product. For example, this study found that argument quality had greater impact for products with a high level of technical quality (e.g. digital cameras) than those with low level of technical quality (e.g. hotels), while source prestige had more influence on product evaluation in a reversed pattern. Therefore, if the advertised products have a higher level of technical quality (e.g. laptop, smartphone), the developers should emphasize the review content and provide extensive information to assist consumers' decision-making process. If the advertised products are experience goods that do not require a high level of technical knowledge to evaluate (e.g., restaurants, books), the status and reputation of the reviewers should be highlighted to increase consumers' trust in online reviews.

Finally, online product reviews might generate more benefits for small businesses in terms of product inquiries and trials since the cost of internet advertising is relatively lower than television commercials. Online consumer reviews enable local brands to take advantage of the growing importance of relationship building with customers by increasing conversion rates and consumer awareness.

Limitations and Directions for Future Research

As with all studies, the findings of this research have several limitations. First, the studies presented used only positive review content. The evidence on review valence discussed previously suggests that positive reviews work inherently differently from negative reviews. Negative reviews are viewed as more useful than positive reviews, and some reviews contain both positive and negative comments on the products. Past research has found that the valence of review content influences consumers' evaluation, and a review containing both positive and negative content is perceived as more helpful than an argument containing only positive or negative information (Chevalier & Mayzlin, 2006).

Second, the results of this study were based on a limited number of product categories; the present research tested only two products (hotels and cameras). It is unclear whether or not similar results will occur when its methods are applied to different product categories. Furthermore, the levels of product involvement within these two product categories were not significantly different in this study. As product involvement differences are known to affect consumers' perceptions and behaviors (Zaichkowsky, 1994), an important next step should be to examine the influence of product involvement on consumers' trust in online reviews. In addition, researchers should consider the search/experience products as a moderator to better understand the influence of product categories on consumers' decision-making process. In sum, further research should be aimed at investigating the robustness and generalizability of these results across multiple product and service categories in different levels of involvement.

Another limitation is the operationalization of the perceived similarity. In this research, the perceived similarity between reviewers and consumers was conceptualized with the reviewers' identity information and social-demographic information. Therefore, in the low

similarity conditions, participants were presented with reviews produced by people from an older age group. Thus, the age difference may serve as an alternative cue to trust and perceived source credibility. In other words, older individuals might be perceived as having more trustworthiness and expertise regardless of the perceptions of background difference. Future research is needed to replicate the effects of perceived similarity, source prestige, and argument quality with participants from a different age group.

Fourth, as the findings of this research identified critical determinants for consumers' trust in online reviews by using a quantitative approach, more qualitative approaches, such as in-depth interviews or intensive focus groups, are needed for future research to address the factors affecting consumers' trust in online product reviews. Such alternative approaches may help provide rich meaning and insight into the results obtained from a controlled experiment environment in this dissertation.

Fifth, consumers' social and psychological motivations in participating in various eWOM activities should be considered in future research. Prior literature suggests that consumers' motives of altruism and self-enhancement influence their information processing and evaluation towards online product reviews (Sundaram, Mitra & Webster, 1998; Hennig-Thurau & Walsh, 2003; Li, 2012; Hsieh, Hsieh & Tang, 2012). In addition, according to Baek, Ahn and Choi (2012), consumers focus on different information sources for reviews, which depend on their objectives for reading reviews. Online reviews can be used for information search or for evaluating alternatives.

Finally, this dissertation examined the argument quality in terms of the review content attributes. However, extant research has identified other content characteristics of online product reviews. For example, a study conducted by Willemsen and his colleagues (2011) indicated that

arguments with higher levels of diversity and density were considered as more useful by online consumers than those with low levels of diversity and density. In this respect, future research should consider the effects of additional content attributes to better understand factors that influence consumers' trust in online product reviews.

Despite these limitations that might be addressed in future research, the findings of this dissertation provide valuable insights into understanding the factors affecting consumers' trust in online product reviews.

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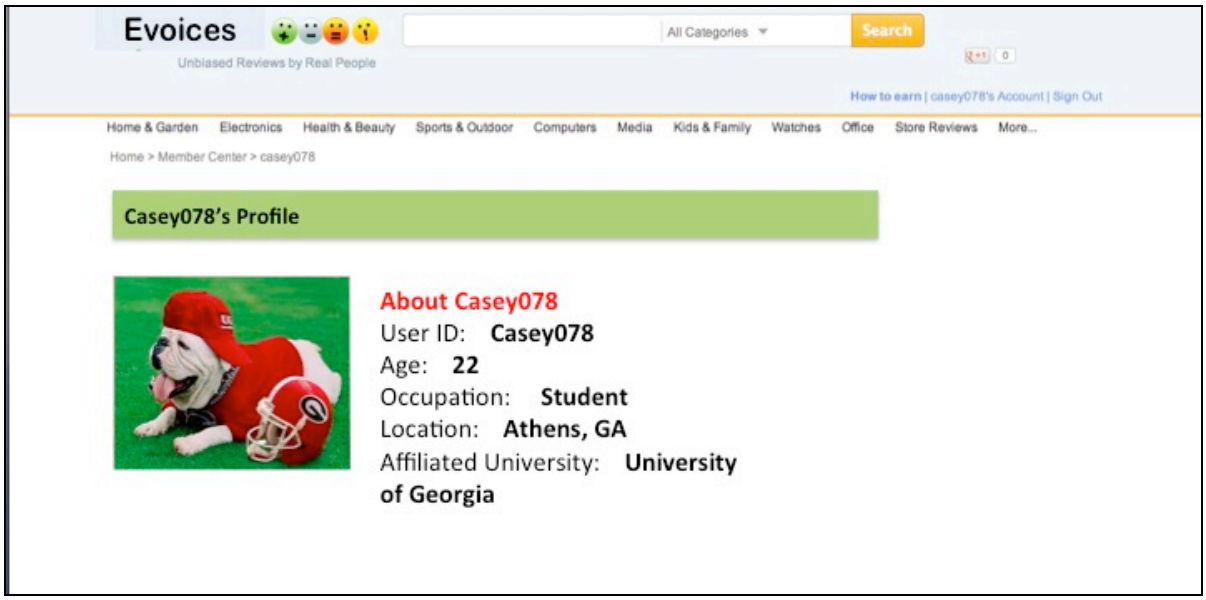
APPENDIX A

Questionnaire for Pretest 1

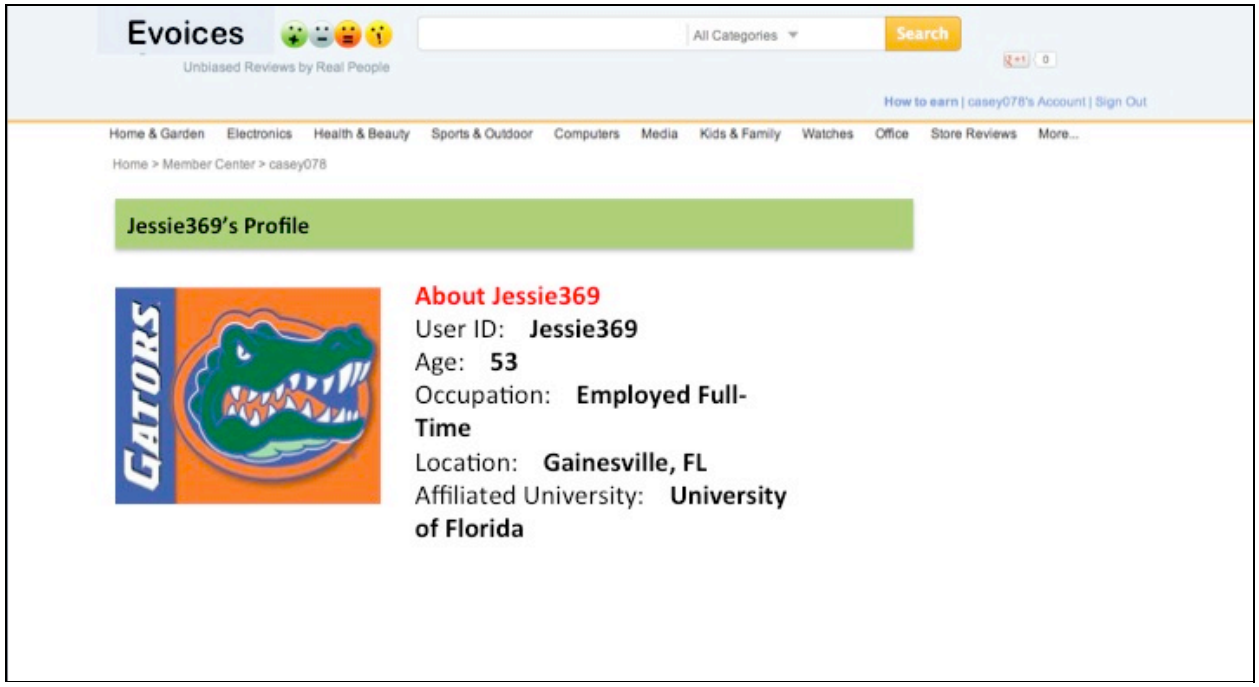
People sometimes check online product reviews before they make a purchase decision (e.g. Amazon). Those who provide product reviews sometimes include their personal information in their profiles beside the comments about products. In this section, you will read some reviewer profiles from an online product review website. Your opinion about these reviewers will be asked in the following questions.

Q1 Please consider your feelings about the reviewer Casey078 who provided the review you just read. On each of the scales below, please indicate your feelings about the reviewer by clicking on the response that most closely describes your feelings.



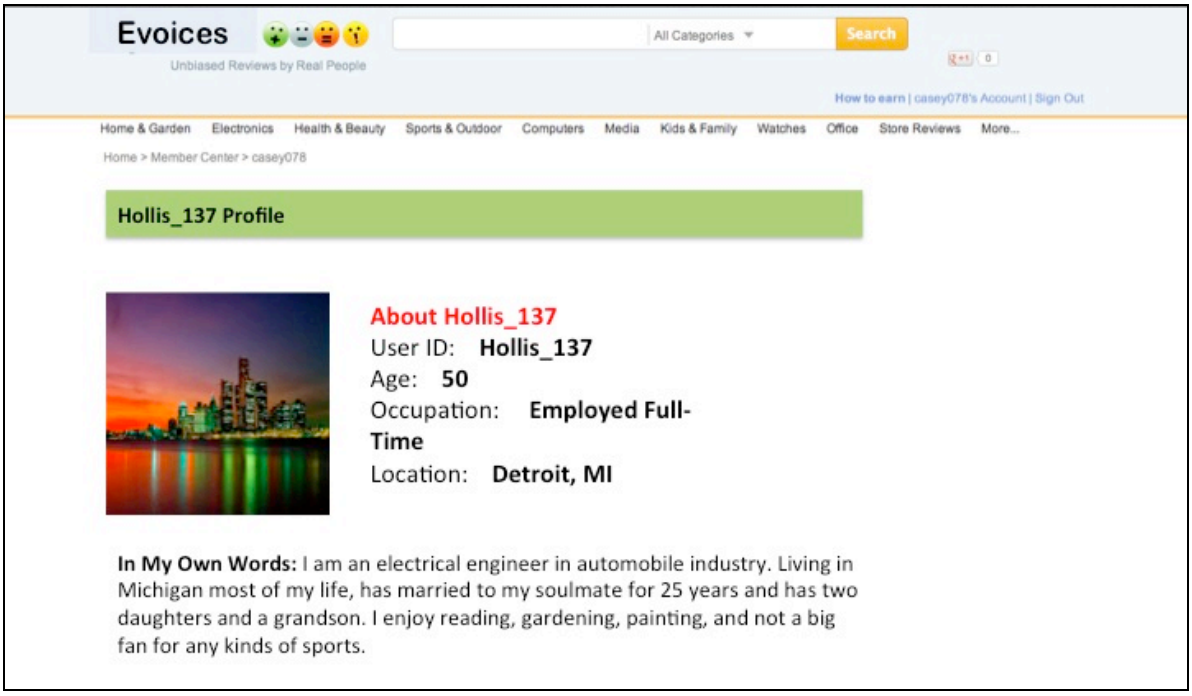
Casey 078 is like me	○ ○ ○ ○ ○ ○ ○	Is unlike me
Is different from me	○ ○ ○ ○ ○ ○ ○	Is similar to me
Thinks like me	○ ○ ○ ○ ○ ○ ○	Does not think like me
Desn't behave like me	○ ○ ○ ○ ○ ○ ○	Behaves like me
Has status like me	○ ○ ○ ○ ○ ○ ○	Has status different from me
Is from a different social class	○ ○ ○ ○ ○ ○ ○	Is from a same social class
Is culturally different	○ ○ ○ ○ ○ ○ ○	Is culturally similar
Has an economic situation like mine	○ ○ ○ ○ ○ ○ ○	Does not have an economic situation like mine

Q2. Please consider your feelings about the reviewer Jessie369 who provided the review you just read. On each of the scales below, please indicate your feelings about the reviewer by clicking on the response that most closely describes your feelings.



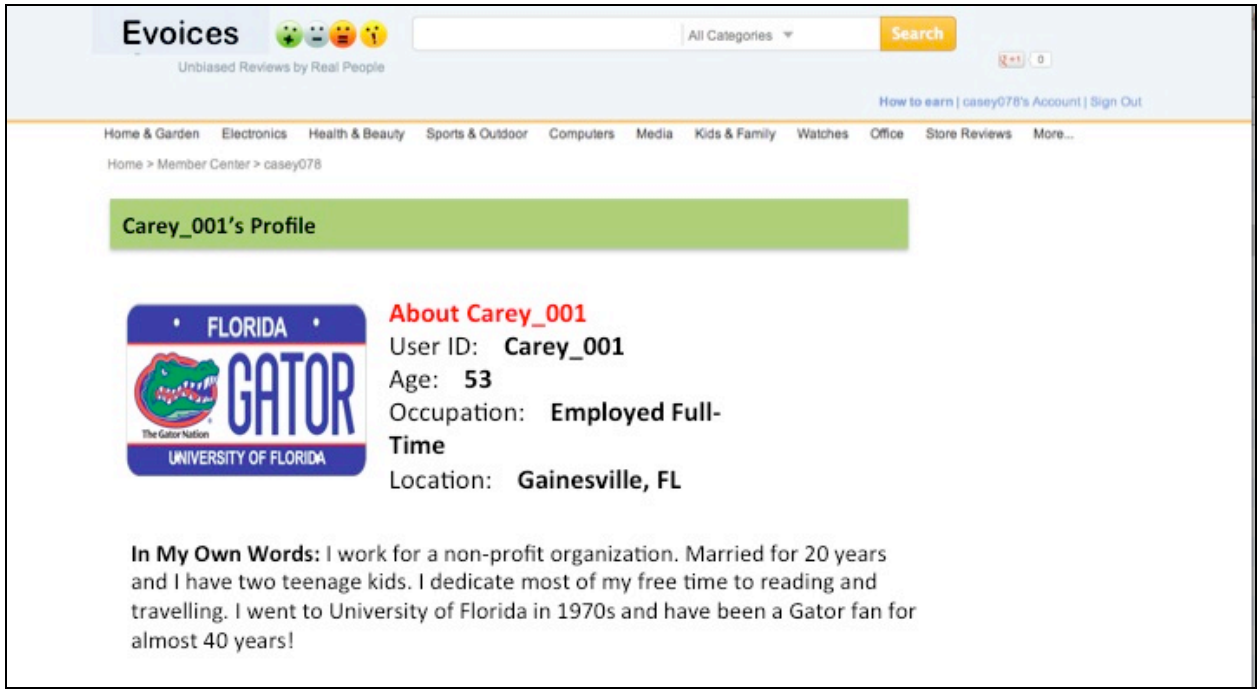
Jessie 369 is like me	○ ○ ○ ○ ○ ○ ○	Is unlike me
Is different from me	○ ○ ○ ○ ○ ○ ○	Is similar to me
Thinks like me	○ ○ ○ ○ ○ ○ ○	Does not think like me
Doesn't behave like me	○ ○ ○ ○ ○ ○ ○	Behaves like me
Has status like me	○ ○ ○ ○ ○ ○ ○	Has status different from me
Is from a different social class	○ ○ ○ ○ ○ ○ ○	Is from the same social class
Is culturally different	○ ○ ○ ○ ○ ○ ○	Is culturally similar
Has an economic situation like mine	○ ○ ○ ○ ○ ○ ○	Does not have an economic situation like mine

Q3. Please consider your feelings about the reviewer Hollis_137 who provided the review you just read. On each of the scales below, please indicate your feelings about the reviewer by clicking on the response that most closely describes your feelings.



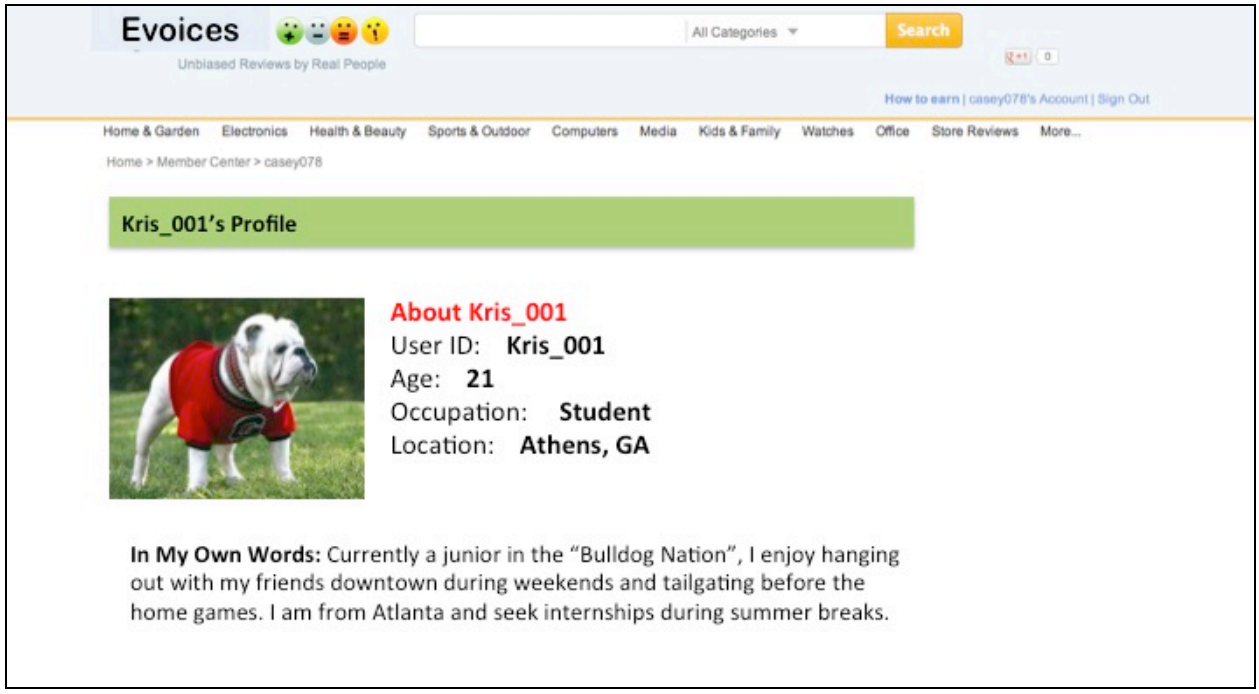
Hollis_137 is like me	○ ○ ○ ○ ○ ○ ○	Is unlike me
Is different from me	○ ○ ○ ○ ○ ○ ○	Is similar to me
Think like me	○ ○ ○ ○ ○ ○ ○	Does not think like me
Doesn't behave like me	○ ○ ○ ○ ○ ○ ○	Behaves like me
Has status like me	○ ○ ○ ○ ○ ○ ○	Has status different from me
Is from a different social class	○ ○ ○ ○ ○ ○ ○	Is from the same social class
Is culturally different	○ ○ ○ ○ ○ ○ ○	Is culturally similar
Has an economic situation like mine	○ ○ ○ ○ ○ ○ ○	Does not have an economic situation like mine

Q4 Please consider your feelings about the reviewer Carey_001 who provided the review you just read. On each of the scales below, please indicate your feelings about the reviewer by clicking on the response that most closely describes your feelings.



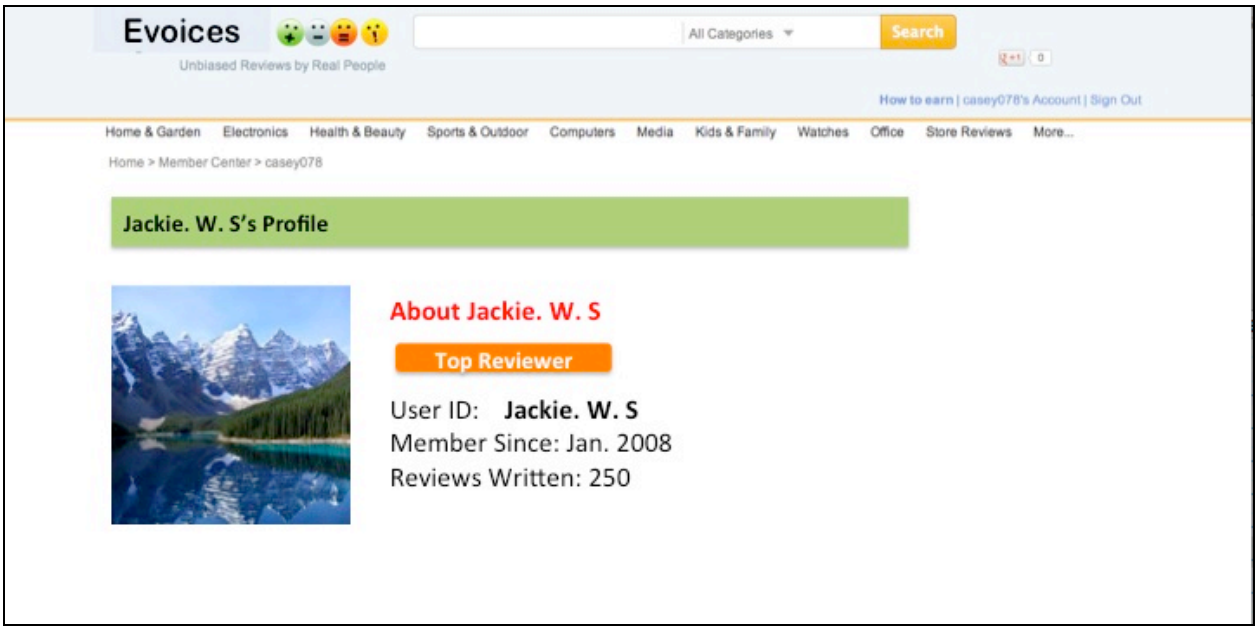
Carey_001 is like me	○ ○ ○ ○ ○ ○ ○	Is unlike me
Is different from me	○ ○ ○ ○ ○ ○ ○	Is similar to me
Thinks like me	○ ○ ○ ○ ○ ○ ○	Does not think like me
Doesn't behave like me	○ ○ ○ ○ ○ ○ ○	Behaves like me
Has status like me	○ ○ ○ ○ ○ ○ ○	Has status different from me
Is from a different social class	○ ○ ○ ○ ○ ○ ○	Is from the same social class
Is culturally different	○ ○ ○ ○ ○ ○ ○	Is culturally similar
Has an economic situation like mine	○ ○ ○ ○ ○ ○ ○	Does not have an economic situation like mine

Q5 Please consider your feelings about the reviewer Kris_001 who provided the review you just read. On each of the scales below, please indicate your feelings about the reviewer by clicking on the response that most closely describes your feelings.



Kris_001 is like me	○ ○ ○ ○ ○ ○ ○	Is unlike me
Is different from me	○ ○ ○ ○ ○ ○ ○	Is similar to me
Thinks like me	○ ○ ○ ○ ○ ○ ○	Does not think like me
Doesn't behave like me	○ ○ ○ ○ ○ ○ ○	Behaves like me
Has status like me	○ ○ ○ ○ ○ ○ ○	Has status different from me
Is from a different social class	○ ○ ○ ○ ○ ○ ○	Is from the same social class
Is culturally different	○ ○ ○ ○ ○ ○ ○	Is culturally similar
Has an economic situation like mine	○ ○ ○ ○ ○ ○ ○	Does not have an economic situation like mine

Some website that provide online product reviews have a top reviewer ranking system. For example, in Amazon.com, consumers who wrote the most consistent, helpful and high-quality reviews are awarded a "top reviewer" badge by this site. In the following section, you will read the membership status of some reviewers and answer questions based on the profile provided.

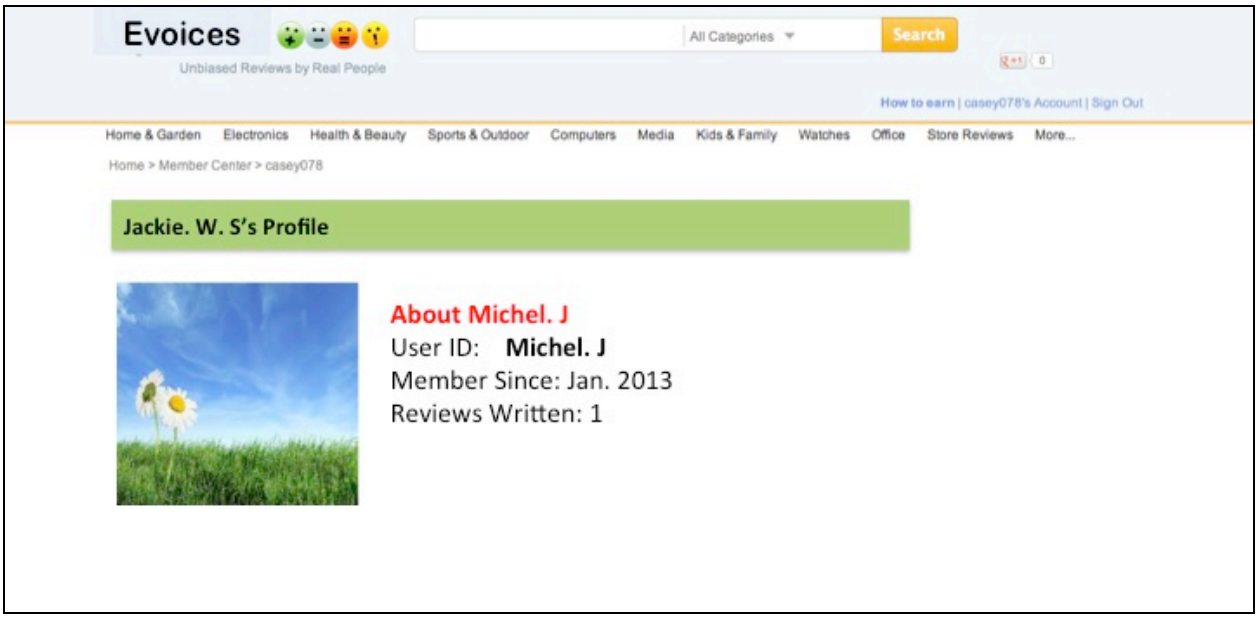


Q6 This reviewer is very prestigious.

- ❍ Strongly Disagree (1)
- ❍ Disagree (2)
- ❍ Somewhat Disagree (3)
- ❍ Neither Agree nor Disagree (4)
- ❍ Somewhat Agree (5)
- ❍ Agree (6)
- ❍ Strongly Agree (7)

Q7 This reviewer has a high status.

- ❍ Strongly Disagree (1)
- ❍ Disagree (2)
- ❍ Somewhat Disagree (3)
- ❍ Neither Agree nor Disagree (4)
- ❍ Somewhat Agree (5)
- ❍ Agree (6)
- ❍ Strongly Agree (7)



Q8 This reviewer is very prestigious.

- ❍ Strongly Disagree (1)
- ❍ Disagree (2)
- ❍ Somewhat Disagree (3)
- ❍ Neither Agree nor Disagree (4)
- ❍ Somewhat Agree (5)
- ❍ Agree (6)
- ❍ Strongly Agree (7)

Q9 This reviewer has a high status.

- ❍ Strongly Disagree (1)
- ❍ Disagree (2)
- ❍ Somewhat Disagree (3)
- ❍ Neither Agree nor Disagree (4)
- ❍ Somewhat Agree (5)
- ❍ Agree (6)
- ❍ Strongly Agree (7)

Q10 People sometimes check product reviews before they make a purchase decision. Please indicate your willingness to check reviews before buying the following products. Your product use will also be asked in this section.

I like to check restaurant reviews before deciding where to eat.

- ❍ Strongly Disagree (1)
- ❍ Disagree (2)
- ❍ Somewhat Disagree (3)
- ❍ Neither Agree nor Disagree (4)
- ❍ Somewhat Agree (5)
- ❍ Agree (6)
- ❍ Strongly Agree (7)

Q11 I always check restaurant reviews before deciding where to eat.
- ❍ Strongly Agree (1)
- ❍ Agree (2)
- ❍ Somewhat Agree (3)
- ❍ Neither Agree nor Disagree (4)
- ❍ Somewhat Disagree (5)
- ❍ Disagree (6)
- ❍ Strongly Disagree (7)

Q12 I like to check product reviews before buying a pair of running shoes.
- ❍ Strongly Disagree (1)
- ❍ Disagree (2)
- ❍ Somewhat Disagree (3)
- ❍ Neither Agree nor Disagree (4)
- ❍ Somewhat Agree (5)
- ❍ Agree (6)
- ❍ Strongly Agree (7)

Q13 I always check product reviews before buying a pair of running shoes.
- ❍ Strongly Disagree (1)
- ❍ Disagree (2)
- ❍ Somewhat Disagree (3)
- ❍ Neither Agree nor Disagree (4)
- ❍ Somewhat Agree (5)
- ❍ Agree (6)
- ❍ Strongly Agree (7)

Q14 I like to check hotel reviews before making a decision.
- ❍ Strongly Disagree (1)
- ❍ Disagree (2)
- ❍ Somewhat Disagree (3)
- ❍ Neither Agree nor Disagree (4)
- ❍ Somewhat Agree (5)
- ❍ Agree (6)
- ❍ Strongly Agree (7)

Q15 I always check hotel reviews before making a decision.
- ❍ Strongly Disagree (1)
- ❍ Disagree (2)
- ❍ Somewhat Disagree (3)
- ❍ Neither Agree nor Disagree (4)
- ❍ Somewhat Agree (5)
- ❍ Agree (6)
- ❍ Strongly Agree (7)

Q16 I like to check product reviews before buying a digital camera.
- Strongly Disagree (1)
- Disagree (2)
- Somewhat Disagree (3)
- Neither Agree nor Disagree (4)
- Somewhat Agree (5)
- Agree (6)
- Strongly Agree (7)

Q17 I always check product reviews before buying a digital camera.
- Strongly Disagree (1)
- Disagree (2)
- Somewhat Disagree (3)
- Neither Agree nor Disagree (4)
- Somewhat Agree (5)
- Agree (6)
- Strongly Agree (7)

Q18 I like to check product review before buying a sunscreen product.
- Strongly Disagree (1)
- Disagree (2)
- Somewhat Disagree (3)
- Neither Agree nor Disagree (4)
- Somewhat Agree (5)
- Agree (6)
- Strongly Agree (7)

Q19 I always check product reviews before buying a sunscreen product.
- Strongly Agree (1)
- Agree (2)
- Somewhat Agree (3)
- Neither Agree nor Disagree (4)
- Somewhat Disagree (5)
- Disagree (6)
- Strongly Disagree (7)

APPENDIX B

Questionnaire for Pretest 2

The following questions ask you to judge two products against a series of descriptive scales according to how YOU perceive the product you will be shown. Please indicate your feelings about the product by clicking on the response that mostly describes your feelings.

1. Hotel is _____.

Important __ __ __ __ __ __ __ Unimportant
Irrelevant __ __ __ __ __ __ __ Relevant
Means a lot to me __ __ __ __ __ __ __ Means nothing to me
Valuable __ __ __ __ __ __ __ Worthless
Interesting __ __ __ __ __ __ __ Boring
Unexciting __ __ __ __ __ __ __ Exciting
Appealing __ __ __ __ __ __ __ Unappealing
Mundane __ __ __ __ __ __ __ Fascinating
Not needed __ __ __ __ __ __ __ Need
Involving__ __ __ __ __ __ __ Not involving

2. Digital Camera is _____.

Important __ __ __ __ __ __ __ Unimportant
Irrelevant __ __ __ __ __ __ __ Relevant
Means a lot to me __ __ __ __ __ __ __ Means nothing to me
Valuable __ __ __ __ __ __ __ Worthless
Interesting __ __ __ __ __ __ __ Boring
Unexciting __ __ __ __ __ __ __ Exciting
Appealing __ __ __ __ __ __ __ Unappealing
Mundane __ __ __ __ __ __ __ Fascinating
Not needed __ __ __ __ __ __ __ Need
Involving__ __ __ __ __ __ __ Not involving

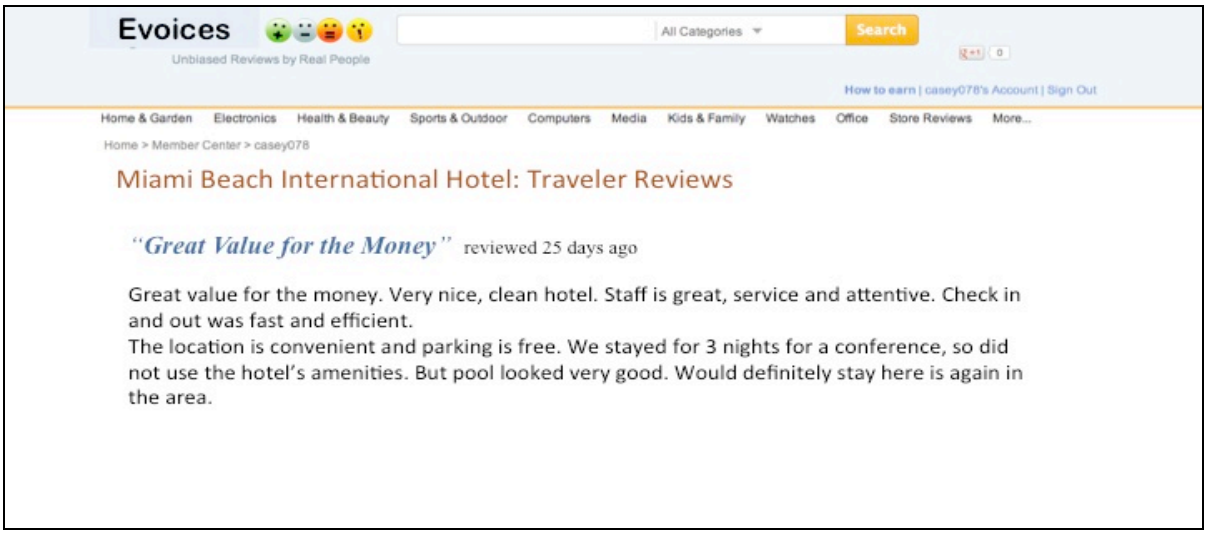
People sometimes check online product reviews before they make a purchase decision (e.g. Amazon, TripAdvisor). In this section, you will read some reviews from an online review website. Your opinion about these reviews will be asked in the following questions.

Please carefully read these reviews and evaluate each of them on an individual basis. On each of the scale below, please indicate your feelings about the reviews by clicking on the response that most closely describes your feelings.

The following reviews are given to the “Miami Beach International Hotel” by different consumers.

1. Please indicate your feelings about the above review by clicking on the response that most closely describes your feelings.

	Strongly Disagree	Disagree	Somewhat Disagree	Neither Agree nor Disagree	Somewhat Agree	Agree	Strongly Agree
This review was compelling.	❍	❍	❍	❍	❍	❍	❍
This review was well-supported.	❍	❍	❍	❍	❍	❍	❍
This review contained specific facts.	❍	❍	❍	❍	❍	❍	❍
This review contained detailed information.	❍	❍	❍	❍	❍	❍	❍
This review listed concrete examples.	❍	❍	❍	❍	❍	❍	❍
This review did not include detailed information.	❍	❍	❍	❍	❍	❍	❍



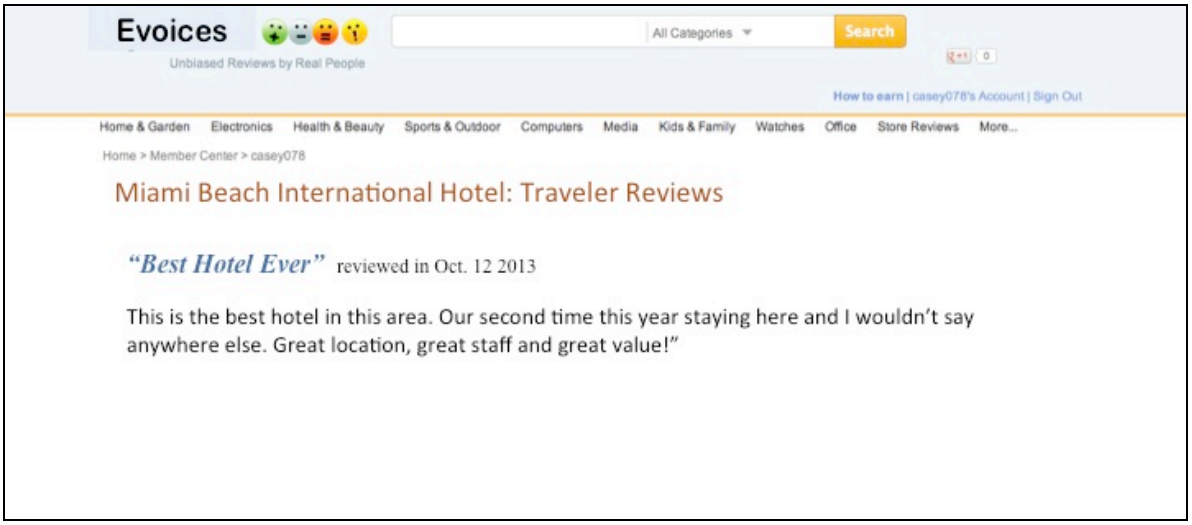
2. Please indicate your feelings about the above review by clicking on the response that most closely describes your feelings.

	Strongly Disagree	Disagree	Somewhat Disagree	Neither Agree nor Disagree	Somewhat Agree	Agree	Strongly Agree
This review was compelling.	❍	❍	❍	❍	❍	❍	❍
This review was well-supported.	❍	❍	❍	❍	❍	❍	❍
This review contained specific facts.	❍	❍	❍	❍	❍	❍	❍
This review contained detailed information.	❍	❍	❍	❍	❍	❍	❍
This review listed concrete examples.	❍	❍	❍	❍	❍	❍	❍
This review did not include detailed information.	❍	❍	❍	❍	❍	❍	❍

3.

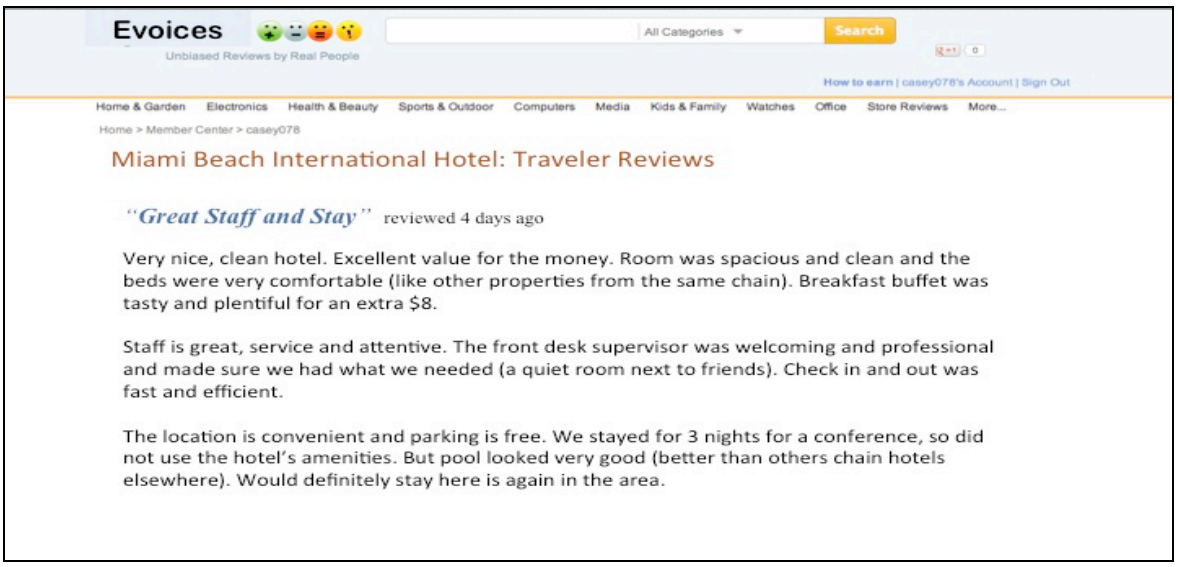
3. Please indicate your feelings about the above review by clicking on the response that most closely describes your feelings.

	Strongly Disagree	Disagree	Somewhat Disagree	Neither Agree nor Disagree	Somewhat Agree	Agree	Strongly Agree
This review was compelling.	❍	❍	❍	❍	❍	❍	❍
This review was well-supported.	❍	❍	❍	❍	❍	❍	❍
This review contained specific facts.	❍	❍	❍	❍	❍	❍	❍
This review contained detailed information.	❍	❍	❍	❍	❍	❍	❍
This review listed concrete examples.	❍	❍	❍	❍	❍	❍	❍
This review did not include detailed information.	❍	❍	❍	❍	❍	❍	❍



4. Please indicate your feelings about the above review by clicking on the response that most closely describes your feelings.

	Strongly Disagree	Disagree	Somewhat Disagree	Neither Agree nor Disagree	Somewhat Agree	Agree	Strongly Agree
This review was compelling.	❍	❍	❍	❍	❍	❍	❍
This review was well-supported.	❍	❍	❍	❍	❍	❍	❍
This review contained specific facts.	❍	❍	❍	❍	❍	❍	❍
This review contained detailed information.	❍	❍	❍	❍	❍	❍	❍
This review listed concrete examples.	❍	❍	❍	❍	❍	❍	❍
This review did not include detailed information.	❍	❍	❍	❍	❍	❍	❍



5. Please indicate your feelings about the above review by clicking on the response that most closely describes your feelings.

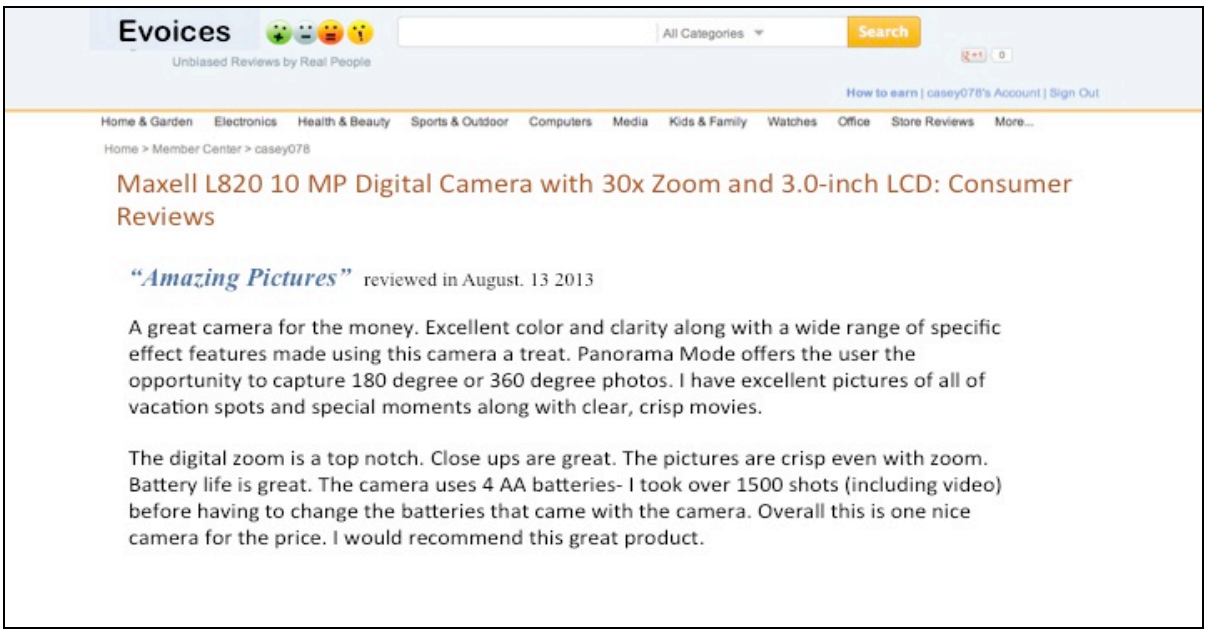
	Strongly Disagree	Disagree	Somewhat Disagree	Neither Agree nor Disagree	Somewhat Agree	Agree	Strongly Agree
This review was compelling.	❍	❍	❍	❍	❍	❍	❍
This review was well-supported.	❍	❍	❍	❍	❍	❍	❍
This review contained specific facts.	❍	❍	❍	❍	❍	❍	❍
This review contained detailed information.	❍	❍	❍	❍	❍	❍	❍
This review listed concrete examples.	❍	❍	❍	❍	❍	❍	❍
This review did not include detailed information.	❍	❍	❍	❍	❍	❍	❍

Please carefully read these reviews and evaluate each of them on an individual basis. On each of the scale below, please indicate your feelings about the reviews by clicking on the response that most closely describes your feelings.

The following reviews are given to the "Maxell L820 Digital Camera" by different consumers.

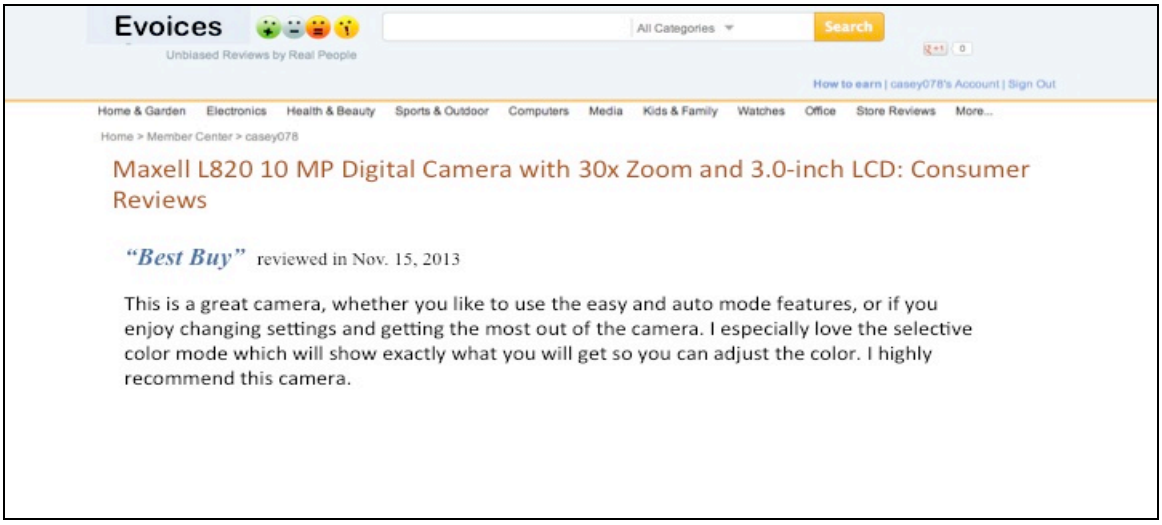
1. Please indicate your feelings about the above review by clicking on the response that most closely describes your feelings.

	Strongly Disagree	Disagree	Somewhat Disagree	Neither Agree nor Disagree	Somewhat Agree	Agree	Strongly Agree
This review was compelling.	❍	❍	❍	❍	❍	❍	❍
This review was well-supported.	❍	❍	❍	❍	❍	❍	❍
This review contained specific facts.	❍	❍	❍	❍	❍	❍	❍
This review contained detailed information.	❍	❍	❍	❍	❍	❍	❍
This review listed concrete examples.	❍	❍	❍	❍	❍	❍	❍
This review did not include detailed information.	❍	❍	❍	❍	❍	❍	❍



2. Please indicate your feelings about the above review by clicking on the response that most closely describes your feelings.

	Strongly Disagree	Disagree	Somewhat Disagree	Neither Agree nor Disagree	Somewhat Agree	Agree	Strongly Agree
This review was compelling.	❍	❍	❍	❍	❍	❍	❍
This review was well-supported.	❍	❍	❍	❍	❍	❍	❍
This review contained specific facts.	❍	❍	❍	❍	❍	❍	❍
This review contained detailed information.	❍	❍	❍	❍	❍	❍	❍
This review listed concrete examples.	❍	❍	❍	❍	❍	❍	❍
This review did not include detailed information.	❍	❍	❍	❍	❍	❍	❍

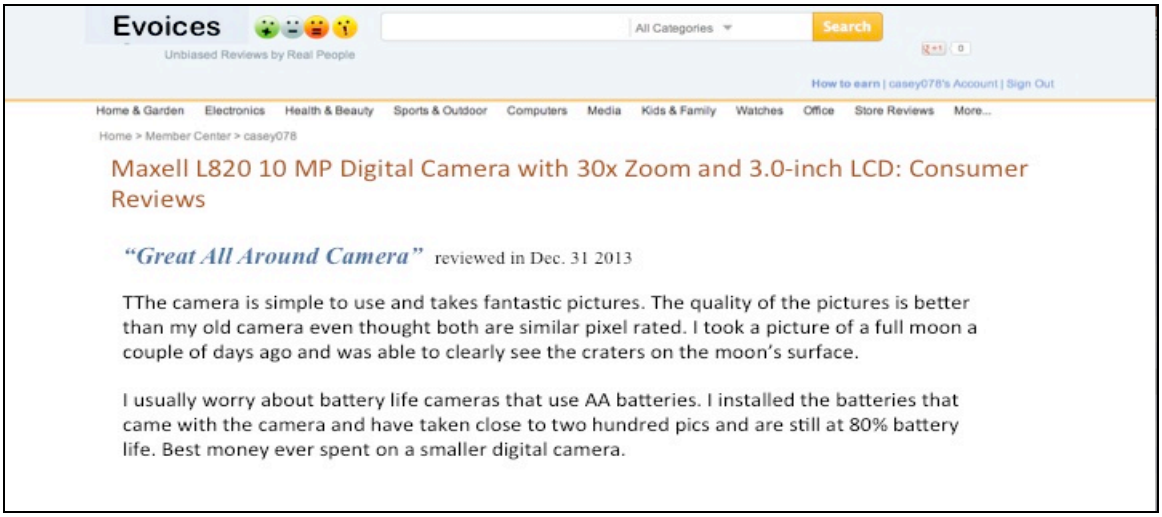


3. Please indicate your feelings about the above review by clicking on the response that most closely describes your feelings.

	Strongly Disagree	Disagree	Somewhat Disagree	Neither Agree nor Disagree	Somewhat Agree	Agree	Strongly Agree
This review was compelling.	❍	❍	❍	❍	❍	❍	❍
This review was well-supported.	❍	❍	❍	❍	❍	❍	❍
This review contained specific facts.	❍	❍	❍	❍	❍	❍	❍
This review contained detailed information.	❍	❍	❍	❍	❍	❍	❍
This review listed concrete examples.	❍	❍	❍	❍	❍	❍	❍
This review did not include detailed information.	❍	❍	❍	❍	❍	❍	❍

4. Please indicate your feelings about the above review by clicking on the response that most closely describes your feelings.

	Strongly Disagree	Disagree	Somewhat Disagree	Neither Agree nor Disagree	Somewhat Agree	Agree	Strongly Agree
This review was compelling.	❍	❍	❍	❍	❍	❍	❍
This review was well-supported.	❍	❍	❍	❍	❍	❍	❍
This review contained specific facts.	❍	❍	❍	❍	❍	❍	❍
This review contained detailed information.	❍	❍	❍	❍	❍	❍	❍
This review listed concrete examples.	❍	❍	❍	❍	❍	❍	❍
This review did not include detailed information.	❍	❍	❍	❍	❍	❍	❍



5. Please indicate your feelings about the above review by clicking on the response that most closely describes your feelings.

	Strongly Disagree	Disagree	Somewhat Disagree	Neither Agree nor Disagree	Somewhat Agree	Agree	Strongly Agree
This review was compelling.	❍	❍	❍	❍	❍	❍	❍
This review was well-supported.	❍	❍	❍	❍	❍	❍	❍
This review contained specific facts.	❍	❍	❍	❍	❍	❍	❍
This review contained detailed information.	❍	❍	❍	❍	❍	❍	❍
This review listed concrete examples.	❍	❍	❍	❍	❍	❍	❍
This review did not include detailed information.	❍	❍	❍	❍	❍	❍	❍

APPENDIX C

Questionnaire for Experiment 1

The following questions ask you to judge two products against a series of descriptive scales according to how YOU perceive the product you will be shown. Please indicate your feelings about the product by clicking on the response that best describes your feelings.

Q1. Selecting the right hotel is _____.

Important __ __ __ __ __ __ __ Unimportant
Irrelevant __ __ __ __ __ __ __ Relevant
Means a lot to me __ __ __ __ __ __ __ Means nothing to me
Valuable __ __ __ __ __ __ __ Worthless
Interesting __ __ __ __ __ __ __ Boring
Unexciting __ __ __ __ __ __ __ Exciting
Appealing __ __ __ __ __ __ __ Unappealing
Mundane __ __ __ __ __ __ __ Fascinating
Not needed __ __ __ __ __ __ __ Needed
Involving __ __ __ __ __ __ __ Not involving

Q2. Selecting the right digital camera is _____.

Important __ __ __ __ __ __ __ Unimportant
Irrelevant __ __ __ __ __ __ __ Relevant
Means a lot to me __ __ __ __ __ __ __ Means nothing to me
Valuable __ __ __ __ __ __ __ Worthless
Interesting __ __ __ __ __ __ __ Boring
Unexciting __ __ __ __ __ __ __ Exciting
Appealing __ __ __ __ __ __ __ Unappealing
Mundane __ __ __ __ __ __ __ Fascinating
Not needed __ __ __ __ __ __ __ Needed
Involving __ __ __ __ __ __ __ Not involving

Q3. The following questions ask your general tendency to be willing to trust others. Please indicate your feelings about the statements by clicking on the response that best describes your feelings. (The items are based on 7-point scale, 1= Strongly Disagree, 7=Strongly Agree, * = Reversed)

a. In general, people really do care about the well-being of others.
b. The typical person is sincerely concerned about the problems of others.
c. Most of the time, people care enough to try to be helpful, rather than just looking out for themselves.
d. * In general, most folks don't keep their promises.
e. I think people generally try to back up their words with their actions.
f. Most people are honest in their dealings with others.

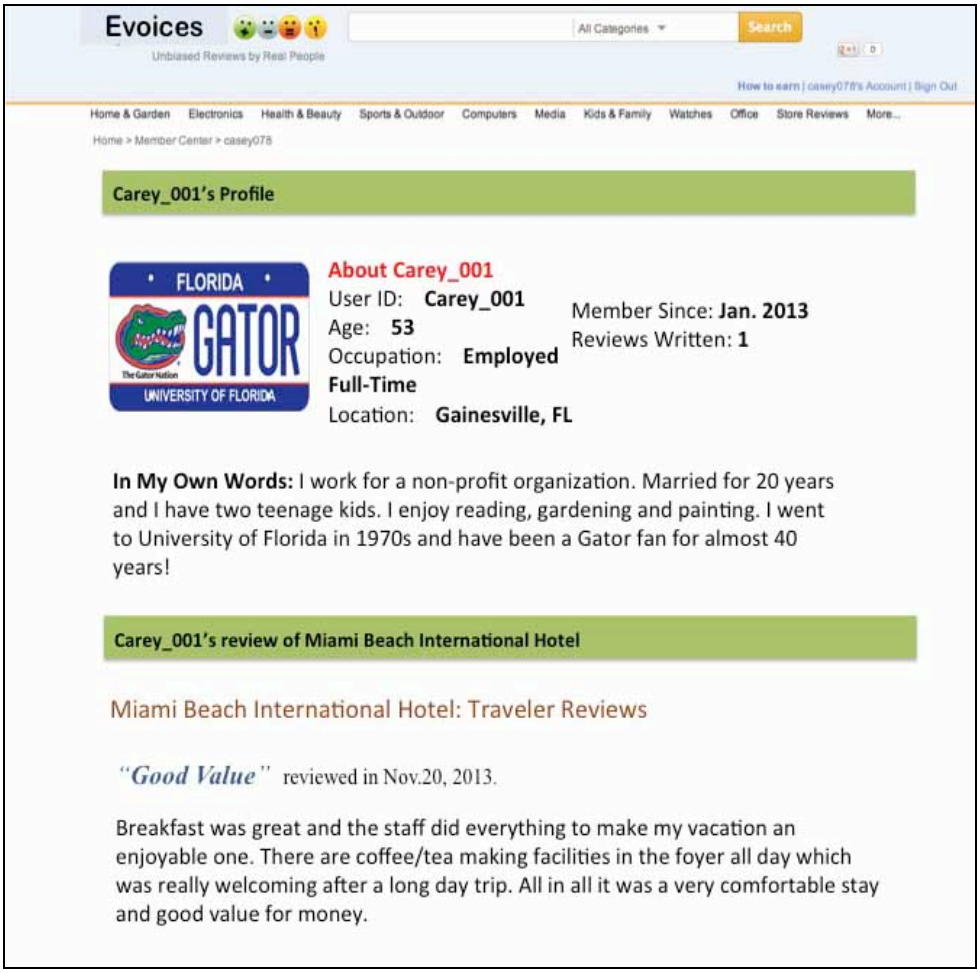
Q4. The following questions ask to what extent that you identify with **your college peers** at the University of Georgia. Please indicate your feelings by clicking on the response that best describes your feelings. (The items are based on 7-point scale, 1= Strongly Disagree, 7=Strongly Agree)

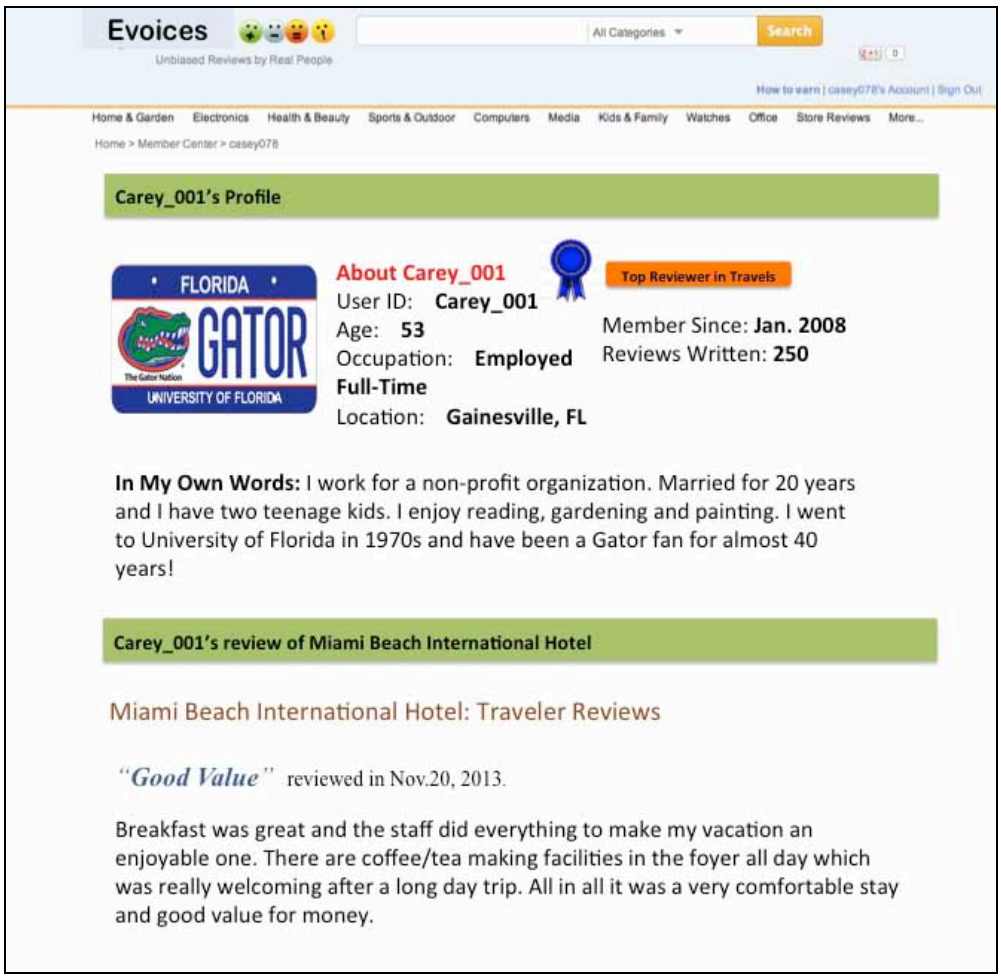
a. I identify with my college peers at UGA.
b. My attitudes and beliefs are similar to my college peers at UGA.
c. I feel strong bonds to my college peers at UGA.
d. My college peers at UGA are important to my sense of who I am.

People sometimes check online product reviews before they make a purchase decision (e.g. Amazon, TripAdvisor). In this section you will read some reviews from an online review website. Your opinions about these reviews will be asked in the questions that follow.

The following review is about the "Miami Beach International Hotel". Please carefully read ALL information in this review.

[Participants will be randomly assigned to one of the four reviews]

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Carey_001's Profile
FLORIDA
GATOR
The Gator Nation
UNIVERSITY OF FLORIDA
About Carey_001
User ID: Carey_001
Age: 53
Occupation: Employed Full-Time
Location: Gainesville, FL
Top Reviewer in Travels
Member Since: Jan. 2008
Reviews Written: 250
In My Own Words: I work for a non-profit organization. Married for 20 years and I have two teenage kids. I enjoy reading, gardening and painting. I went to University of Florida in 1970s and have been a Gator fan for almost 40 years!
Carey_001's review of Miami Beach International Hotel
Miami Beach International Hotel: Traveler Reviews
"Good Value" reviewed in Nov.20, 2013.
Breakfast was great and the staff did everything to make my vacation an enjoyable one. There are coffee/tea making facilities in the foyer all day which was really welcoming after a long day trip. All in all it was a very comfortable stay and good value for money.

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Kris_093's Profile

About Kris_093

User ID: **Kris_093**
Age: **21**
Occupation: **Student**
Location: **Athens, GA**

Member Since: **Jan. 2013**
Reviews Written: **1**

In My Own Words: Currently a junior in the "Bulldog Nation", I enjoy hanging out with my friends downtown during weekends and tailgating before the home games. I am from Atlanta and seek internships during summer breaks.

Kris_093's review of Miami Beach International Hotel

Miami Beach International Hotel: Traveler Reviews

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User ID: **Kris_093**
Age: **21**
Occupation: **Student**
Location: **Athens, GA**

Top Reviewer in Travels

Member Since: **Jan. 2008**
Reviews Written: **250**

In My Own Words: Currently a junior in the "Bulldog Nation", I enjoy hanging out with my friends downtown during weekends and tailgating before the home games. I am from Atlanta and seek internships during summer breaks.

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Miami Beach International Hotel: Traveler Reviews

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Breakfast was great and the staff did everything to make my vacation an enjoyable one. There are coffee/tea making facilities in the foyer all day which was really welcoming after a long day trip. All in all it was a very comfortable stay and good value for money.

Q5. Please indicate your feelings about the review you just read by clicking on the response that best describes your feelings.
The person who wrote this review _____

is like me __ __ __ __ __ __ __ is unlike me
is different from me __ __ __ __ __ __ __ is similar to me
thinks like me __ __ __ __ __ __ __ does not think like me
doesn't behave like me __ __ __ __ __ __ __ behaves like me
has status like me __ __ __ __ __ __ __ has status different from me
is from a different social class __ __ __ __ __ __ __ is from the same social class
is culturally different __ __ __ __ __ __ __ is culturally similar
has an economic situation like mine __ __ __ __ __ __ __ does not have an economic situation like mine

Q6. (1= Strongly Disagree, 7= Strongly Agree)
a. This reviewer has a high ranking on the review website.
b. This reviewer is a prominent member of the review website.

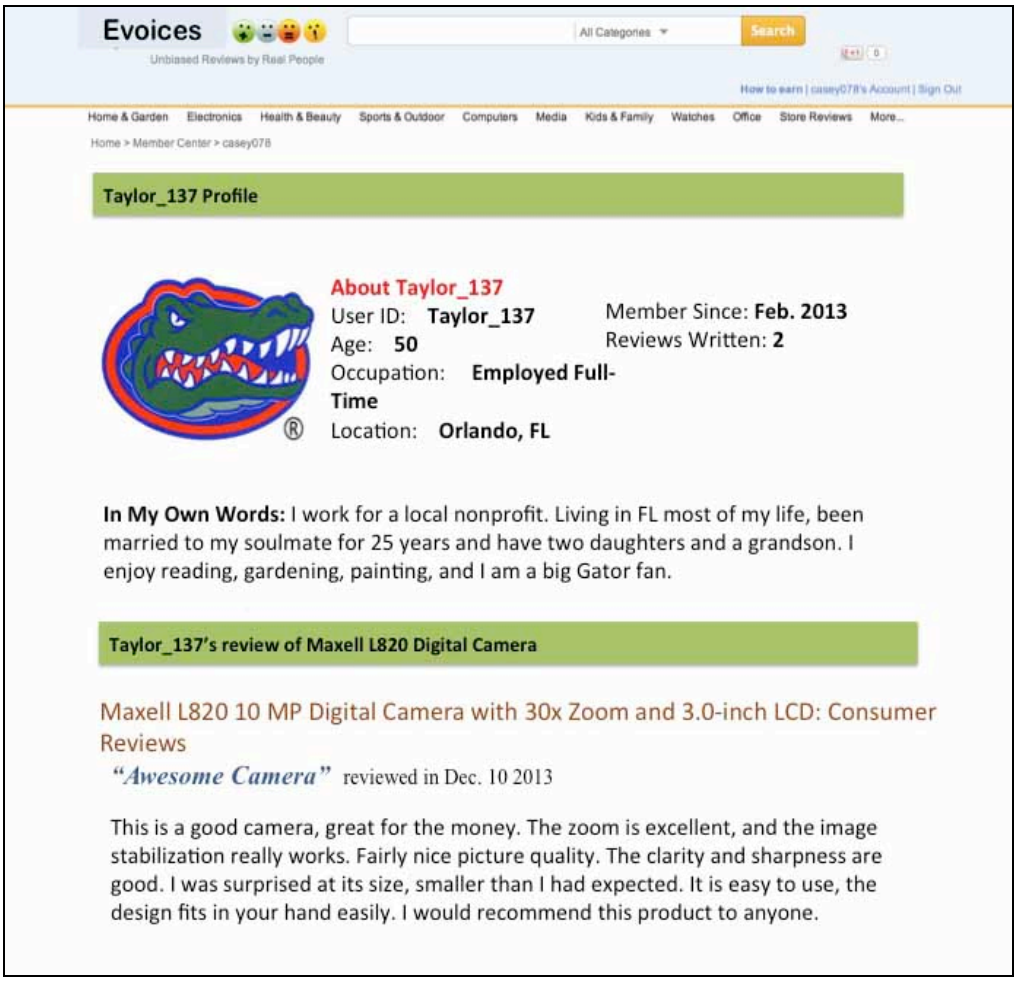
Q7. The person who wrote this review is _____. (* = Reversed)

Dependable __ __ __ __ __ __ __Undependable
Dishonest __ __ __ __ __ __ __ Honest *
Reliable __ __ __ __ __ __ __ Unreliable
Sincere __ __ __ __ __ __ __Insincere
Trustworthy __ __ __ __ __ __ __Untrustworthy
Not an expert __ __ __ __ __ __ __Expert *
Experienced __ __ __ __ __ __ __Inexperienced
Unknowledgeable __ __ __ __ __ __ __Knowledge *
Unqualified __ __ __ __ __ __ __Qualified *
Skilled __ __ __ __ __ __ __Unskilled

Q8. a. I am willing to rely on this review when making purchase-related decisions.
b. I am willing to make important purchase-related decisions based on this review.
c. I am not willing to consider this review when making purchase-related decisions. *
d. I am willing to recommend the product in this review to my friends or family. (1= Strongly Disagree, 7= Strongly Agree)

The following review is about the "Maxell L820 Digital Camera". Please carefully read ALL the information in this review.

[Participants will be randomly assigned to one of the four reviews, then they will be asked the duplicated questions from Q5 to Q8]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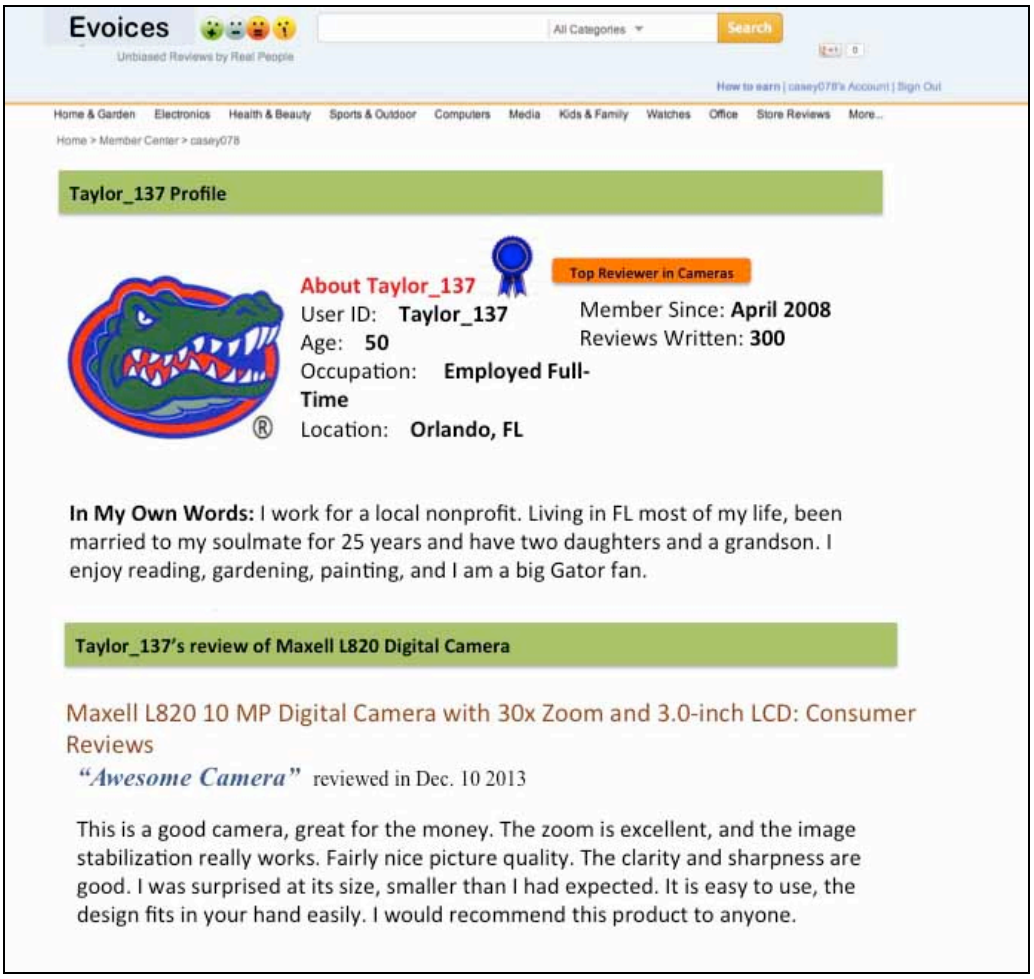
Taylor_137 Profile
About Taylor_137
User ID: Taylor_137
Age: 50
Occupation: Employed Full-Time
Location: Orlando, FL
Member Since: Feb. 2013
Reviews Written: 2
In My Own Words: I work for a local nonprofit. Living in FL most of my life, been married to my soulmate for 25 years and have two daughters and a grandson. I enjoy reading, gardening, painting, and I am a big Gator fan.
Taylor_137's review of Maxell L820 Digital Camera
Maxell L820 10 MP Digital Camera with 30x Zoom and 3.0-inch LCD: Consumer Reviews
"Awesome Camera" reviewed in Dec. 10 2013
This is a good camera, great for the money. The zoom is excellent, and the image stabilization really works. Fairly nice picture quality. The clarity and sharpness are good. I was surprised at its size, smaller than I had expected. It is easy to use, the design fits in your hand easily. I would recommend this product to anyone.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Taylor_137 Profile
About Taylor_137
Top Reviewer in Cameras
User ID: Taylor_137
Age: 50
Occupation: Employed Full-Time
Location: Orlando, FL
Member Since: April 2008
Reviews Written: 300
In My Own Words: I work for a local nonprofit. Living in FL most of my life, been married to my soulmate for 25 years and have two daughters and a grandson. I enjoy reading, gardening, painting, and I am a big Gator fan.
Taylor_137's review of Maxell L820 Digital Camera
Maxell L820 10 MP Digital Camera with 30x Zoom and 3.0-inch LCD: Consumer Reviews
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Kris_078's Profile

About Kris_078

User ID: **Kris_078**
Age: **23**
Occupation: **Student**
Location: **Athens, GA**

Member Since: **Feb. 2013**
Reviews Written: **2**

In My Own Words: I was born in Georgia, spent most of my time in and around Atlanta. I enjoy music, parties, and going to live concerts. As a recent college grad, my favorite memory at Georgia has been the last home game. Go Dwags!

Kris_078's review of Maxell L820 Digital Camera

Maxell L820 10 MP Digital Camera with 30x Zoom and 3.0-inch LCD: Consumer Reviews

"Awesome Camera" reviewed in Dec. 10 2013

This is a good camera, great for the money. The zoom is excellent, and the image stabilization really works. Fairly nice picture quality. The clarity and sharpness are good. I was surprised at its size, smaller than I had expected. It is easy to use, the design fits in your hand easily. I would recommend this product to anyone.

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Kris_078's Profile

About Kris_078

User ID: **Kris_078**
Age: **23**
Occupation: **Student**
Location: **Athens, GA**

Top Reviewer in Cameras

Member Since: **April. 2008**
Reviews Written: **300**

In My Own Words: I was born in Georgia, spent most of my time in and around Atlanta. I enjoy music, parties, and going to live concerts. As a recent college grad, my favorite memory at Georgia has been the last home game. Go Dwags!

Kris_078's review of Maxell L820 Digital Camera

Maxell L820 10 MP Digital Camera with 30x Zoom and 3.0-inch LCD: Consumer Reviews

"Awesome Camera" reviewed in Dec. 10 2013

This is a good camera, great for the money. The zoom is excellent, and the image stabilization really works. Fairly nice picture quality. The clarity and sharpness are good. I was surprised at its size, smaller than I had expected. It is easy to use, the design fits in your hand easily. I would recommend this product to anyone.

APPENDIX D

Questionnaire for Experiment 2

The following questions ask you to judge two products against a series of descriptive scales according to how YOU perceive the product you will be shown. Please indicate your feelings about the product by clicking on the response that best describes your feelings.

Q1. Selecting the right hotel is _____.

Important __ __ __ __ __ __ __ Unimportant
Irrelevant __ __ __ __ __ __ __ Relevant
Means a lot to me __ __ __ __ __ __ __ Means nothing to me
Valuable __ __ __ __ __ __ __ Worthless
Interesting __ __ __ __ __ __ __ Boring
Unexciting __ __ __ __ __ __ __ Exciting
Appealing __ __ __ __ __ __ __ Unappealing
Mundane __ __ __ __ __ __ __ Fascinating
Not needed __ __ __ __ __ __ __ Needed
Involving __ __ __ __ __ __ __ Not involving

Q2. Selecting the right digital camera is _____.

Important __ __ __ __ __ __ __ Unimportant
Irrelevant __ __ __ __ __ __ __ Relevant
Means a lot to me __ __ __ __ __ __ __ Means nothing to me
Valuable __ __ __ __ __ __ __ Worthless
Interesting __ __ __ __ __ __ __ Boring
Unexciting __ __ __ __ __ __ __ Exciting
Appealing __ __ __ __ __ __ __ Unappealing
Mundane __ __ __ __ __ __ __ Fascinating
Not needed __ __ __ __ __ __ __ Needed
Involving __ __ __ __ __ __ __ Not involving

Q3. The following questions ask your general tendency to be willing to trust others. Please indicate your feelings about the statements by clicking on the response that best describes your feelings. (The items are based on 7-point scale, 1= Strongly Disagree, 7=Strongly Agree, * = Reversed)

a. In general, people really do care about the well-being of others.
b. The typical person is sincerely concerned about the problems of others.
c. Most of the time, people care enough to try to be helpful, rather than just looking out for themselves.
d. * In general, most folks don't keep their promises.
e. I think people generally try to back up their words with their actions.
f. Most people are honest in their dealings with others.

Q4. The following questions ask to what extent that you identify with **your college peers** at the University of Georgia. Please indicate your feelings by clicking on the response that best

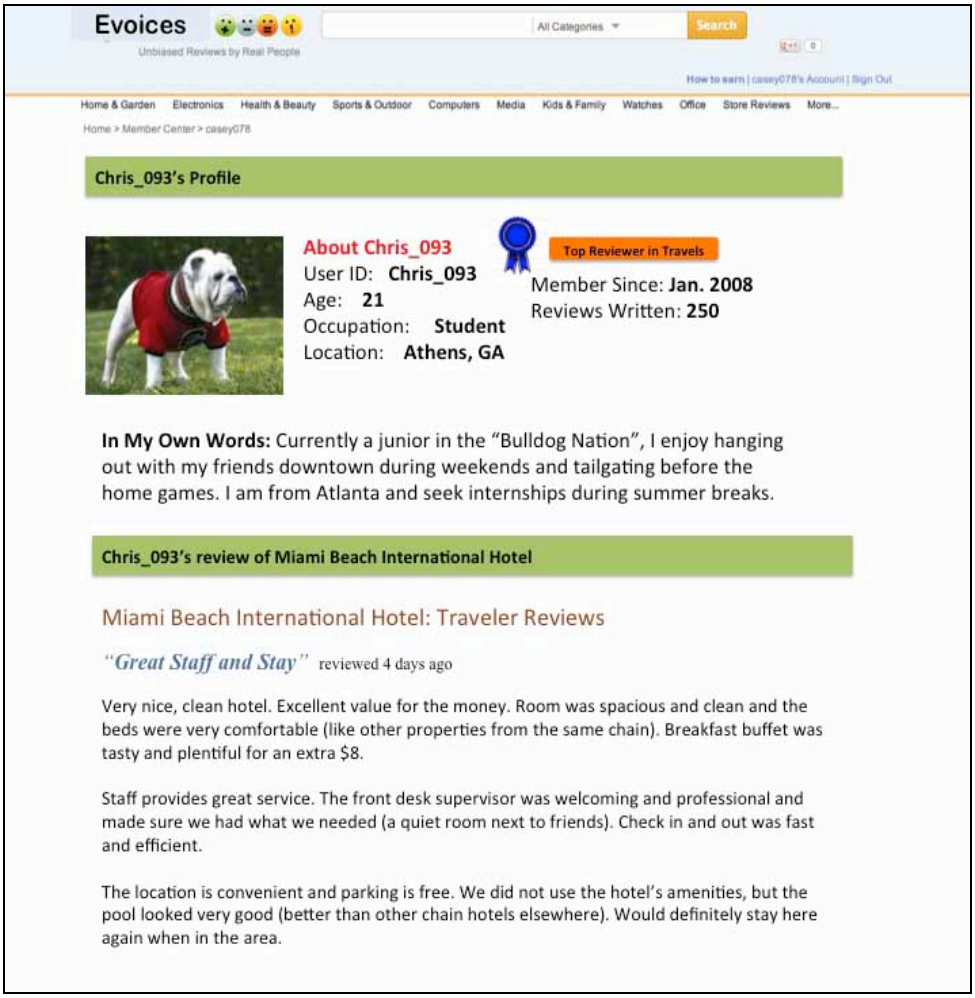
describes your feelings. (The items are based on 7-point scale, 1= Strongly Disagree, 7=Strongly Agree)

a. I identify with my college peers at UGA.
b. My attitudes and beliefs are similar to my college peers at UGA.
c. I feel strong bonds to my college peers at UGA.
d. My college peers at UGA are important to my sense of who I am.

People sometimes check online product reviews before they make a purchase decision (e.g. Amazon, TripAdvisor). In this section you will read some reviews from an online review website. Your opinions about these reviews will be asked in the questions that follow.

The following review is about the "Miami Beach International Hotel". Please carefully read ALL information in this review.

[Participants will be randomly assigned to one of the eight reviews]



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Chris_093's Profile

About Chris_093

User ID: **Chris_093**
Age: **21**
Occupation: **Student**
Location: **Athens, GA**

Top Reviewer in Travels

Member Since: **Jan. 2008**
Reviews Written: **250**

In My Own Words: Currently a junior in the "Bulldog Nation", I enjoy hanging out with my friends downtown during weekends and tailgating before the home games. I am from Atlanta and seek internships during summer breaks.

Chris_093's review of Miami Beach International Hotel

Miami Beach International Hotel: Traveler Reviews

"Great Value for the Money" reviewed 25 days ago

Great value for the money. Very nice, clean hotel. Staff provides great service. Check in and out was fast and efficient.

The location is convenient and parking is free. We did not use the hotel's amenities, but the pool looked very good. Would definitely stay here again when in the area.

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Chris_093's Profile

About Chris_093

User ID: **Kris_093**
Age: **21**
Occupation: **Student**
Location: **Athens, GA**

Member Since: **Jan. 2013**
Reviews Written: **1**

In My Own Words: Currently a junior in the "Bulldog Nation", I enjoy hanging out with my friends downtown during weekends and tailgating before the home games. I am from Atlanta and seek internships during summer breaks.

Chris_093's review of Miami Beach International Hotel

Miami Beach International Hotel: Traveler Reviews

"Great Staff and Stay" reviewed 4 days ago

Very nice, clean hotel. Excellent value for the money. Room was spacious and clean and the beds were very comfortable (like other properties from the same chain). Breakfast buffet was tasty and plentiful for an extra $8.

Staff provides great service. The front desk supervisor was welcoming and professional and made sure we had what we needed (a quiet room next to friends). Check in and out was fast and efficient.

The location is convenient and parking is free. We did not use the hotel's amenities, but the pool looked very good (better than other chain hotels elsewhere). Would definitely stay here again when in the area.

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Chris_093's Profile

About Chris_093

User ID: **Kris_093**
Age: **21**
Occupation: **Student**
Location: **Athens, GA**

Member Since: **Jan. 2013**
Reviews Written: **1**

In My Own Words: Currently a junior in the "Bulldog Nation", I enjoy hanging out with my friends downtown during weekends and tailgating before the home games. I am from Atlanta and seek internships during summer breaks.

Chris_093's review of Miami Beach International Hotel

Miami Beach International Hotel: Traveler Reviews

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Great value for the money. Very nice, clean hotel. Staff provides great service. Check in and out was fast and efficient.

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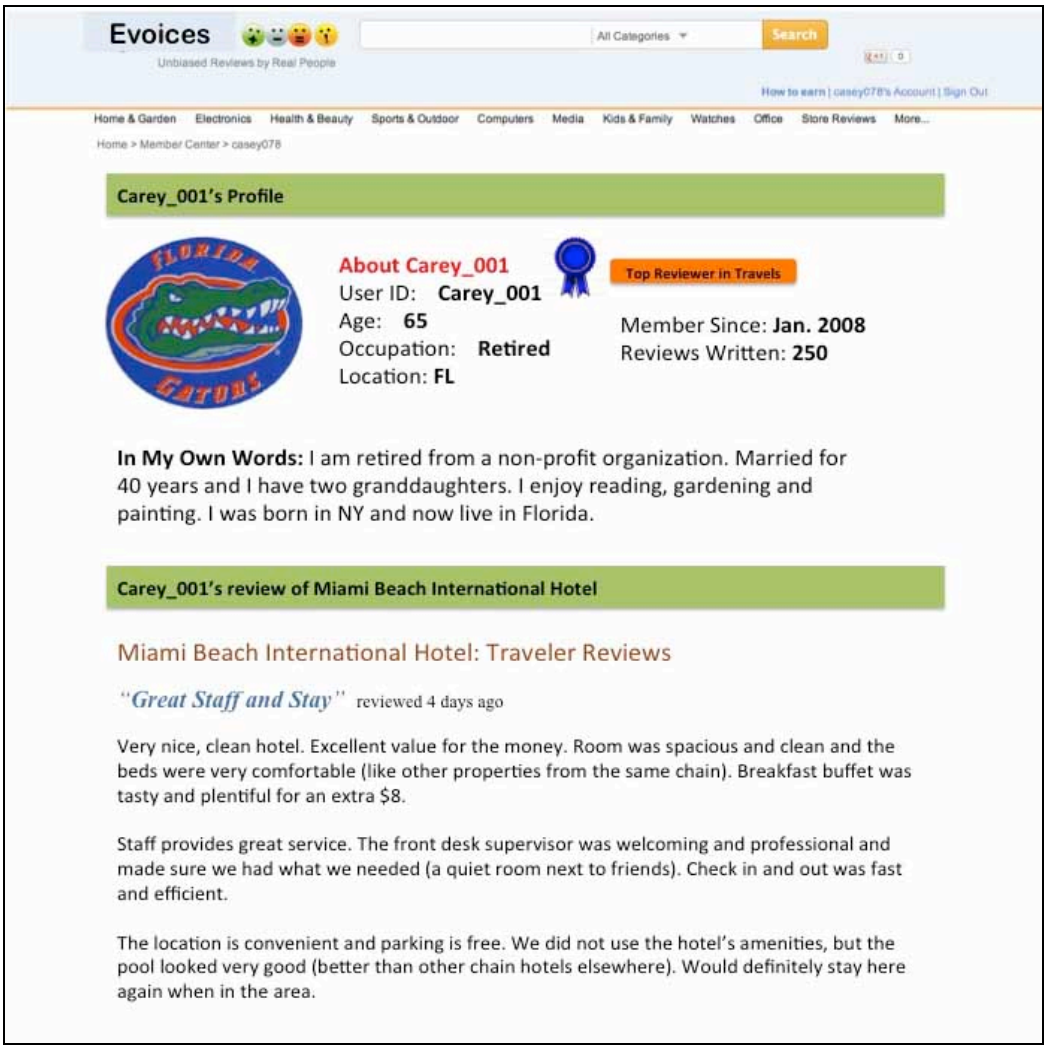
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Carey_001's Profile
About Carey_001
User ID: Carey_001
Age: 65
Occupation: Retired
Location: FL
Top Reviewer in Travels
Member Since: Jan. 2008
Reviews Written: 250
In My Own Words: I am retired from a non-profit organization. Married for 40 years and I have two granddaughters. I enjoy reading, gardening and painting. I was born in NY and now live in Florida.
Carey_001's review of Miami Beach International Hotel
Miami Beach International Hotel: Traveler Reviews
"Great Staff and Stay" reviewed 4 days ago
Very nice, clean hotel. Excellent value for the money. Room was spacious and clean and the beds were very comfortable (like other properties from the same chain). Breakfast buffet was tasty and plentiful for an extra $8.
Staff provides great service. The front desk supervisor was welcoming and professional and made sure we had what we needed (a quiet room next to friends). Check in and out was fast and efficient.
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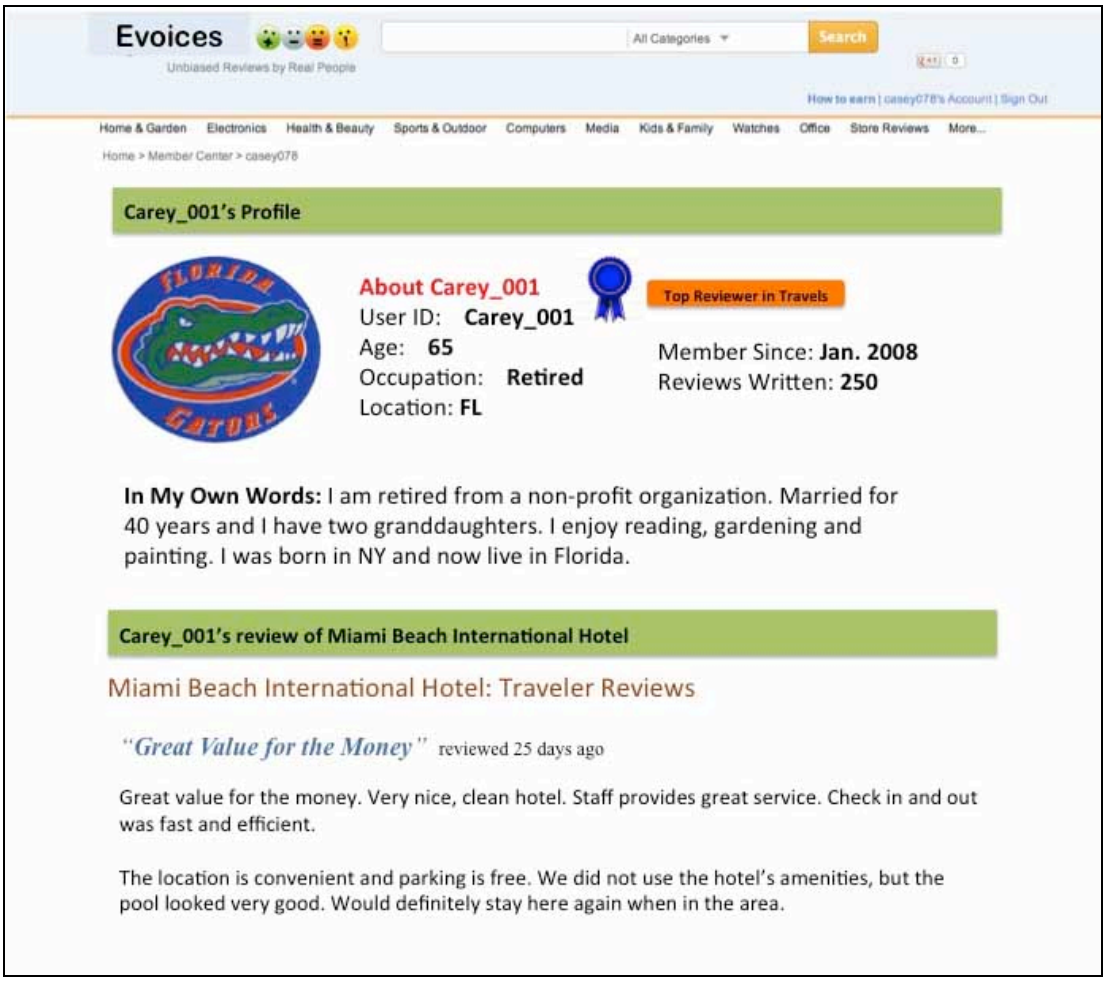
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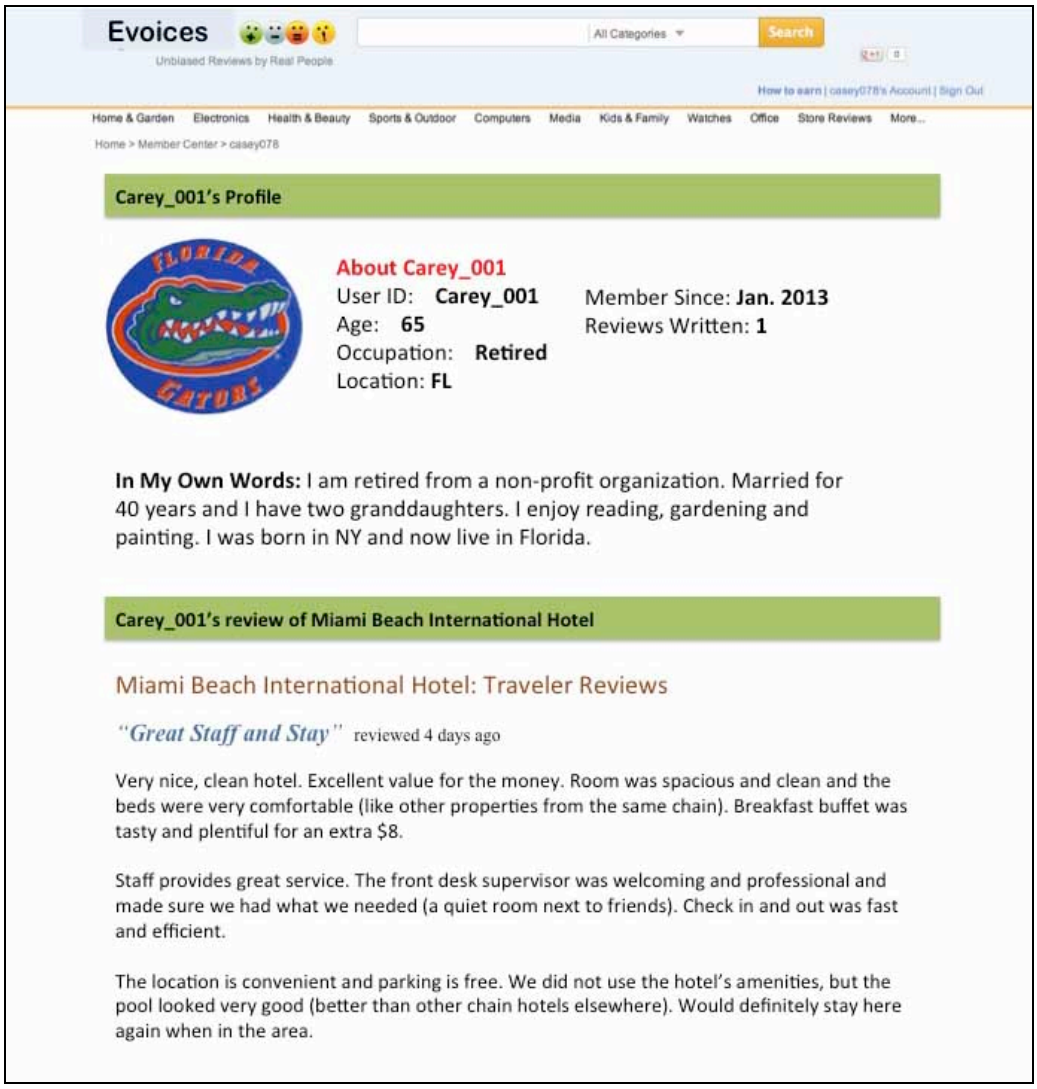
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Age: 65
Occupation: Retired
Location: FL
Member Since: Jan. 2013
Reviews Written: 1
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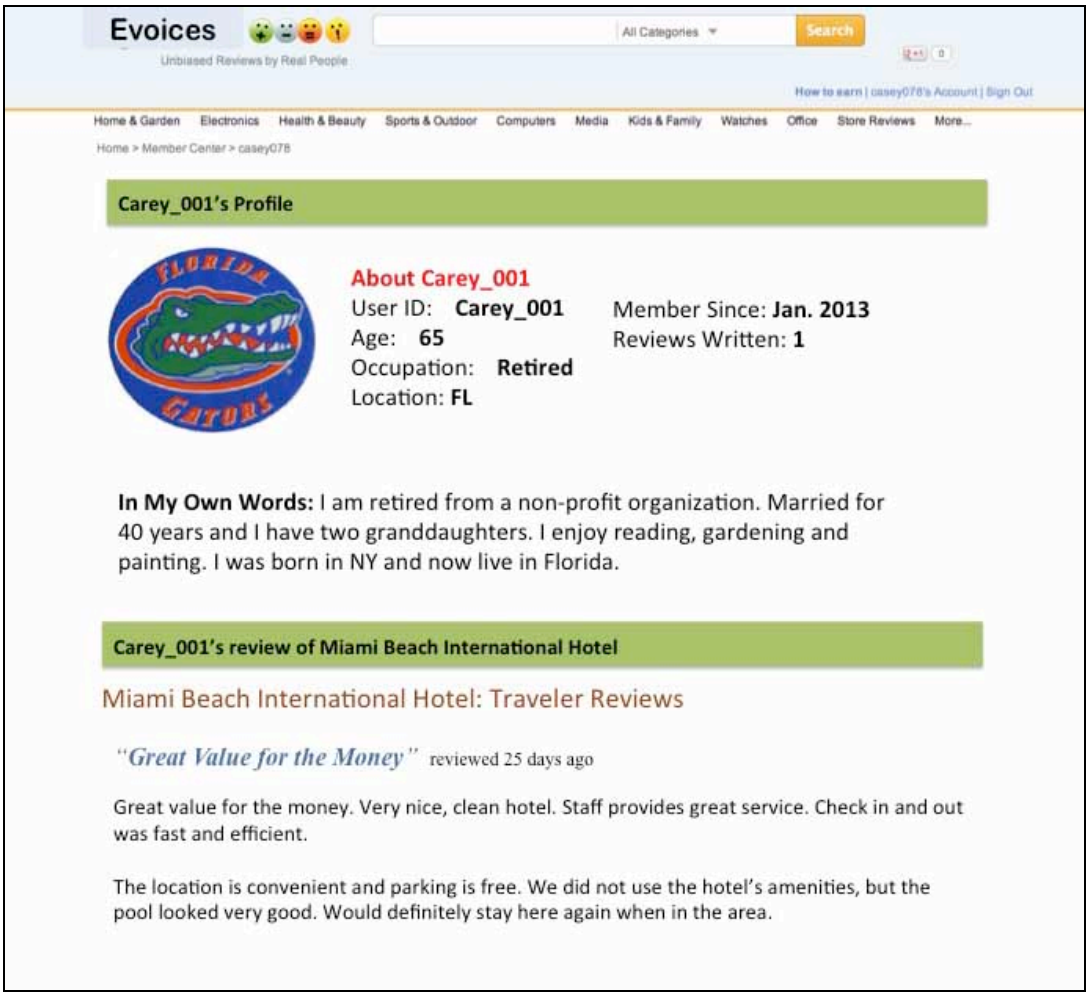
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Q5. Please indicate your feelings about the review you just read by clicking on the response that best describes your feelings.
The person who wrote this review _____

is like me __ __ __ __ __ __ __ is unlike me
is different from me __ __ __ __ __ __ __ is similar to me
thinks like me __ __ __ __ __ __ __ does not think like me
doesn't behave like me __ __ __ __ __ __ __ behaves like me
has status like me __ __ __ __ __ __ __ has status different from me
is from a different social class __ __ __ __ __ __ __ is from the same social class
is culturally different __ __ __ __ __ __ __ is culturally similar
has an economic situation like mine __ __ __ __ __ __ __ does not have an economic situation like mine

Q6. (1= Strongly Disagree, 7= Strongly Agree)
a. This reviewer has a high ranking on the review website.
b. This reviewer is a prominent member of the review website.

Q7. The person who wrote this review is _____. (* = Reversed)

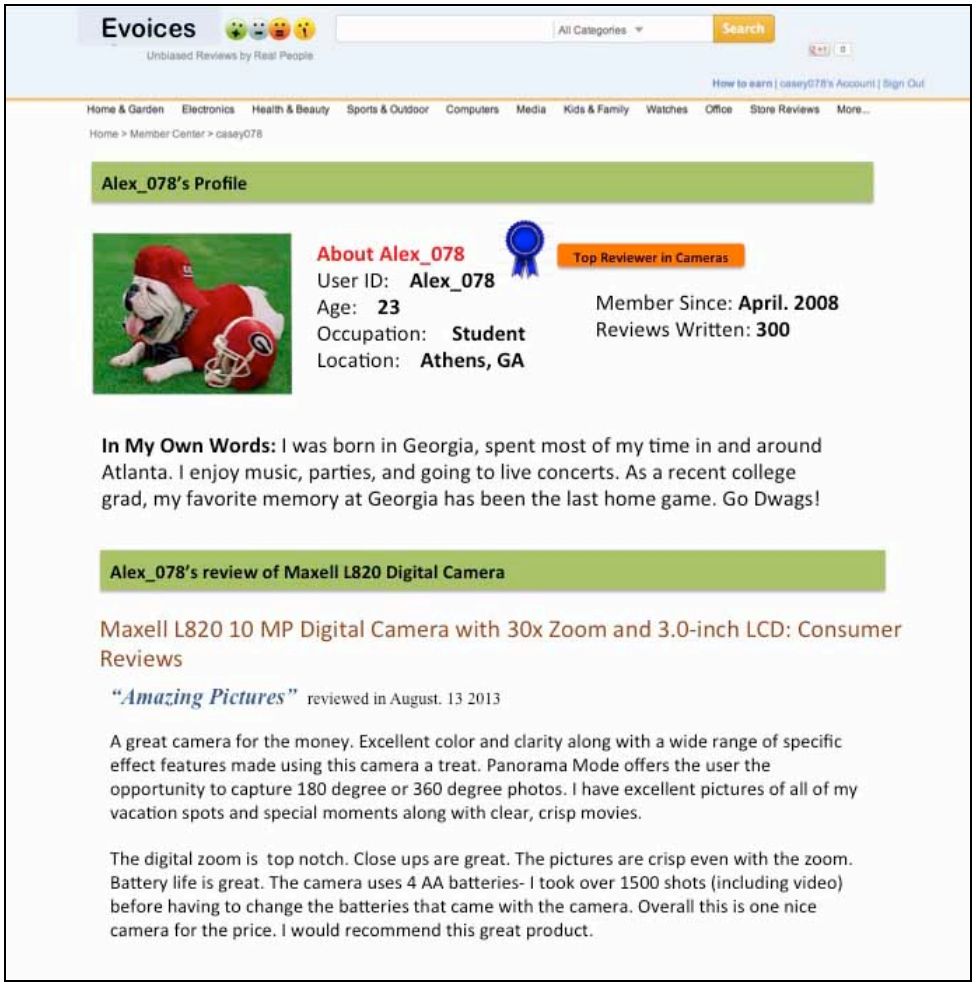
Dependable __ __ __ __ __ __ __Undependable
Dishonest __ __ __ __ __ __ __ Honest *
Reliable __ __ __ __ __ __ __ Unreliable
Sincere __ __ __ __ __ __ __Insincere
Trustworthy __ __ __ __ __ __ __Untrustworthy
Not an expert __ __ __ __ __ __ __Expert *
Experienced __ __ __ __ __ __ __Inexperienced
Unknowledgeable __ __ __ __ __ __ __Knowledge *
Unqualified __ __ __ __ __ __ __Qualified *
Skilled __ __ __ __ __ __ __Unskilled

Q8. (1= Strongly Disagree, 7= Strongly Agree)
a. This review was compelling.
b. This review was well-supported.
c. This review contained specific facts.
d. This review contained detailed information.
e. This review listed concrete examples.
f. This review did not include detailed information.

Q9. a. I am willing to rely on this review when making purchase-related decisions.
b. I am willing to make important purchase-related decisions based on this review.
c. I am not willing to consider this review when making purchase-related decisions. *
d. I am willing to recommend the product in this review to my friends or family. (1= Strongly Disagree, 7= Strongly Agree)

The following review is about the "Maxell L820 Digital Camera". Please carefully read ALL the information in this review.

[Participants will be randomly assigned to one of the eight reviews, then they will be asked the duplicated questions from Q5 to Q9]



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Alex_078's Profile

About Alex_078

User ID: **Alex_078**
Age: **23**
Occupation: **Student**
Location: **Athens, GA**

Top Reviewer in Cameras

Member Since: **April. 2008**
Reviews Written: **300**

In My Own Words: I was born in Georgia, spent most of my time in and around Atlanta. I enjoy music, parties, and going to live concerts. As a recent college grad, my favorite memory at Georgia has been the last home game. Go Dwags!

Alex_078's review of Maxell L820 Digital Camera

Maxell L820 10 MP Digital Camera with 30x Zoom and 3.0-inch LCD: Consumer Reviews

"Great Camera" reviewed in June. 24 2013

This camera price was a good, and the camera offerings and functionality are really good. The digital zoom is top notch. Close-ups are great. The camera offers a wide variety of custom settings. Battery life is great. I would recommend it to family and friends without hesitation.

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Alex_078's Profile

About Alex_078

User ID: **Alex_078**
Age: **23**
Occupation: **Student**
Location: **Athens, GA**

Member Since: **Feb. 2013**
Reviews Written: **2**

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Maxell L820 10 MP Digital Camera with 30x Zoom and 3.0-inch LCD: Consumer Reviews

"Amazing Pictures" reviewed in August. 13 2013

A great camera for the money. Excellent color and clarity along with a wide range of specific effect features made using this camera a treat. Panorama Mode offers the user the opportunity to capture 180 degree or 360 degree photos. I have excellent pictures of all of my vacation spots and special moments along with clear, crisp movies.

The digital zoom is top notch. Close ups are great. The pictures are crisp even with the zoom. Battery life is great. The camera uses 4 AA batteries- I took over 1500 shots (including video) before having to change the batteries that came with the camera. Overall this is one nice camera for the price. I would recommend this great product.

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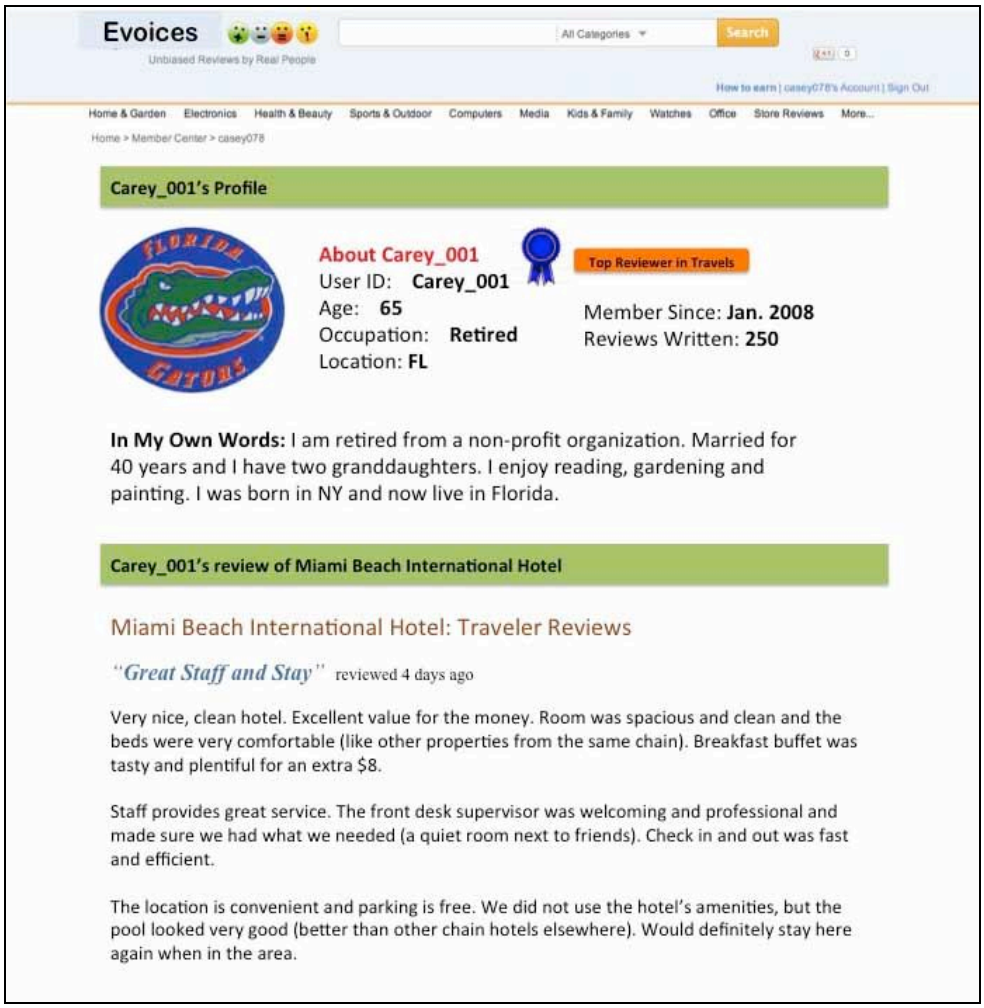
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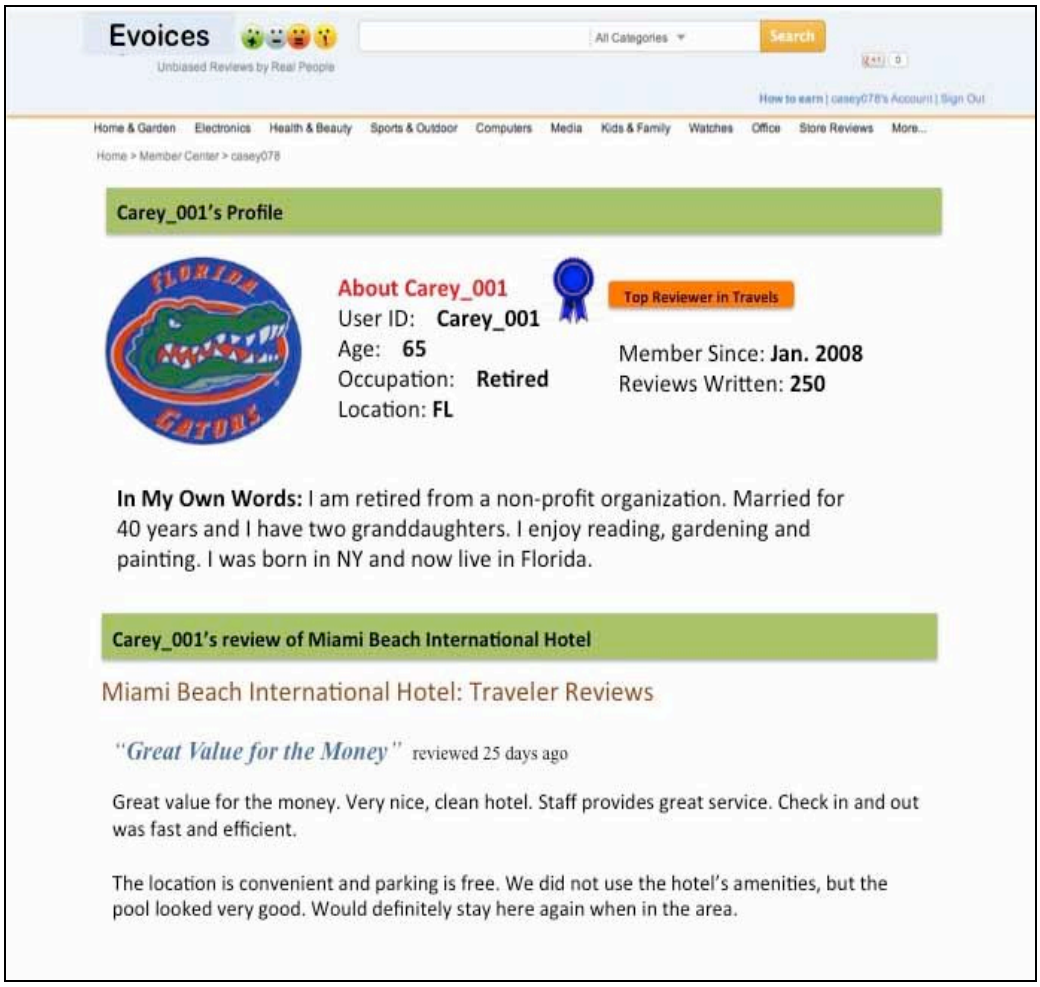
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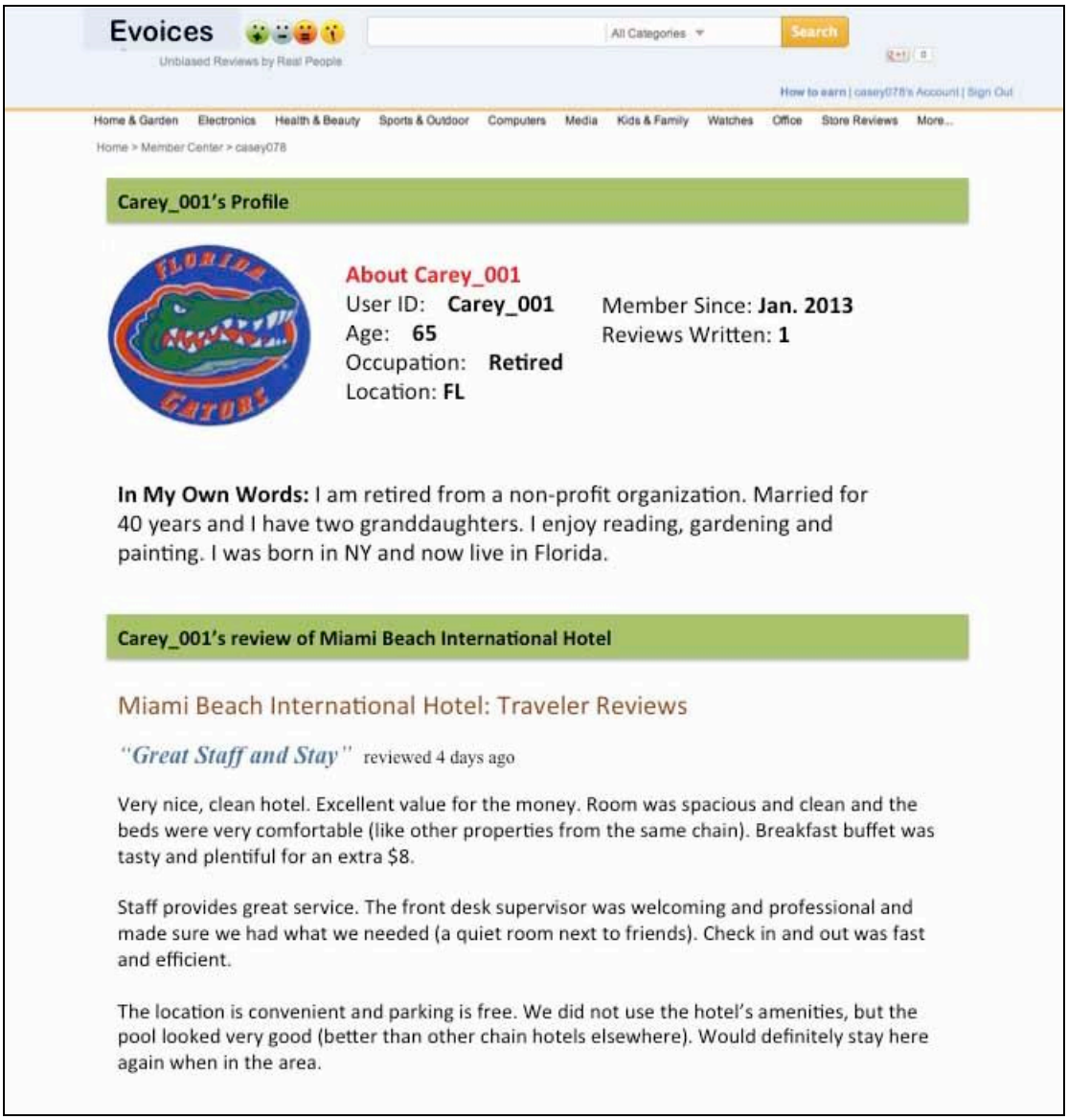
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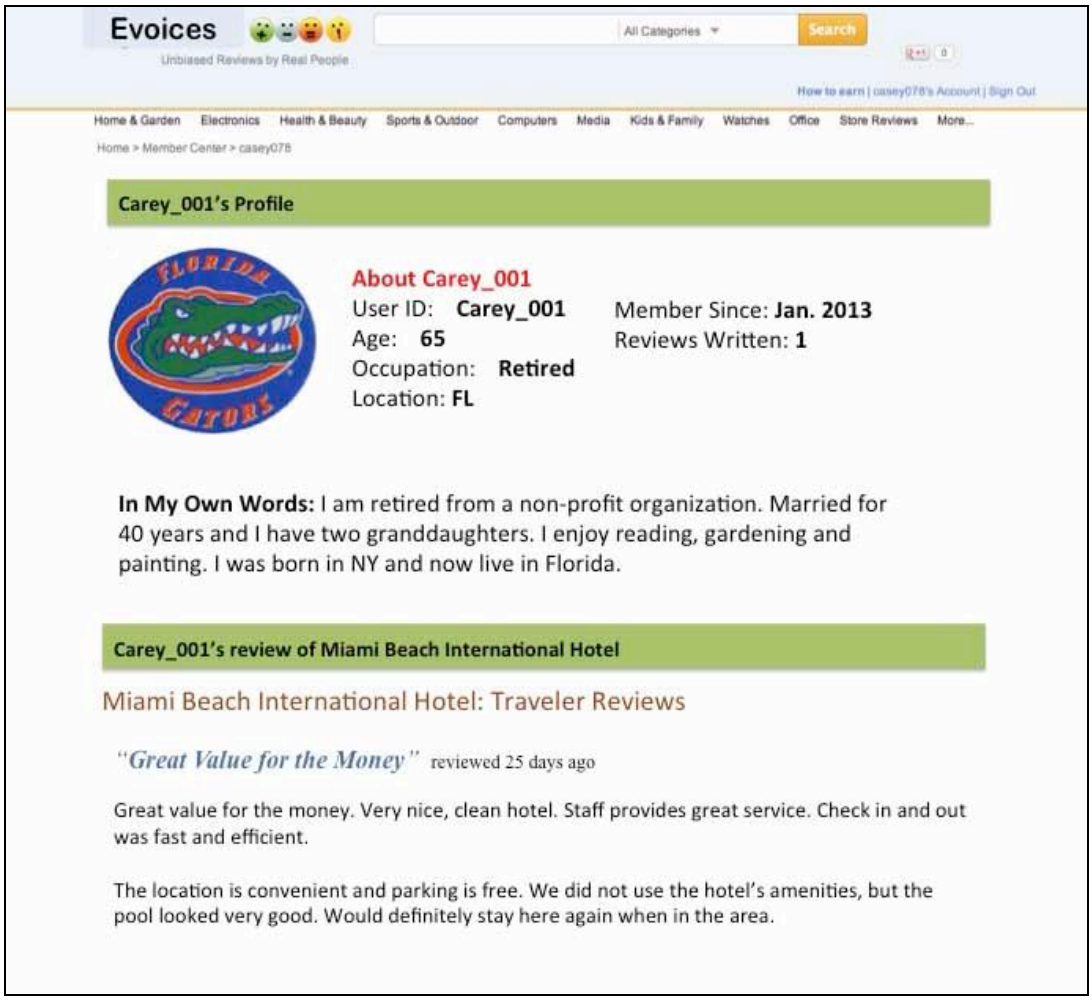
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APPENDIX E

Questionnaire for Experiment 3

The following questions ask you to judge two products against a series of descriptive scales according to how YOU perceive the product you will be shown. Please indicate your feelings about the product by clicking on the response that best describes your feelings.

Q1. Selecting the right hotel is _____.

Important __ __ __ __ __ __ __ Unimportant
Irrelevant __ __ __ __ __ __ __ Relevant
Means a lot to me __ __ __ __ __ __ __ Means nothing to me
Valuable __ __ __ __ __ __ __ Worthless
Interesting __ __ __ __ __ __ __ Boring
Unexciting __ __ __ __ __ __ __ Exciting
Appealing __ __ __ __ __ __ __ Unappealing
Mundane __ __ __ __ __ __ __ Fascinating
Not needed __ __ __ __ __ __ __ Needed
Involving __ __ __ __ __ __ __ Not involving

Q2. Selecting the right digital camera is _____.

Important __ __ __ __ __ __ __ Unimportant
Irrelevant __ __ __ __ __ __ __ Relevant
Means a lot to me __ __ __ __ __ __ __ Means nothing to me
Valuable __ __ __ __ __ __ __ Worthless
Interesting __ __ __ __ __ __ __ Boring
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Appealing __ __ __ __ __ __ __ Unappealing
Mundane __ __ __ __ __ __ __ Fascinating
Not needed __ __ __ __ __ __ __ Needed
Involving __ __ __ __ __ __ __ Not involving

Q3. The following questions ask your general tendency to be willing to trust others. Please indicate your feelings about the statements by clicking on the response that best describes your feelings. (The items are based on 7-point scale, 1= Strongly Disagree, 7=Strongly Agree, * = Reversed)

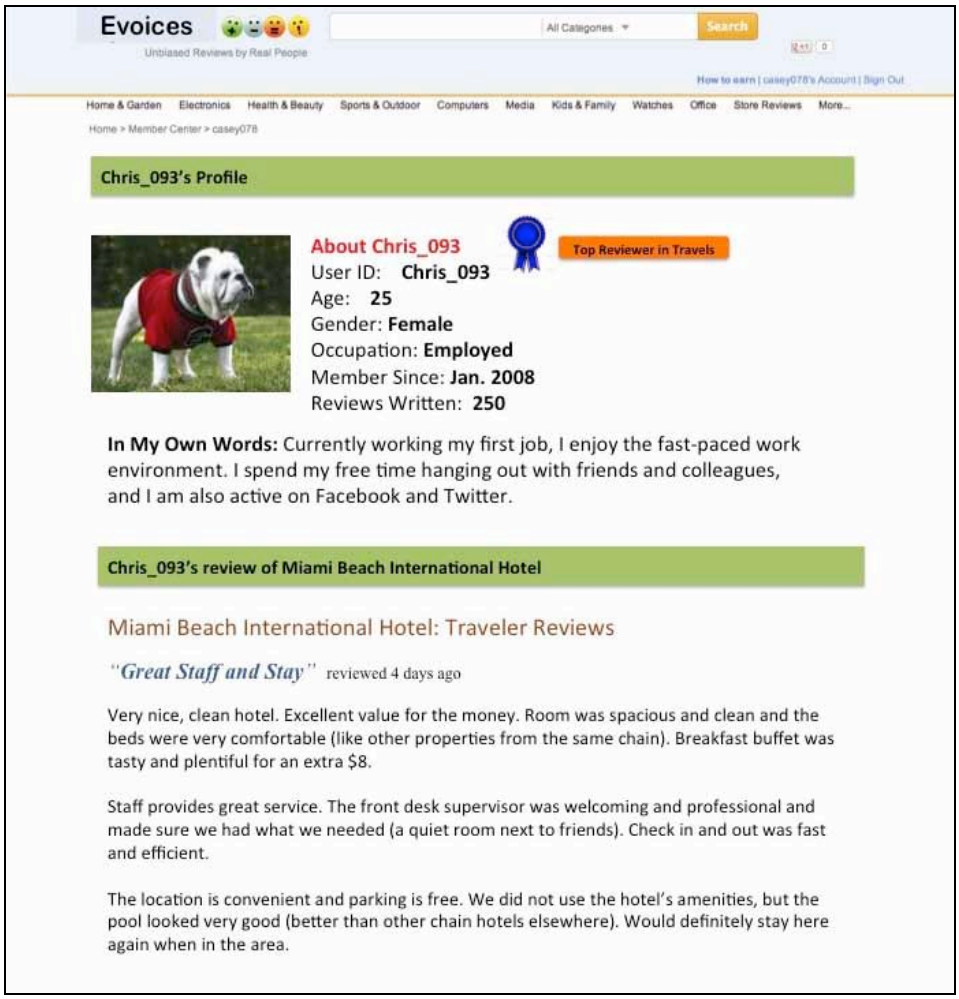
a. In general, people really do care about the well-being of others.
b. The typical person is sincerely concerned about the problems of others.
c. Most of the time, people care enough to try to be helpful, rather than just looking out for themselves.
d. * In general, most folks don't keep their promises.
e. I think people generally try to back up their words with their actions.
f. Most people are honest in their dealings with others.

People sometimes check online product reviews before they make a purchase decision (e.g. Amazon, TripAdvisor). In this section you will read some reviews from an online review website. Your opinions about these reviews will be asked in the questions that follow.

The following review is about the "Miami Beach International Hotel". Please carefully read ALL information in this review.

[Participants will be randomly assigned to one of the eight reviews]

For female participants



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Chris_093's Profile

About Chris_093

User ID: **Chris_093**
Age: **25**
Gender: **Female**
Occupation: **Employed**
Member Since: **Jan. 2008**
Reviews Written: **250**

Top Reviewer in Travels

In My Own Words: Currently working my first job, I enjoy the fast-paced work environment. I spend my free time hanging out with friends and colleagues, and I am also active on Facebook and Twitter.

Chris_093's review of Miami Beach International Hotel

Miami Beach International Hotel: Traveler Reviews

"Great Value for the Money" reviewed 25 days ago

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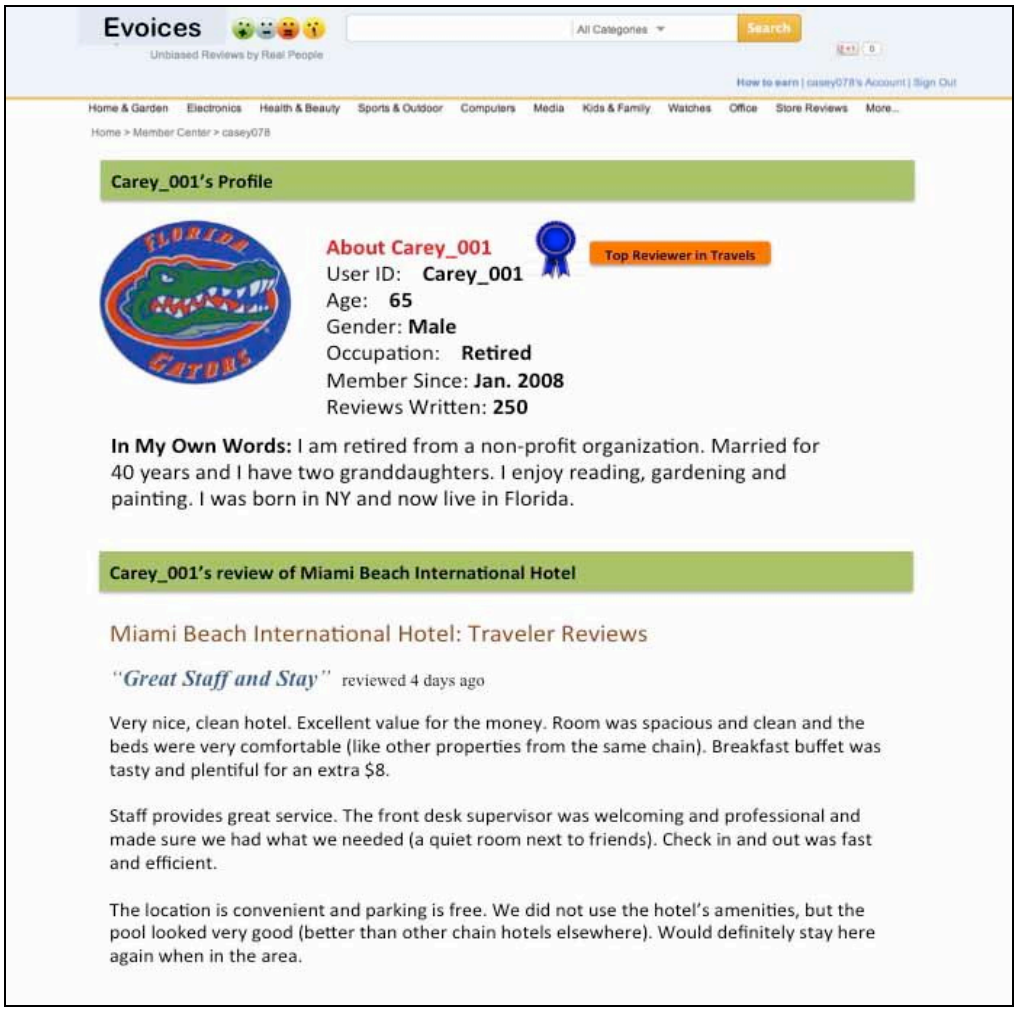
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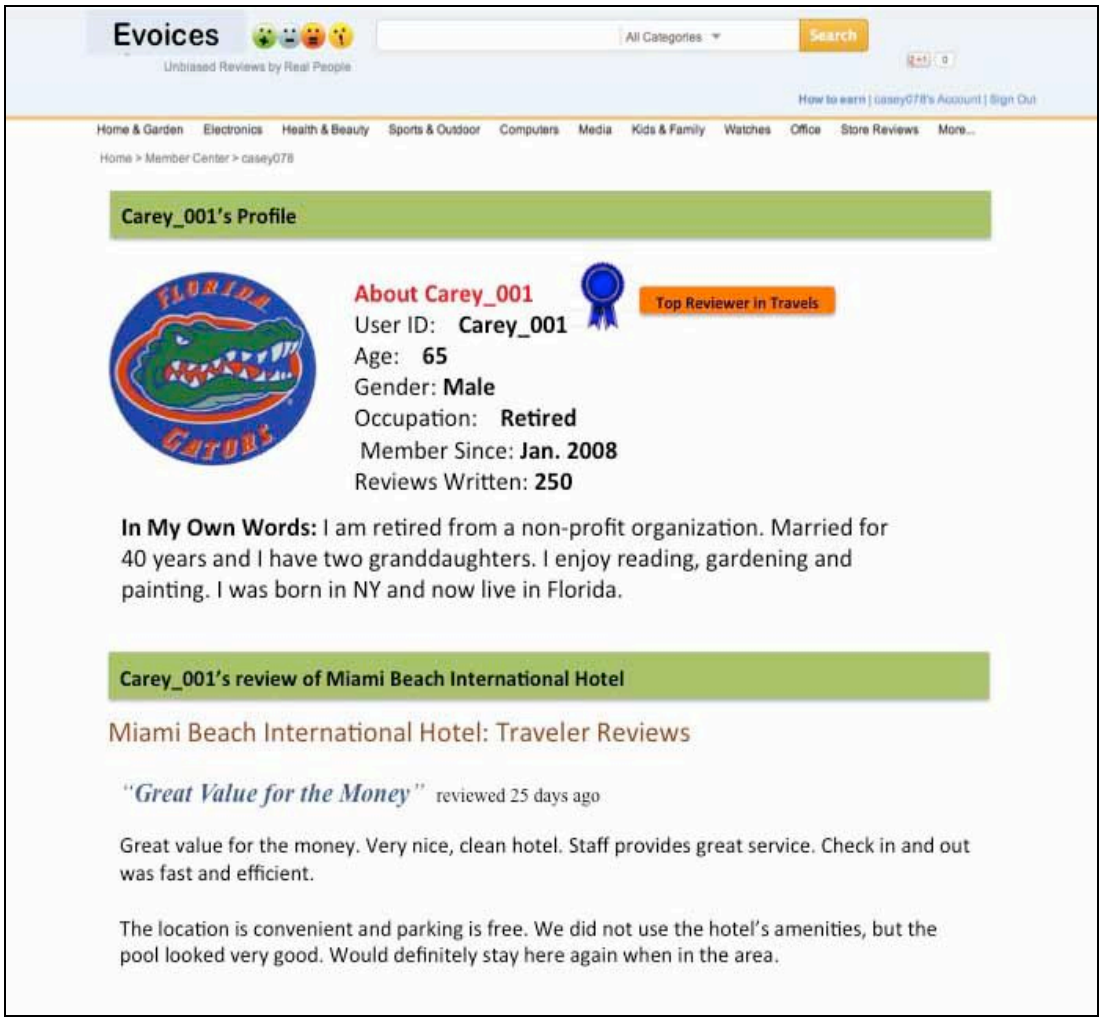
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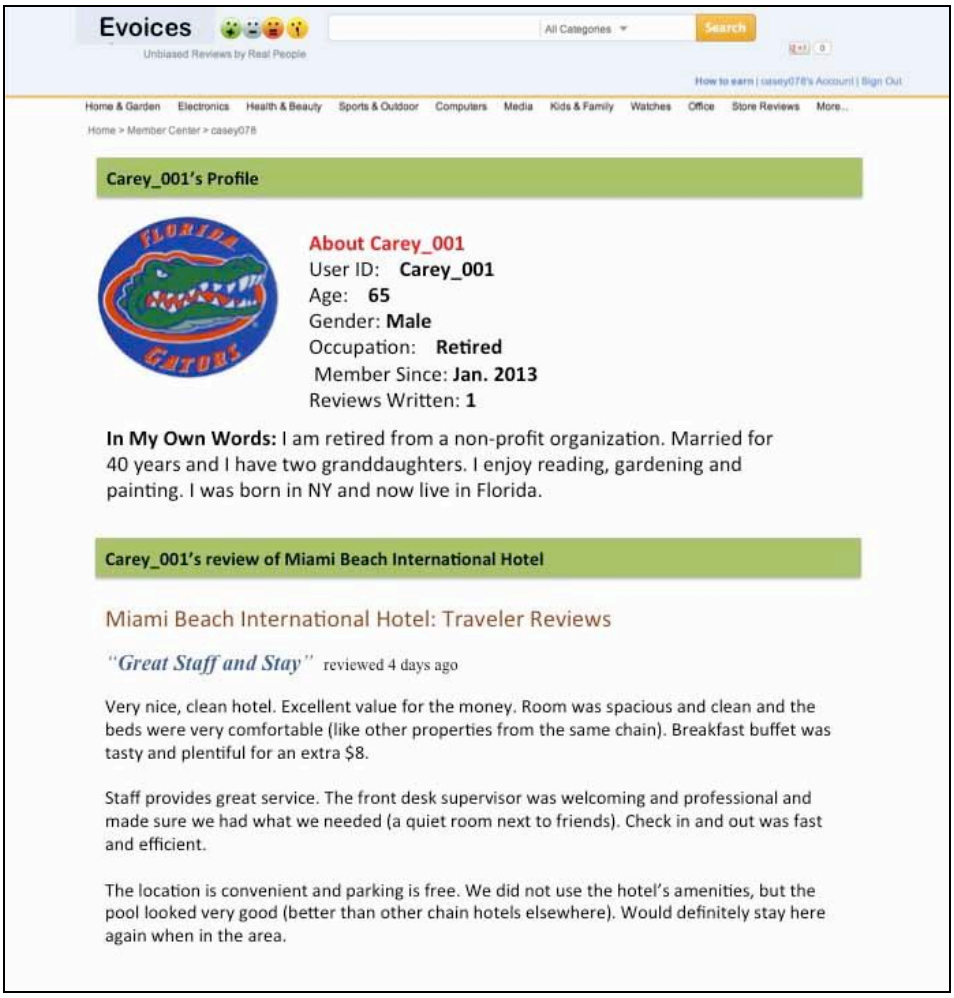
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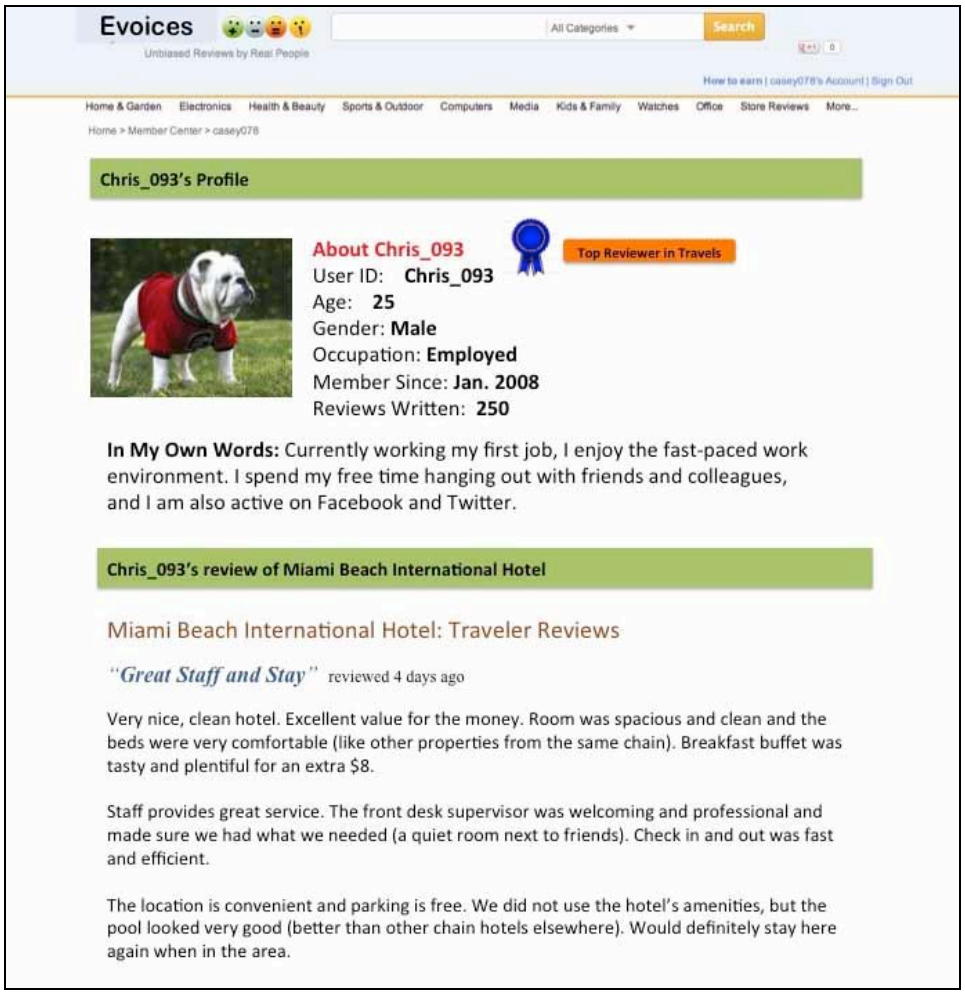

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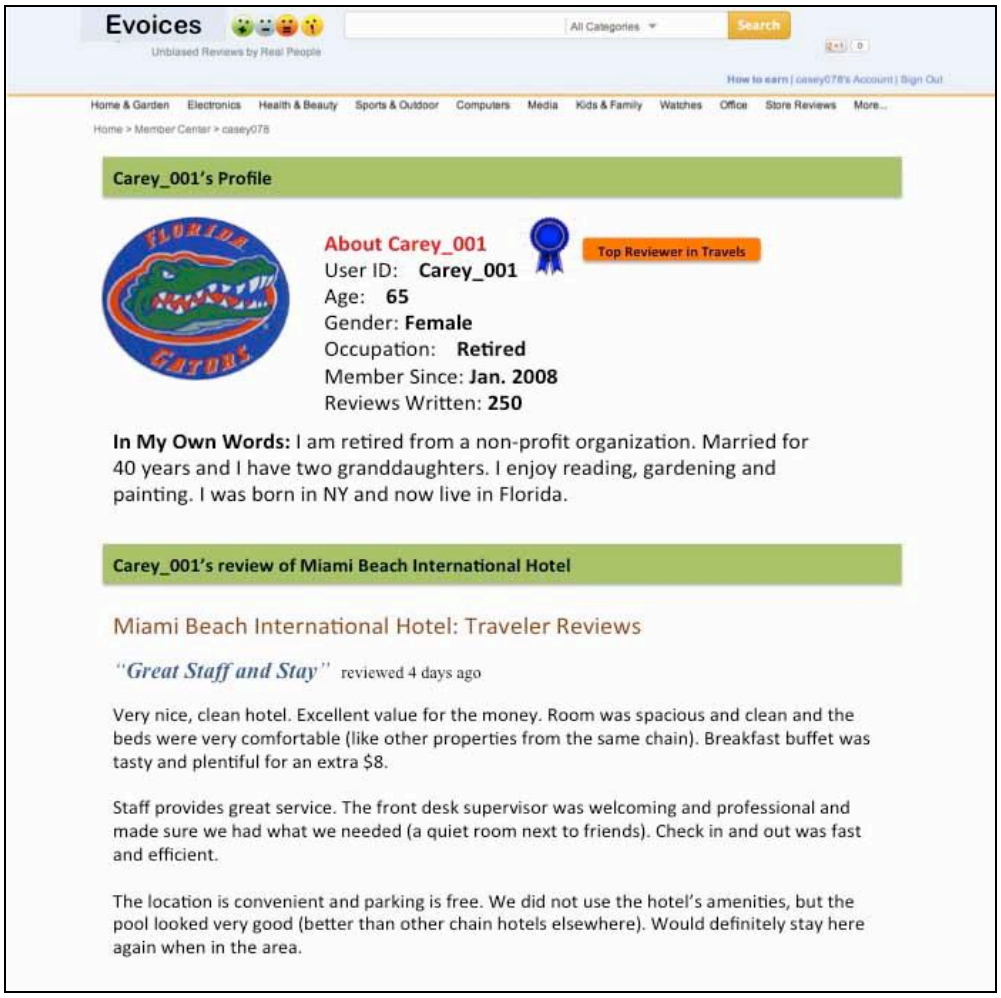
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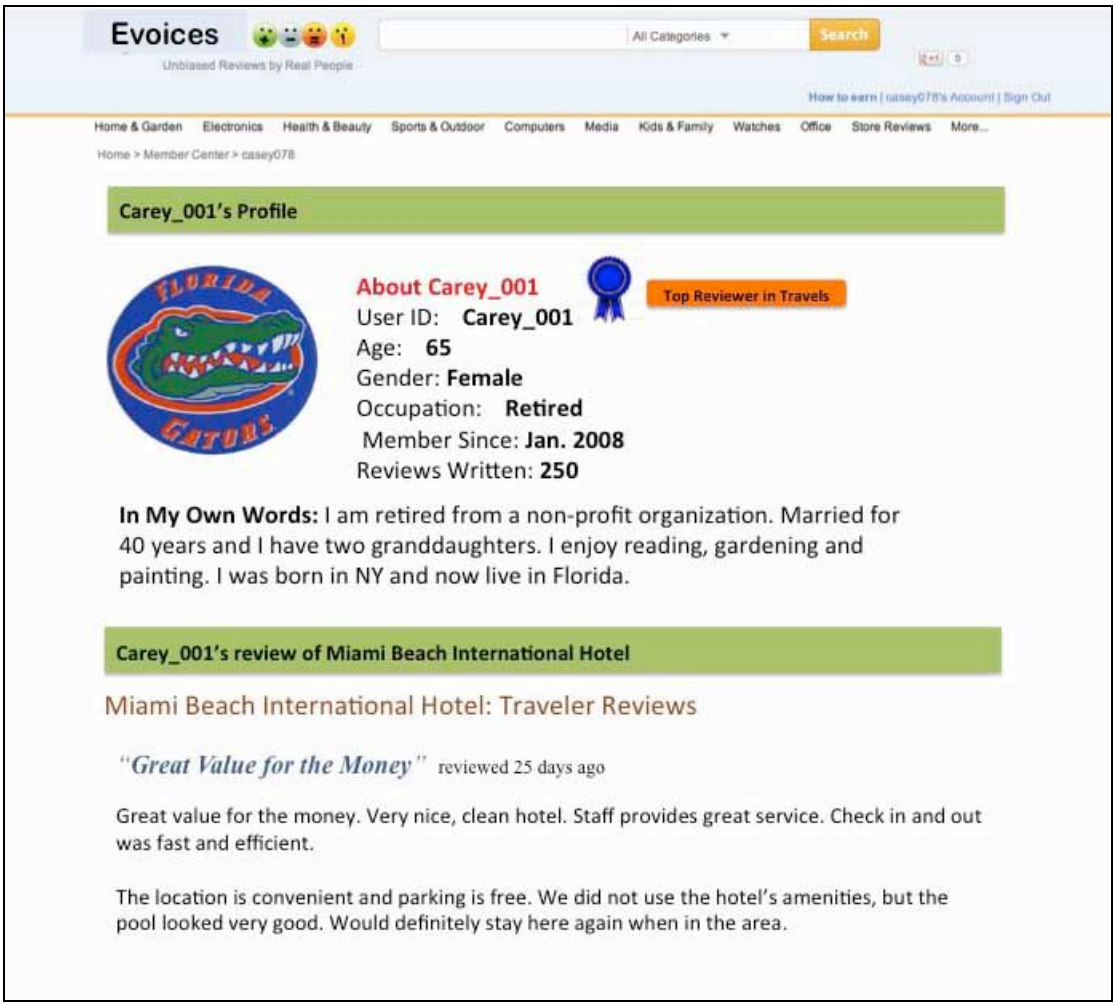
Staff provides great service. The front desk supervisor was welcoming and professional and made sure we had what we needed (a quiet room next to friends). Check in and out was fast and efficient.
The location is convenient and parking is free. We did not use the hotel's amenities, but the pool looked very good (better than other chain hotels elsewhere). Would definitely stay here again when in the area.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Carey_001's Profile
About Carey_001
Top Reviewer in Travels
User ID: Carey_001
Age: 65
Gender: Female
Occupation: Retired
Member Since: Jan. 2008
Reviews Written: 250
In My Own Words: I am retired from a non-profit organization. Married for 40 years and I have two granddaughters. I enjoy reading, gardening and painting. I was born in NY and now live in Florida.
Carey_001's review of Miami Beach International Hotel
Miami Beach International Hotel: Traveler Reviews
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Great value for the money. Very nice, clean hotel. Staff provides great service. Check in and out was fast and efficient.
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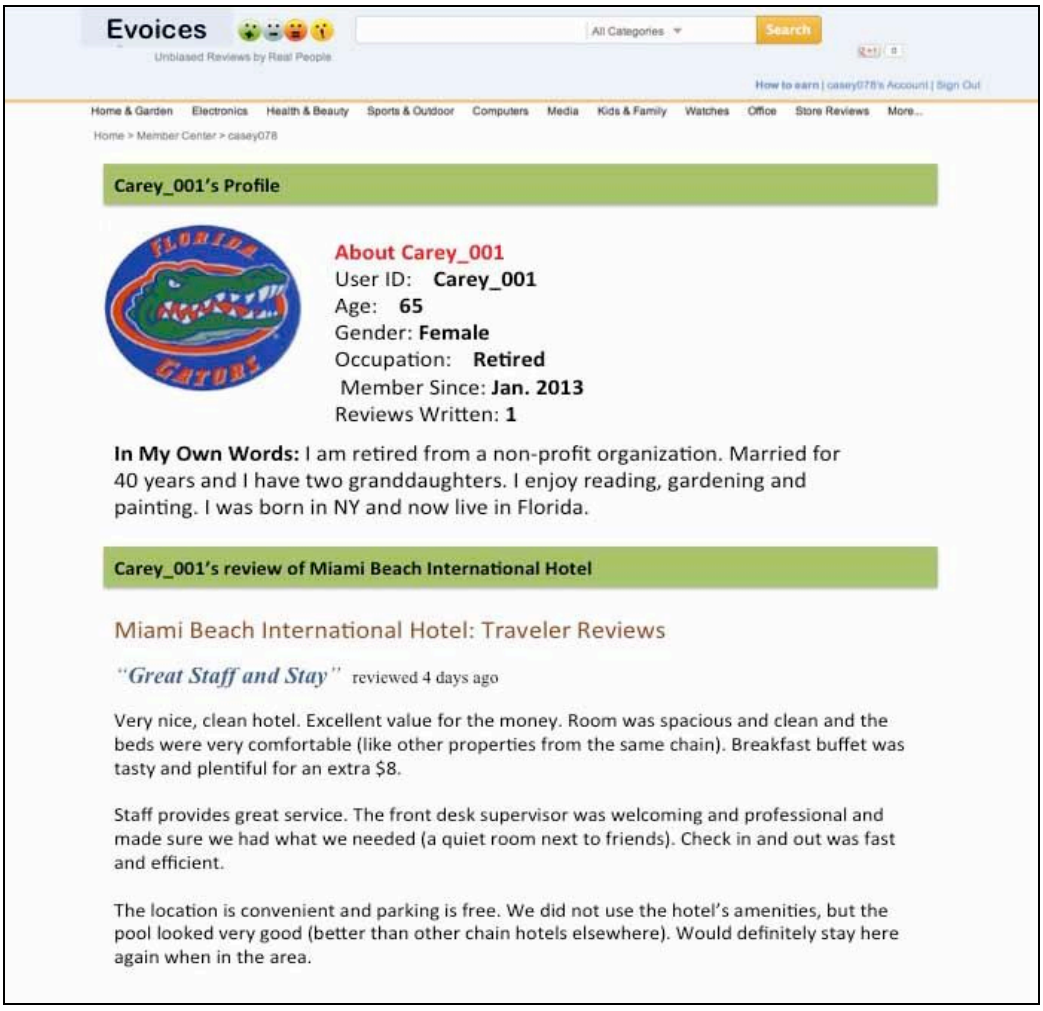
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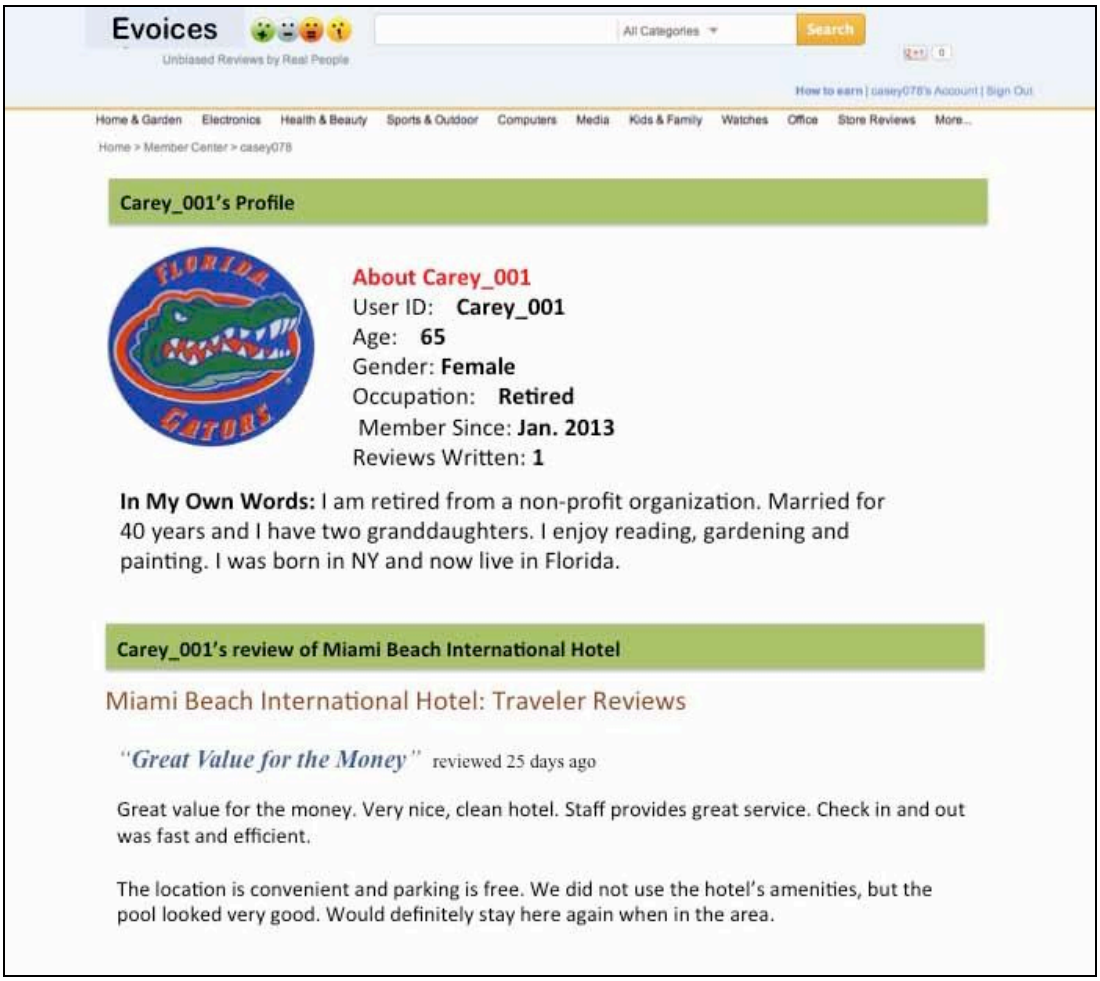
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Q4. Please indicate your feelings about the review you just read by clicking on the response that best describes your feelings.
The person who wrote this review _____

is like me __ __ __ __ __ __ __ is unlike me
is different from me __ __ __ __ __ __ __ is similar to me
thinks like me __ __ __ __ __ __ __ does not think like me
doesn't behave like me __ __ __ __ __ __ __ behaves like me
has status like me __ __ __ __ __ __ __ has status different from me
is from a different social class __ __ __ __ __ __ __ is from the same social class
is culturally different __ __ __ __ __ __ __ is culturally similar
has an economic situation like mine __ __ __ __ __ __ __ does not have an economic situation like mine

Q5. (1= Strongly Disagree, 7= Strongly Agree)
a. This reviewer has a high ranking on the review website.
b. This reviewer is a prominent member of the review website.

Q6. The person who wrote this review is _____. (* = Reversed)

Dependable __ __ __ __ __ __ __Undependable
Dishonest __ __ __ __ __ __ __ Honest *
Reliable __ __ __ __ __ __ __ Unreliable
Sincere __ __ __ __ __ __ __Insincere
Trustworthy __ __ __ __ __ __ __Untrustworthy
Not an expert __ __ __ __ __ __ __Expert *
Experienced __ __ __ __ __ __ __Inexperienced
Unknowledgeable __ __ __ __ __ __ __Knowledge *
Unqualified __ __ __ __ __ __ __Qualified *
Skilled __ __ __ __ __ __ __Unskilled

Q7 (1= Strongly Disagree, 7= Strongly Agree)
a. This review was compelling.
b. This review was well-supported.
c. This review contained specific facts.
d. This review contained detailed information.
e. This review listed concrete examples.
f. This review did not include detailed information.

Q8. a. I am willing to rely on this review when making purchase-related decisions.
b. I am willing to make important purchase-related decisions based on this review.
c. I am not willing to consider this review when making purchase-related decisions. *
d. I am willing to recommend the product in this review to my friends or family. (1= Strongly Disagree, 7= Strongly Agree)

For female participants

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Alex_078's Profile

About Alex_078

Top Reviewer in Cameras

User ID: **Alex_078**
Age: **28**
Gender: **Female**
Occupation: **Employed**
Member Since: **April. 2008**
Reviews Written: **300**

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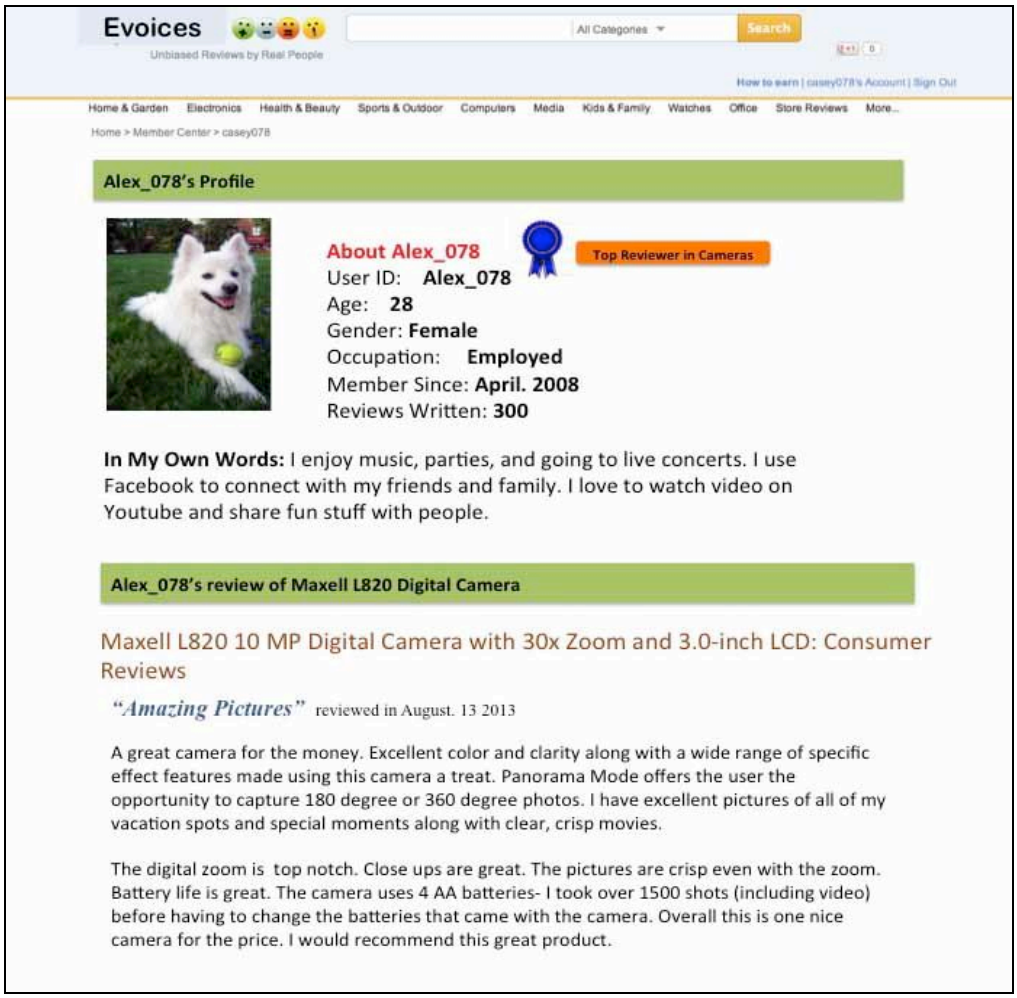
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Alex_078's Profile

About Alex_078

User ID: **Alex_078**
Age: **28**
Gender: **Female**
Occupation: **Employed**
Member Since: **Feb. 2013**
Reviews Written: **2**

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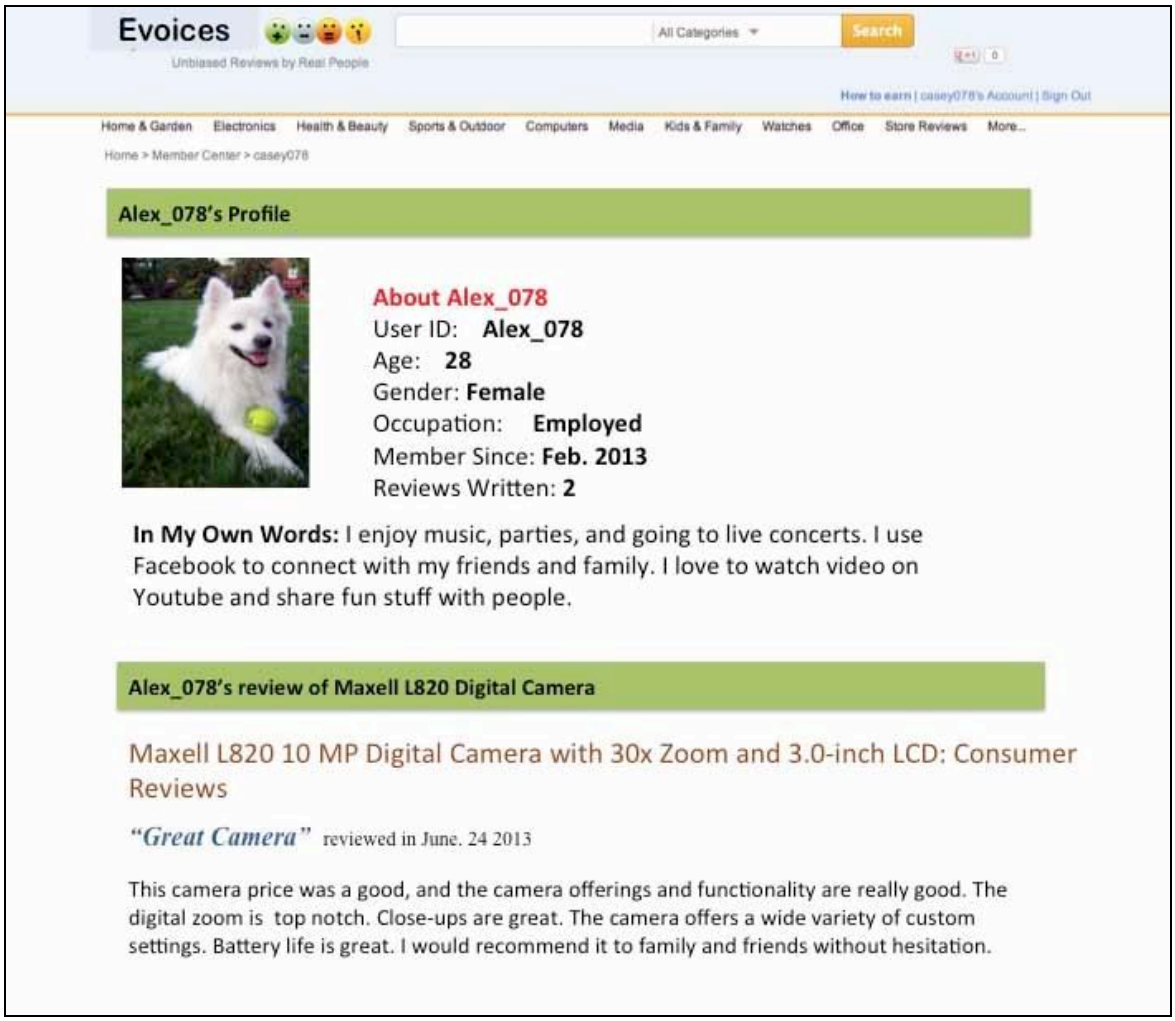
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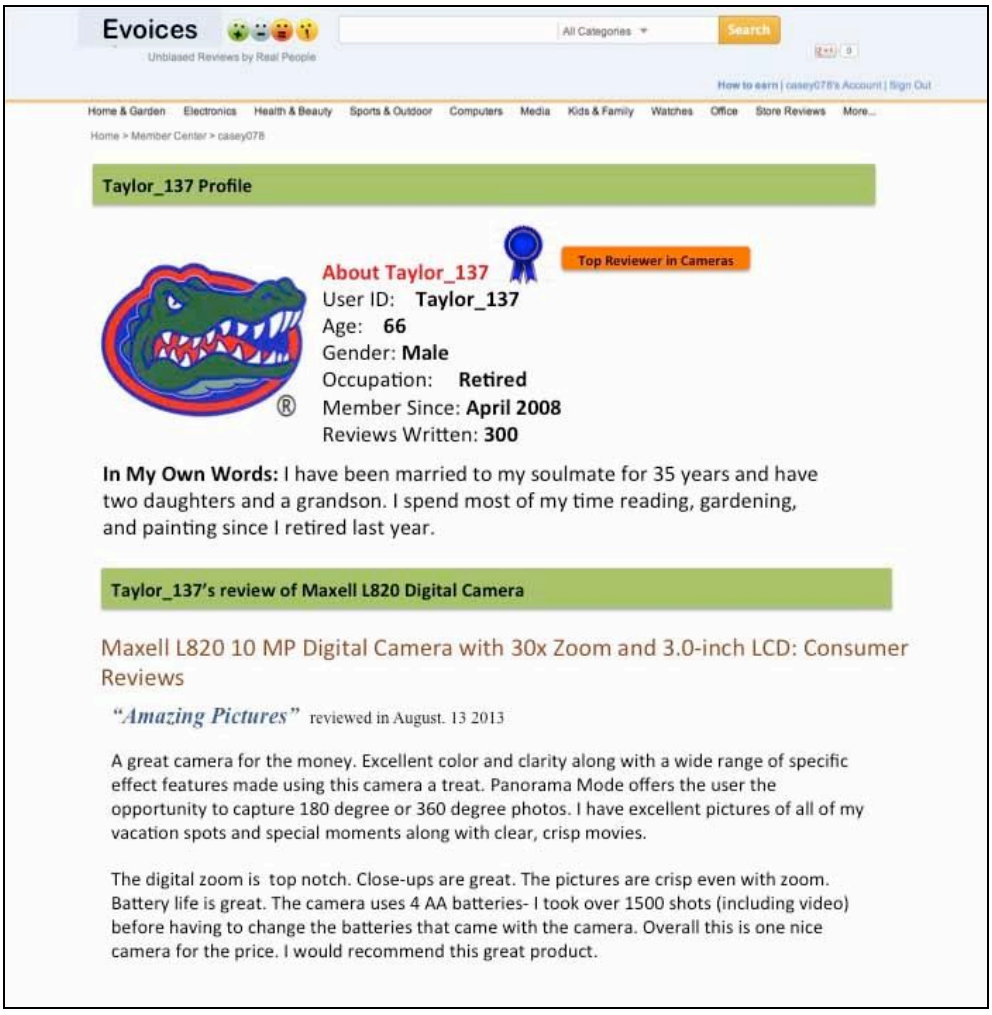
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Taylor_137 Profile
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User ID: Taylor_137
Age: 66
Gender: Male
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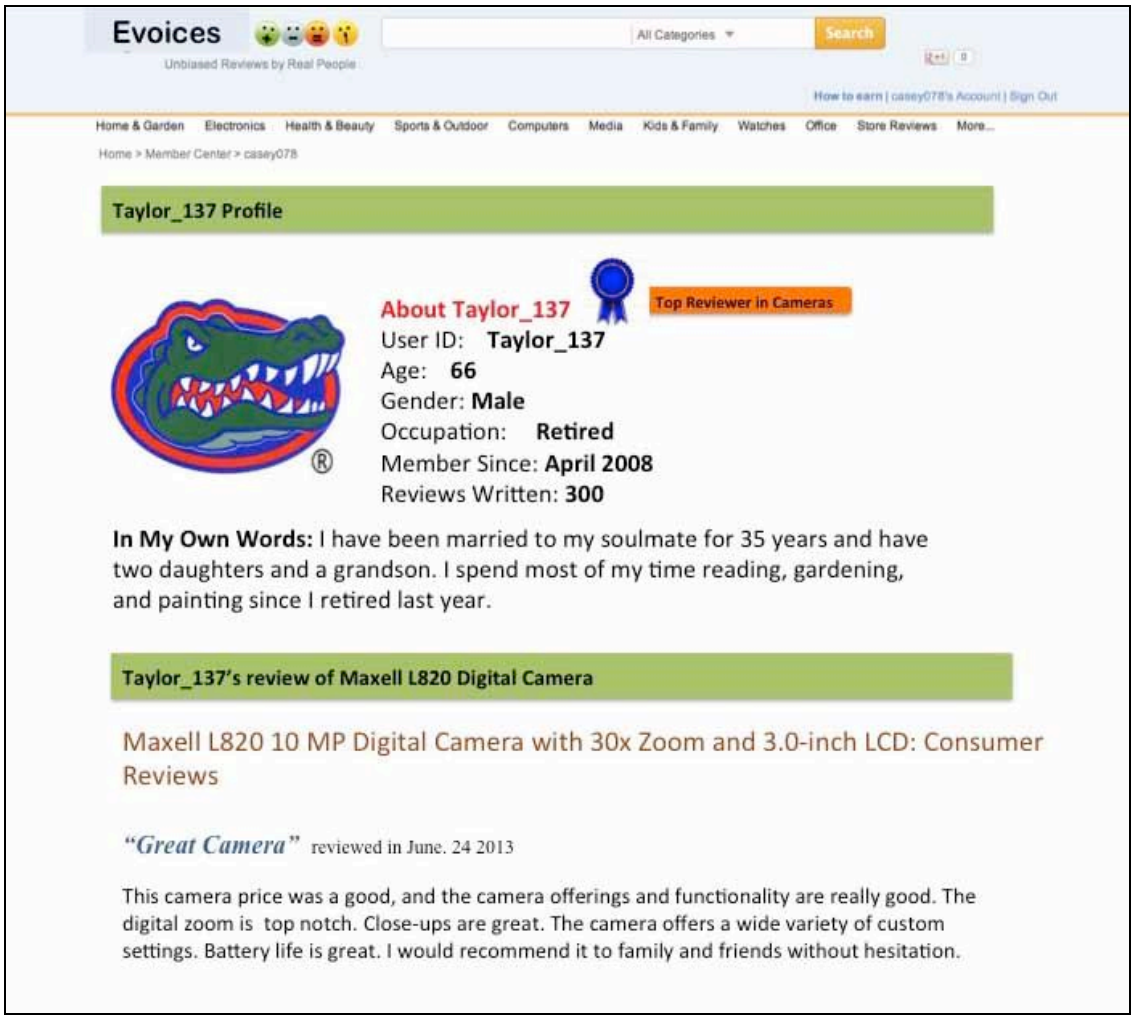
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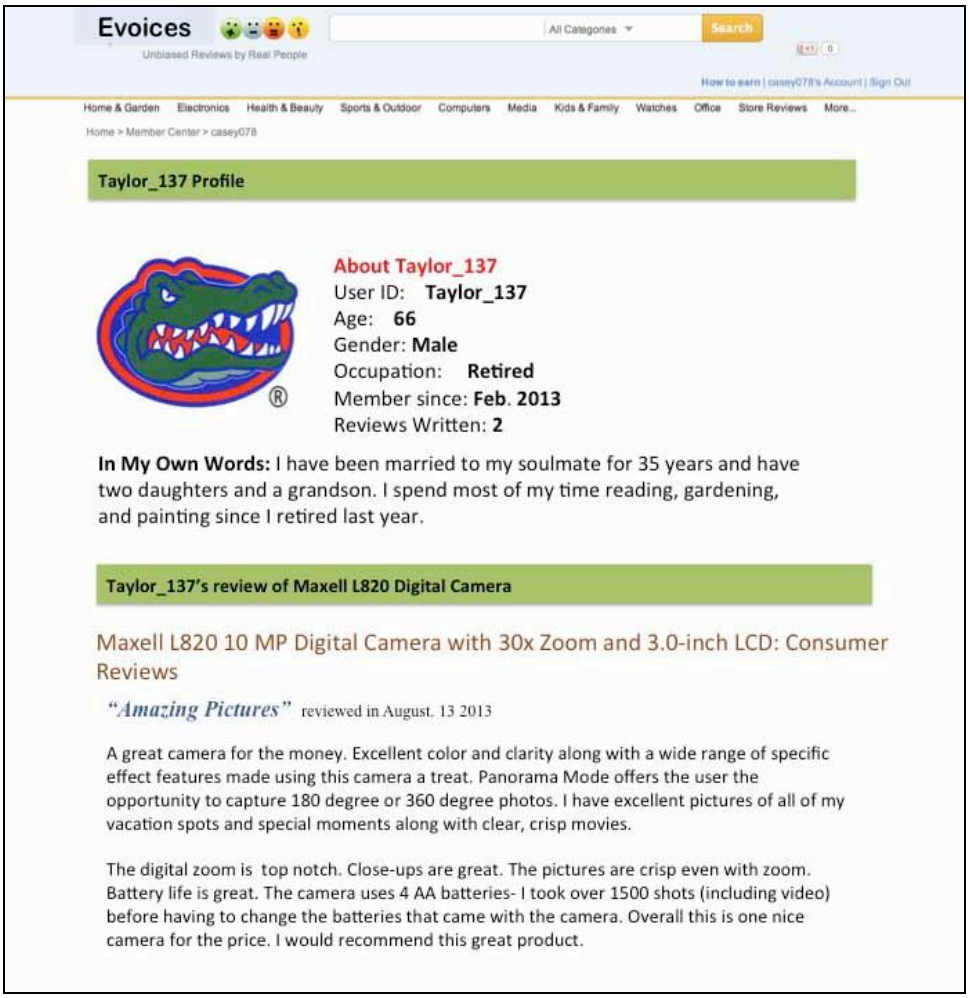
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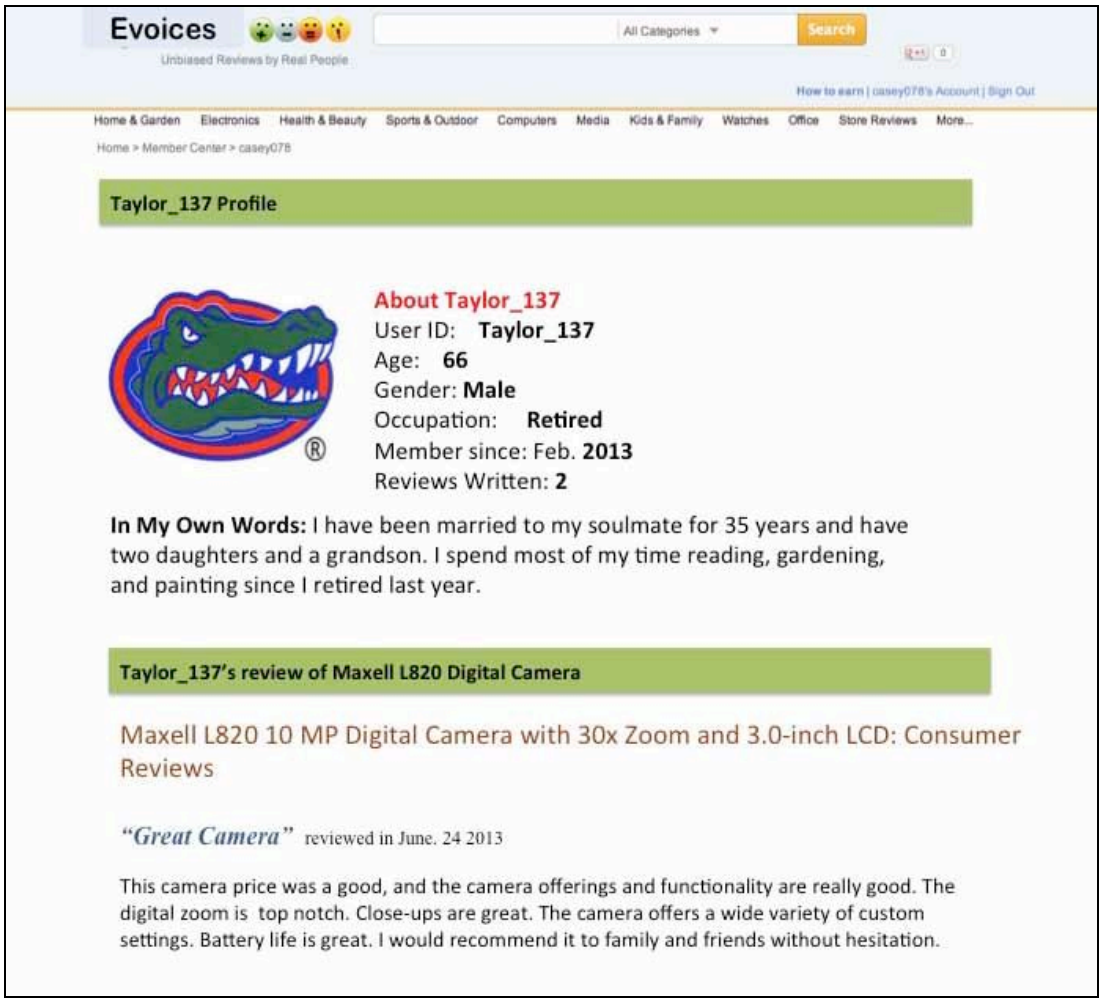
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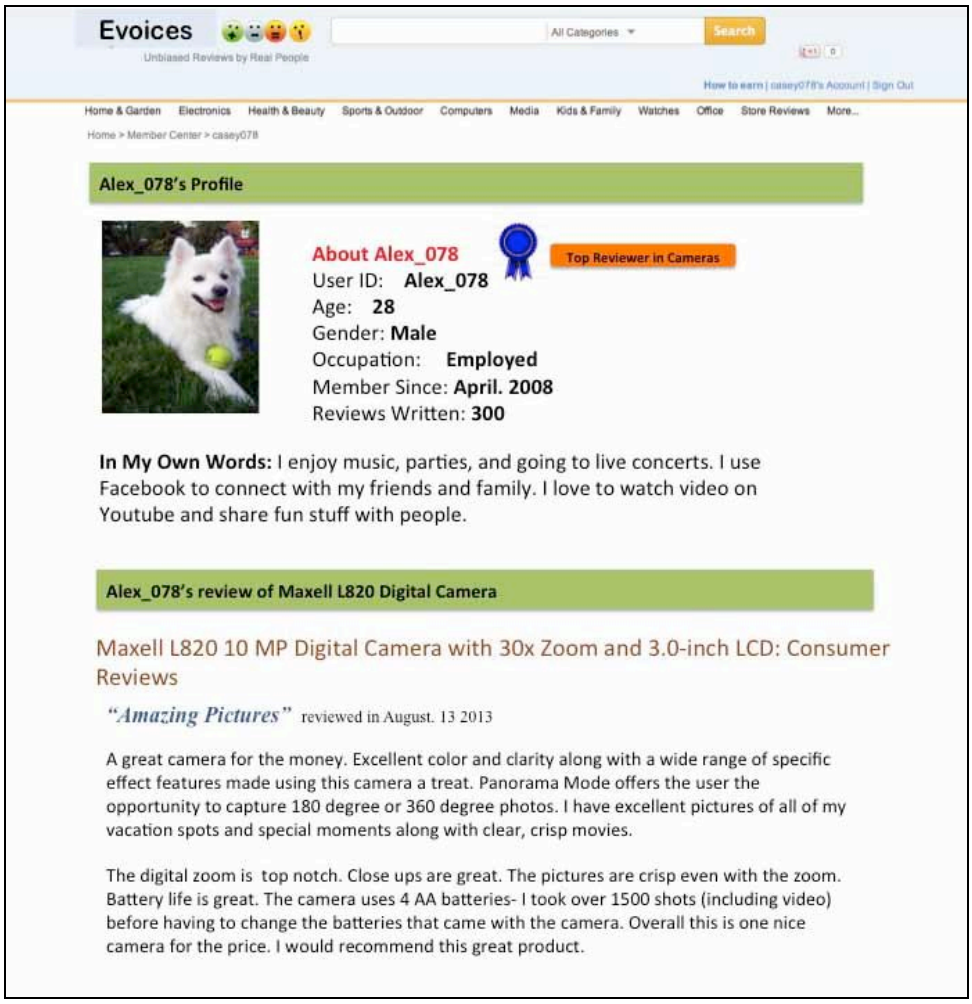
For male participants



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Alex_078's Profile

About Alex_078

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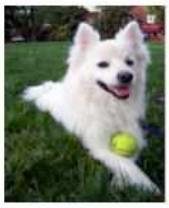

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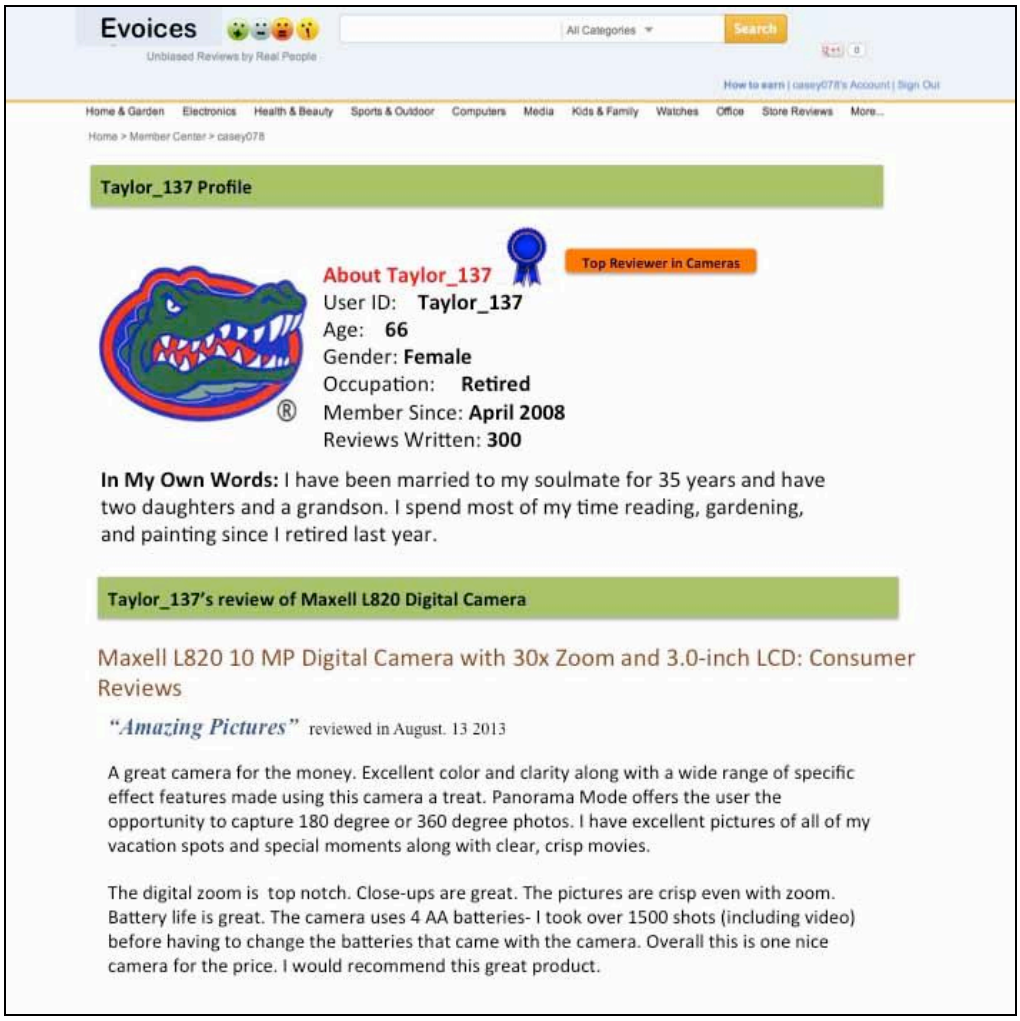
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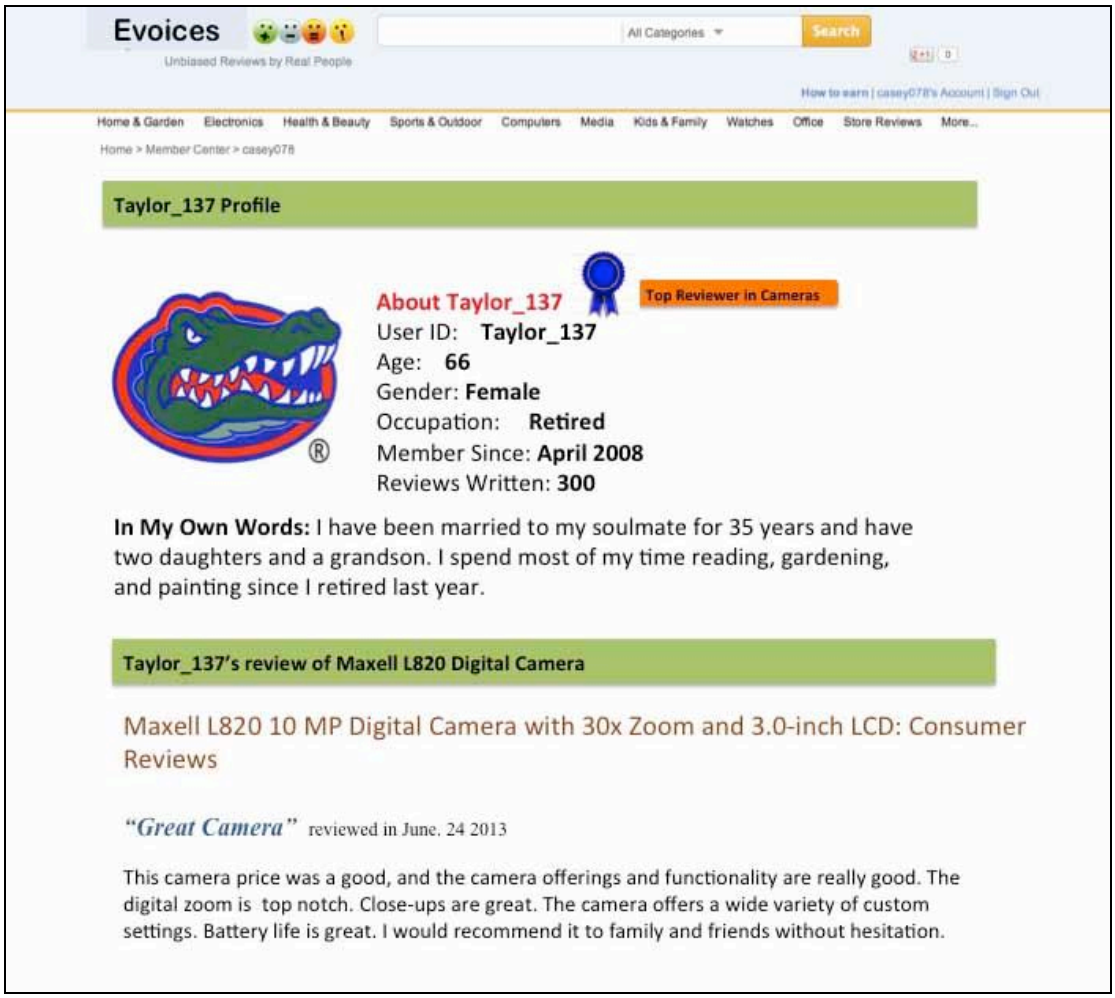
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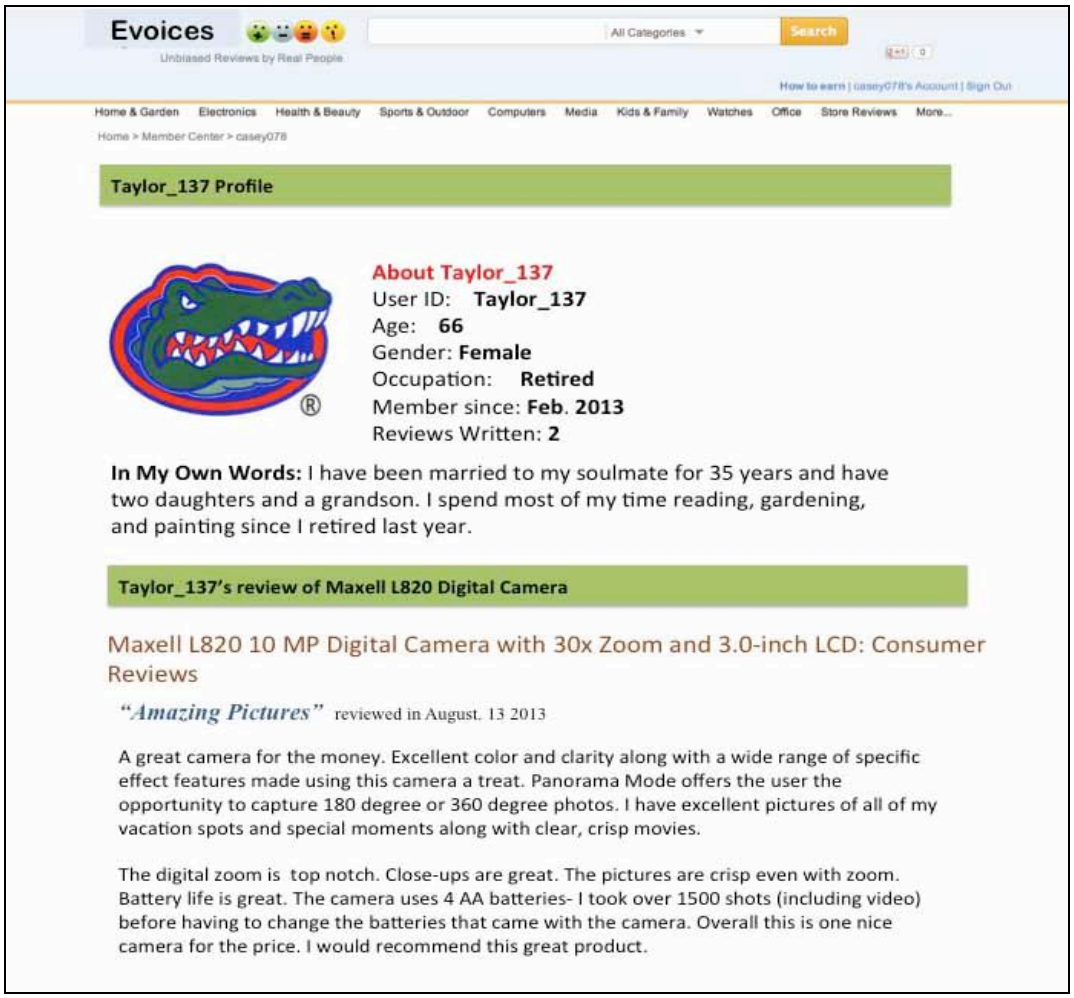
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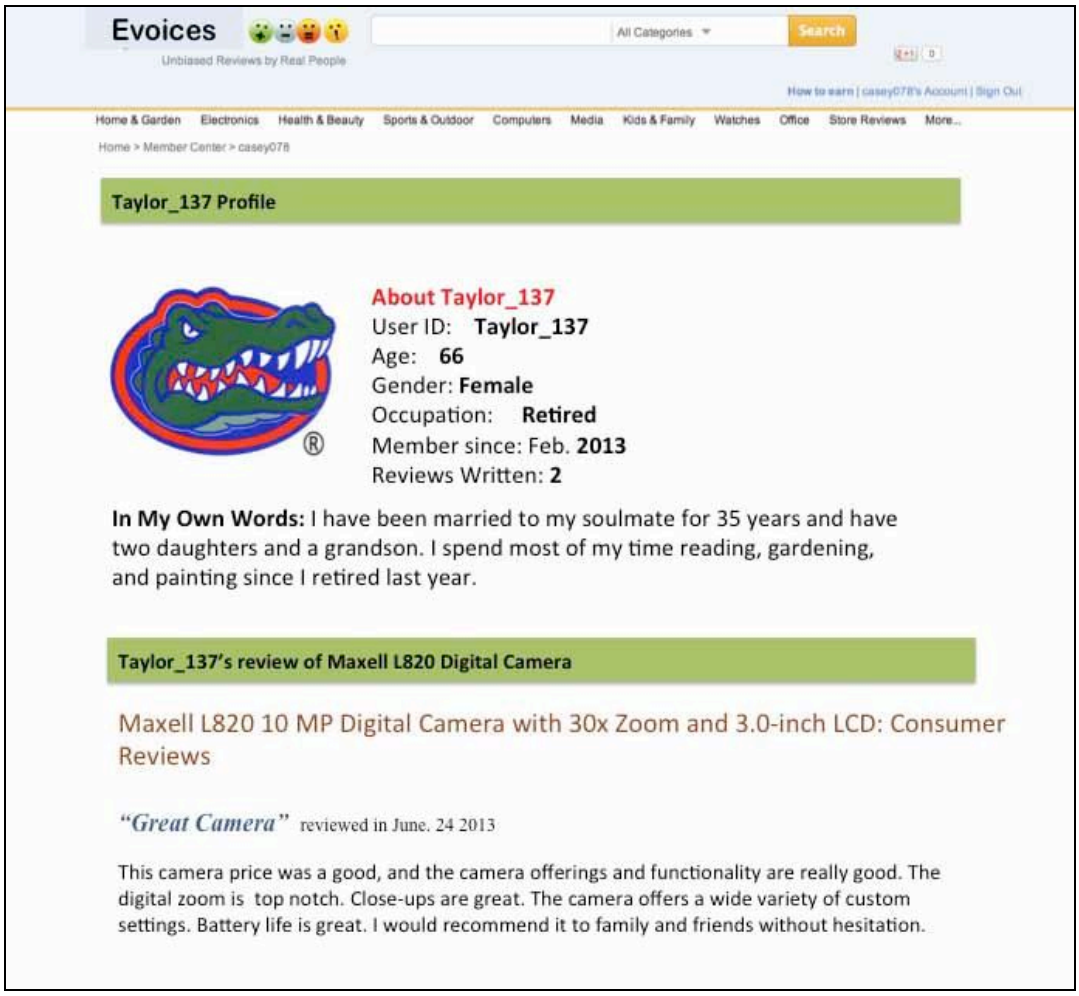
"Amazing Pictures" reviewed in August. 13 2013
A great camera for the money. Excellent color and clarity along with a wide range of specific effect features made using this camera a treat. Panorama Mode offers the user the opportunity to capture 180 degree or 360 degree photos. I have excellent pictures of all of my vacation spots and special moments along with clear, crisp movies.
The digital zoom is top notch. Close-ups are great. The pictures are crisp even with zoom. Battery life is great. The camera uses 4 AA batteries- I took over 1500 shots (including video) before having to change the batteries that came with the camera. Overall this is one nice camera for the price. I would recommend this great product.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Taylor_137 Profile
About Taylor_137
User ID: Taylor_137
Age: 66
Gender: Female
Occupation: Retired
Member since: Feb. 2013
Reviews Written: 2
In My Own Words: I have been married to my soulmate for 35 years and have two daughters and a grandson. I spend most of my time reading, gardening, and painting since I retired last year.
Taylor_137's review of Maxell L820 Digital Camera
Maxell L820 10 MP Digital Camera with 30x Zoom and 3.0-inch LCD: Consumer Reviews
"Great Camera" reviewed in June. 24 2013
This camera price was a good, and the camera offerings and functionality are really good. The digital zoom is top notch. Close-ups are great. The camera offers a wide variety of custom settings. Battery life is great. I would recommend it to family and friends without hesitation.