

FELLOW TRAVELLERS: TRUST AND TRIPADVISOR

FELLOW TRAVELLERS: WHAT DO USERS TRUST
ON RECOMMENDER WEBSITES?
A CASE STUDY OF TRIPADVISOR.COM

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Declaration

I hereby declare that this thesis is my original work and has been written by me in its entirety. I have duly acknowledged all the sources of information which have been used in this thesis.

This thesis has also not been submitted for any degree in any university previously.

A handwritten signature in black ink that reads "Andrew Duffy". The signature is written in a cursive style with a period at the end.

Andrew Duffy

22 April 2013

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I would like to thank my father, Michael, who supported me not just through this course of study, but through all my academic endeavours – the highs and the lows – that led up to it. Credit for the first doctor in the family goes in a large part to him.

My family. “This is the story of what a Woman’s patience can endure, and what a Man’s resolution can achieve.” Those words were from *The Woman in White*, but they capture something of how my wife Caroline has been there for me when I was not there for anyone in the 12 months leading up to this dissertation. Sam, for showing me in what hard work and commitment are really about. Barnaby and Harry for being the antidote to everything tough, and taking me out of myself when I got serious. And my mother, Jennifer, for never doubting.

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Abstract

This study used the travellers' review website TripAdvisor.com for exploratory research into the role of trust in decision-making in an information-rich online environment. It is well established that information is used to overcome uncertainty and risk; and when it is insufficient, trust takes over to allow people to act. The role of trust when information is abundant is less explored. The study integrated several strands of research into online trust, including dimensions of trust, forms of trust, self-efficacy (trust in the self), as well as the technological aspects and social identification that meet on interactive Web 2.0. This study conducts exploratory research into how these variables interact around trust in the new environment of peer-to-peer information sources, to integrate them into a model, and to suggest what form trust takes and what role it plays.

Based on interviews with 30 users of TripAdvisor and a survey of 237 users, it found that they do not trust the site implicitly, any more than they trust individual reviewers. Rather, they rely on themselves to use the site along with other sources to overcome risk to the point where they can make a decision. They combine this with a trust in technological features such as aggregation and the 'law of large numbers' implicit in peer-review sites. Social identification is also a factor in information searches on such sites, as users are influenced by people like to them and employ social similarity heuristics to reduce large amounts of information.

This study found that trust is less influential than risk or self-efficacy in decision-making and behavioural intention. It also found that users cross-check information from the site against other sources, and TripAdvisor is just one of many sources they turn to for information. The research concludes that any trust users have in TripAdvisor is not so much in the reviewers or the site, but rather in what such sites represent when combined with the user's own skills in using them.

This study suggests that the role of trust may be different in information-rich environments from what has been considered previously. It also suggests that TripAdvisor use can involve an 'apomediary effect' in which technological features and social identification with reviewers are combined in some circumstances to reduce information to a manageable quantity. Thus, it suggests that peer-to-peer review sites such as TripAdvisor use massed information to reduce the need for trust (and hence the role of trust itself) in decision-making, and sociotechnological aspects to reduce the subsequent problem of information overload. Finally, this study suggests that research into online trust should include a social-context element as Web 2.0 involves a high level of a relatively new form of social interaction.

Keywords: Trust, Web 2.0, TripAdvisor, self-efficacy, apomediation, travel, UGC, social identification, online trust, information search

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Chapter 1 – Introduction

“Neither power nor talent gives a travel writer his or her authority,
which comes only and crucially from experience”

Mary B. Campbell, *The witness and the other world:
Exotic European travel writing, 400-1600* (1988) p. 3

1.1. Overview

The thorn trees of Africa once carried messages from traveller to fellow traveller, pinned to their spikes so they would not blow away in the hot, dusty wind. In Europe, landlords of roadside inns were valued purveyors not just of meat and wine but also of information on road conditions, floods and highwaymen. More recently, Lonely Planet asks for suggestions from independent travellers which ultimately find their way into the best-selling books to inspire and guide the next wave of backpackers.¹ Travellers have exchanged information for as long as there has been travel. Now the Internet allows them to share information in ways the world has never seen before, with a new breed of peer-to-peer advice and recommendation sites.

This dissertation looks at the user-generated recommendation website TripAdvisor, where travellers share their opinions of hotels, restaurants, activities and cities. For

¹ Bringing this historical journey on a pleasing full circle, Lonely Planet’s traveller advice-sharing forum is called the Thorn Tree travel forum.

independent travellers, it has become a valued site to research, confirm or double-check a destination (Jeacle & Carter, 2011). The aim of this study is to develop a research model to explore the role of trust in an online user-generated content review site. Due to the increased influence of such sites, it is both timely and important to explore the factors that drive people to use them. An integrative model is one that tests all possible paths to show a complexity of associations, and how the processes are interlinked and reinforce one another, to yield a more nuanced understanding of the relationships among variables.

1.1.i. Theoretical framework

Travel involves risk, and hence uncertainty reduction theory (URT) is its theoretical starting point (Berger & Calabrese, 1975). The role of these sites is to offer information to allow individuals to overcome risk or uncertainty in a buying decision, to move the individual towards a point where he or she feels well-informed enough to act. As TripAdvisor involves the social aspect of the user assessing hotel reviewers on similarity and relevance to his or her own travel plans and interests, it also borrows from social comparison theory (Festinger, 1954), social information processing theory (Walther, 1992), the reduced social cues model (Sproull & Kiesler, 1986) and the social identity model of deindividuation effects (Lea & Spears, 1991). Finally, as TripAdvisor is a form of computer-mediated communication (CMC) in which technology is important, a second theoretical approach for this dissertation is the technology acceptance model (TAM) (Davis, 1986).

This dissertation borrows from these theories to propose a model applicable to the phenomenon studied, and their meeting point is that of *trust*. Uncertainty reduction theory concerns two individuals meeting for the first time; but it can equally be applied to the search for social cues of trustworthiness in user-generated content (UGC). Social identification theories concern the effects on the individual of shared identities; and it can also be applied to the search for social cues of trustworthiness in UGC. Finally, TAM concerns the adoption of technology based on system features and user demands; and it can be applied to TripAdvisor's goal of system trustworthiness and its aggregation of social cues of trustworthiness. Hence all three can usefully guide and exploratory study of how apomediary sites – which use human or technological agents that guide people towards trustworthy information and involves both technological and social features on a website (Eysenbach, 2008) – work for the reader.

In the proposed model for this study, a reader turns to TripAdvisor to reduce uncertainty (URT) in choosing a hotel. He combines self-efficacy in using the site with the social (social identity theories) and technological features (TAM) that constitute an apomediary site. This leads him to trust the site and the people writing on it, and his own efficacy; and this in turn leads to behavioural intention and action.

1.1.ii. Central question for research

This raises the question of what is the role of trust in an information-rich environment such as TripAdvisor, with over 60 million reviews of thousands of hotels. As a result,

the overriding question for this dissertation is: *what role does trust play on TripAdvisor?*

1.1.iii. Conceptual variables

In addition to these three theoretical starting points, this dissertation uses six primary concepts:

- 1) Risk
- 2) Trust
- 3) Self-efficacy
- 4) Social identification with reviewers on the site
- 5) Technological features that combine with social aspects on an apomediary site
- 6) Behavioural intention.

First, travellers seek to reduce travel risk to a manageable level; they access information to help achieve this. Where risk cannot be reduced by information, they turn to trust in order to act. Risk is thus a primary concept in this dissertation.

Second, risk reduction first involves information search and then, if this is inadequate to overcome risk, the individual turns to trust; hence trust is also a primary concept. Meyer, Davis & Schoorman (1995) say that trust becomes important as people work in teams from different backgrounds and countries, so trust based on similarity is a factor; and people are working in more self-directed, empowered groups, so trust has to take the place of supervision. Hence the link between self-reliance, self-efficacy and trust is also important. Yet it is possible that an apomediary site's great volume of

information generated by similar people and effectively processed by the individual may do away with the need for trust; or at least reduce the level of trust required for action. This raises the question of how much users trust such sites, or indeed whether trust is significant in this new environment. After all, trust exists to counter uncertainty, and given the vast amount of information on such sites there may be little room left for uncertainty. If people were omniscient, there would be no place for trust (Lewis & Weigert, 1985). When a traveller knows the names, locations, prices, availability, services, menus, staff attitudes and bathroom cleanliness of all the hotels in a destination, there is less risk in choosing the wrong one, and hence less need for trust to make a decision.

Third, the reader requires high levels of self-efficacy to use the site; they need to believe they have the experience and the skills to achieve what they want from the site (Bandura, 1982).

The fourth and fifth concepts for this dissertation combine the technological features of a site that connect peers with the social identification that allow users to decide whose opinions are salient, into an apomediary site (Eysenbach, 2008). As this is a central concept for this study and is not widely known, Eysenbach is quoted at length:

Just as in many areas of life (e.g., the travel industry), information and communication technologies empower consumers to access pertinent information or services directly, cutting out the middleman or gatekeeper (or intermediary) such as the travel agent, real estate agent, librarian, pharmacist, health professional or journalist. With

direct and convenient access to abundant health information on the Internet, consumers may now bypass the expert intermediary and gain direct access to unfiltered information... In this situation, consumers must assume new responsibilities... The agents that replace intermediaries in the digital media context may be called “apomediaries” because rather than mediating by standing “in between” (inter-) consumers and the services or information they seek, they “stand by” (apo-) and provide added value from the outside... While the traditional intermediary is the “expert”, apomediaries consist of a broader community including experts, parents, teachers, peers, and the like, who are networked in a digital environment” (Eysenbach, 2008, pp. 129-130)

Apomediary sites may replace the need for trust. On TripAdvisor, as on other similar sites, “the voice of the community is emerging as the coin of credibility, and self-regulation serves as evidence that the locus of knowledge ownership is moving to communities of users” (Metzger & Flanagin, 2008, p. 1). Technologically, the principles behind interactive Web 2.0 such as being an enabler or middleman, collective power, enabling self-service, encouraging person-to-person networks, dynamic updating and harnessing collective intelligence (O’Reilly, 2005) can also be said to be the driving force behind such sites and the principle of sharing information for the common good. Socially, people tend to trust more those who are similar to them.

Hence this dissertation's title. On the one hand, TripAdvisor is a travel-related peer-to-peer sharing site where likeminded 'fellow travellers' offer mutual support to each other. On the other hand, the phrase has overtones of the anti-communist purges in the US of the 1950s, where to be a 'fellow traveler' was to be sympathetic to those who wished to changing the old order and therefore to become subject to suspicion. All these themes – support, trust, distrust, change – meet on TripAdvisor.

Finally, the sixth key concept is that is behavioural intention; that is, the end goal of accessing TripAdvisor is to choose a hotel, so that is considered the outcome variable.

Such sites fit into the category of user-generated content (UGC) and have been called user-generated recommendation sites, or consumer opinion platforms incorporating word-of-mouth principles to exchange product information between non-experts (Hennig-Thurau, Gwinner, Walsh & Gremler, 2004); and the lengthy "online peer-generated product evaluations posted on company or third party websites" (Mudambi & Schuff, 2010, p. 186). For this study, however, the newly coined acronym of OURS (Online User Review Site) will be used, with the dual benefits of brevity and aptness as they are 'ours', made by us, the general public.

1.2. Value and contribution of this research

A few researchers have examined TripAdvisor, and have identified several variables that affect use of the site; this paper seeks to rationalise and integrate some of these variables into a parsimonious model that explores the role of trust in the site. Cox, Burgess, Sellitto and Buultjens (2009) found that such sites are used by people to

supplement information searches rather than as the sole source of information, which was confirmed by this study. Their study was limited to Australian travellers, however, and this study seeks to go beyond that by inviting responses from a wider range of nationalities.² Other studies have investigated trust in online travel communication channels and found that level of trust depended on the kind of site carrying the UGC and the perception of the people who created that content (Yoo, Lee, Gretzel & Fesenmaier, 2009). They also found that individuals who trust UGC gain greater benefits from it, despite finding it less trustworthy than traditional word of mouth as it is hard to identify the source.

Nevertheless, perceived trustworthiness of reviewers significantly predicted trust among users. For this current study, Yoo et al's paper led to questions whether social identification with reviewers is a significant antecedent of trust. For this study, social identification is defined as the extent to which a person finds value in another person based on similarity of background, interests, opinions and goals. Dickinger (2011) compared TripAdvisor with other online information sources and found that UGC is considered informative but of uncertain quality and that city tourism boards were more trusted. Her research relied on a survey that she suggested might influence the responses and the results; as a result, this current study adopted a two-pronged approach, using interviews to triangulate the survey data, and potentially to complement the survey (Bryman, 2006).

² It does not suggest that Australians are unusually skeptical and hence will always compare information sources, nor does it anticipate that the ethnicity of respondents will make a difference. Rather it seeks to confirm the behaviour of cross-checking information.

Other research has picked up on the phenomenon of OURS and why reviewers contribute their opinions (Yoo & Gretzel, 2008); and why people trust such reviews and the benefits they bring (Yoo, Lee, Gretzel & Fesenmaier, 2009). This last paper identified that perceived expertise of reviewers predicted trust in apomediary sites, but did not consider the distinction between trust in the reviewer and trust in the site, which form the heart of this current study and raise the question of how reviewer trust and site trust influence each other. While trust may be influential on these sites, all these studies led to the question of how important its role is on an information-rich site when compared with other factors that might equally drive a user to make a decision.

Casaló, Flavián and Guinalú (2011) studied how customer reviews play a greater part in decision making than other information sources and therefore contribute to travel behaviour. They included perceived usefulness and trust as precursors of behavioural intention, and added a new variable of personal susceptibility to interpersonal influence. They found that this last variable plays a part in moderating the influence of the sites' usability and levels of trust. Their research focused on informational influence, accepting others' opinions as evidence of reality, but did not look at what persuades users to pay greater heed to comments by some reviewers more than others. Hence this study broadens their study of informational influence to include social identification as a variable that strongly influences the value of reviews.

Sidali, Schulze and Spiller (2009) considered the overall role of consumer reviews on apomediary OURS in decision making and found that they accounted for a large

percentage of information that contributed to decisions – but were not the only source of information used. Recommendations from friends were most valued by travellers, followed by the hotel rating system, OURS and finally travel agents' recommendations. However, OURS were the most *used* source of information. They also examined the determinants of trust in OURS, and found that expertise of the reviewers and the credibility of the site were most significant. Once again, their study did not consider the role of social identification in persuading users to value opinions presented on OURS, which would seem to account for the discrepancy between sources valued (in which friends were most significant) and sources used (in which OURS were most significant). This current study proposes that social identification is the common factor in friends' influence and OURS' influence.

1.2.i Contributions of this research

New forms of communication demand enquiry into how people use them: “determining trust, believability, and information bias – key elements of credibility – become critical as individuals process the information in their lives gleaned from digital media” (Flanagin & Metzger, 2008, p. 5). Based on the abovementioned theoretical and conceptual starting points, this dissertation offers four contributions:

- 1) To examine antecedents of trust and see their effects in a UGC environment such as TripAdvisor
- 2) To examine the effects of that trust on behavioural intention
- 3) To propose a model of an apomediary site

- 4) To examine the role of trust in an information-rich environment.

This dissertation also offers and tests measures for evaluating two different forms of trust (reviewer trust and site trust) and their role in OURS. Trust is just one variable, and this study attempts to develop a cohesive framework to integrate disparate approaches to the interplay between six variables (risk, self-efficacy, trust, social identification, technological features and behavioural intention) when a user engages with the site, on the principle that it is important to understand the processes behind such peer-to-peer sites as well as the social changes they imply (Jeacle & Carter, 2011). Information-richness is considered to be the context that makes this of interest for research rather than being studied directly and as a result is not included among the six variables.

This dissertation takes the position that information searches using OURS inevitably involve risk of one form or another and hence demand trust to help overcome that risk. Trust is a pivotal factor in the information-gathering process. Given that it is rare for an individual to gather enough information to know be certain, and given that the source of the information itself may be dubious, then trust takes over and allows a decision. The question is, when offered an exhaustive information supply such as that on TripAdvisor, how necessary does trust become?

At the same time, this study proposes that an understanding of interactive, user-generated Web 2.0 sites should involve a study of technological features and social identification with contributors to the site. Finally it suggests that the new forms of

literacy needed to study these sites demand enquiry into the self-efficacy of people using them. Taken together, it is hoped that these will give an insight into the role that these factors play in decision making on TripAdvisor.

1.2.ii. Value of this research

In broad sociological terms, if trust is an essential underpinning for society (Simmel, 1978, cited in Meyerson, Weick & Kramer, 1996), then what happens to society if trust is reduced and replaced by self-reliance and community-sourced information? Trust can bring society together, while self-reliance can create a more atomised society; so what is the effect when both collaboration and separation occur simultaneously in a community information source that encourages self-reliance?

In terms of academic thought, this study explores new avenues in studies of online trust which have focused on e-commerce (with trust transference from bricks to clicks); social relationships (with dating sites and MMORPGs); and social capital and social networks (with self-help groups online). This study builds on previous research in that the sites studied earlier are comparable to OURS but have their differences, too. E-commerce has similarities with TripAdvisor, but users do not buy through the site. TripAdvisor is similar to online self-help communities, but reviewers float their comments out into the ether rather than responding to questions. Social identification is important for using TripAdvisor effectively, but no one goes there looking for a friend or a date. OURS such as TripAdvisor represent a new form of site and a new form of trust which do not fit quite into any of these categories and hence demand fresh thought which academia is starting to deliver. "Part social network, part virtual

community, and part blog, like all Web 2.0 sites, TripAdvisor is difficult to categorise” (O’Connor, 2010, p. 761).

It also has relevance for the travel industry which is becoming increasingly reliant on and influenced by such electronic word-of-mouth feedback which people use to make a decision; and to other business sectors where customers meet and share their opinions online. Hotels that have a clearer idea of customer demographics, for example, may not care to counter a damning review written by the ‘wrong’ sort of customer, because such a review will not be considered salient by their target market and may even serve to drive the ‘right’ sort of customers to them. It also offers a model for further academic study of the phenomenon of OURS and examines relationships between established variables in the relatively unexplored landscape of review sites.

1.3. The environment: Travel and TripAdvisor

The rise of digital media has coincided with a rise in tourism and both have had a democratising effect as more people see more of the world and share their experiences online. Travel is the second largest industry in the world (Moss, 2008; Cocking, 2009). And with an emerging middle-class in Asia with the money, the will and the time to travel, it looks to continue as an economic and cultural force. The Pew Internet and American Life Survey in 2005 found that searching for travel information is one of the most popular online activities (O’Connor, 2010). The Internet has opened the floodgates to a torrent of information by individuals sharing their experiences, and

made the digital native more self-reliant in information seeking. Similarly, the rise in mass tourism has taken travel away from the wealthy, exclusive or expert and made it part of the world of the common man. These two phenomena meet on TripAdvisor.

In the recent past when travellers wanted recommendations of where to stay they had three main options. Their first was to ask friends who had stayed at the destination. A second was to buy a travel guide such as Baedeker, Lonely Planet or Footprint. In this case they bought an independent recommendation for money. The user would trust the book that was salient to his needs. The third way was through the media, which contributes to a mental database for the user to draw on. Somewhere among these is the travel book which is part narrative, part guide and part inspiration, while a newcomer is the travel blog where travellers update an online diary of their adventures. Whichever source users turns to, their aim is to gather information. With the limited time people have to travel and the pressure to get the best experience, it is no wonder that people look for recommendations that can help them decide with confidence (Ricci & Wietsma, 2006). Correct information minimises the likelihood of a failed trip and increases the chance of a worthwhile visit.

While these are all still relevant, that was then and TripAdvisor is now. The power of the site comes by virtue of the volume of information it holds. As a 'father' of Web 2.0 Tim O'Reilly presciently pointed out, "a key Web 2.0 principle: the service automatically gets better the more people use it" (O'Reilly, 2005, n.p.). At the time of writing, TripAdvisor had some 60 million reviews from 20 million members. The majority of these people could not be called 'experts' in the standard meaning of the

word as one who has knowledge or skill in a field. Rather, they are experienced. They represent a new source of information for decision-making. Rather than consulting one or two experts whose job is to stay in hotels then compare them and reach an informed judgment based on wide knowledge, people instead consult many amateurs whose experience in the hotel may be more representative of the user. More information has replaced less.

It is not always easy to use the site, however. For example, what is a traveller to make of these two conflicting reviews of the same hotel in Istanbul?

Four-star pretender would have a hard time qualifying as a two-star hotel. Granted there were robes and hair dryer in the room, which I presume is why they bill themselves as a multiple star hotel. But in three days we could not shower because they could not get the bathtub/shower to work. Doors were made of what seems like corrugated paper and bathroom door would not close. Furniture looked like salvation army leftovers and the floor which was linoleum was devoid of even a rug. Most disappointing. [sic]

As opposed to:

Great hotel. we had an awesome experience here. booked the hotel using united airmiles and found it to be a charming hotel, with incredible break fast, in a terrific location right among the main sites. the surrounding neighborhood is lovely to walk around, great food both

sit-down restaurant style and street food style. the rooma was small
but clean, charming and comfortable. The rest of the hotel was alos
clean and charming with great character and just a lovely vibe. [sic]

Did the reviewers have different experiences or different expectations? Was the negative review written by a competitor masquerading as a guest, or was the glowing tribute written by the hotel itself to boost business? Further, what clues might a traveller gather from these two reviews in order to know which one might be more relevant and more trustworthy? The spelling and vocabulary in the first might identify the author as a person of education, taste and refinement; or as a pedant. While the broken English of the second might label the writer as an un-travelled ingénue; or as an honest, ordinary soul. Either one would be more credible to different people. It is not enough to judge the content; a user must also get an idea of the reviewer (Williams, van der Wiele, van Iwaarden & Eldridge, 2010).

The interactive nature of Web 2.0 makes it a natural home for travellers wishing to compare notes and TripAdvisor is at the forefront (Miguens, Baggio & Costa, 2008). OURS bring a new form of recommendation and hence require a new form of literacy to appreciate the nuances of what is written. Just as a literate user of travel guides would understand that a mid-priced hotel in the Rough Guide and a mid-priced hotel in a Michelin guide would be for two very different pockets, so literate users of OURS would need to learn what to trust and what to suspect, what is relevant to them and what is meant for someone else.

As it is neither easy to know where the information comes from in an apomediary OURS, nor is it clear how accurate it is, OURS also require a new literacy as “the wide-scale access and multiplicity of sources that ensure vast information availability also make assessing the credibility of information extremely complex” (Flanagin & Metzger, 2008, p. 5). This requires new skills, as “literacies which have been adequate in the past for the construction and interpretation of traditional forms of text are no longer fully adequate for texts presented through the Internet or on the Web, and they will become less so as the medium continues to evolve and new forms of texts emerge” (Gibbs, 2000, p. 23). This study proposes that the skills of identifying socially similar reviewers and using technological features such as rankings, aggregation and search functions constitute a form of literacy that OURS demand.

This may be particularly salient in travel-related searches as risk is high in ‘experience goods’ which cannot be tested before purchase nor returned if they disappoint, and require one’s senses to evaluate fully (de Vries & Pruyn, 2007; Mudambi & Schuff, 2010; Willemsen, Neijens, Bronner & de Ridder, 2012). Experience goods (houses, wine, travel, music) require sampling and are hence distinct from search goods (cameras, sunglasses, computers) for which it is possible to obtain information on the quality of the product before purchasing it by comparing it with similar goods. It is not easy to ‘try before you buy’ when it comes to experience goods such as travel (Senecal & Nantel, 2004). Indeed, travel is perhaps the ultimate experience good: “Unlike most products on sale, the tourism product is a package offer of both the tangible and the

intangible. It represents an opportunity for the purchaser to buy a dream, to escape from reality, and to acquire fulfillment” (Neilsen, 2001, p. 44).

1.3.i. TripAdvisor in a bigger picture

TripAdvisor is not alone and Bookings.com, Travelocity and Agoda also allow travellers to share their opinions about destinations. In other industries, Epinions, Dooyoo, Reviewcentre and Ciao.com are general consumer sites with product reviews from customers. Amazon carries reviews of books and music by amateurs alongside those from the professionals. eBay, the online auction site, has a recommender function that allows users to comment on sellers so that other buyers will know whether to trust them or not. Even academia is not immune, and Ratemyprofessors.com allows students to share candid comments about lecturers.

These sites represent a step-change in the global system of production and consumption. Following Europe’s industrial revolution of the 18th and 19th centuries, the Trades Union movement arose as collective action on how people earned their money, empowering the individual to get a better deal. Today, in an era marked by consumerism, reviewer websites operate as a form of collective action on how people spend their money, with a similar outcome. Knowledge is power and these sites amount to a shift of power away from the producer and into the hands of the consumer by creating a virtual community in which people can share knowledge:

Customers become more sophisticated capturers and managers of their own information. Virtual communities will play a part in this process by

organizing and orchestrating the information and transaction capabilities that will allow customers to extract ever more value from the vendors they interact with. In essence, virtual communities will act as agents for their members by helping them to get increased product and service information – not to mention lower prices – from vendors at the same time that they meet a broad range of social needs to communicate. (Hagel & Armstrong, 1997, p. 8)

To an extent, power and information have moved from the authorities, the producers and the paid experts into the hands of the amateur represented by a collective activity and collective intelligence based on Web 2.0 technology (O'Reilly, 2005). The experiences of millions replace the musings of the few (Jeacle & Carter, 2011); they place this in the broader perspective of a shift away from authority towards the amateur: "Lay opinion derives its credibility from being the authentic voice of experience, uncompromised by corporate life and other vested interests. That the non-expert is privileged raises questions about expertise. TripAdvisor appears to preference lay experience over formalized expertise" (p. 304). This may have bigger social implications beyond the Internet: "Society may soon be at this inflection point in terms of how people... identify credible information, abandoning traditional methods for determining credibility that are based on authority and hierarchy for digital tools and new network approaches. Far from being a negative development, new methods and tools for determining credibility may reflect a more distributed and open approach than in the past" (Lankes, 2008, p. 101).

The site can also be linked to changing concepts of the media as a whole. Moving from a few sources reaching out to many, largely undifferentiated users, it is increasingly seen more as a two-way process “in which communications strategies are shaped by the instrumental and relational goals of the individuals involved and knowledge about one another’s idiosyncratic preferences” (Walther, Carr, Choi, DeAndrea, Kim, Tong & Van Der Heide, 2011, p. 19). As the end result is personalised information, the user must constantly evaluate different sources (Sundar, 2007). This again may change the nature of trust, as information can be personalised rather than being ‘mass’. With this shift has come a need for new literacies to use this explosion of amateur information effectively: “Electronic literacy places an increased burden on the user who can manipulate the text and is often responsible for constructing his/her own pathway through the information” (Thurstun, 2000, p. 65).

One objective of this dissertation is to add to the growing scholarship that examines how OURS build trust, and to explain the role of trust in OURS, as well as for academic study of new forms of sociotechnological interaction created by Web 2.0. This is a disputed term, and there is still no agreed definition; so, while cautious about citing from the Internet, this study borrows from O’Connor (2010) who aptly used a web-based, UGC definition of the term, updated here:

Web 2.0 is a concept that takes the network as a platform for information sharing, interoperability, user-centered design, and collaboration on the World Wide Web. A Web 2.0 site allows users to interact and collaborate with each other in a social media dialogue as creators (prosumers) of user-

generated content in a virtual community, in contrast to websites where users (consumers) are limited to the passive viewing of content that was created for them (Wikipedia, 2012).

The rise of Web 2.0 has combined social identification with technological features, which Metzger, Flanagin and Medders (2010) have merged into “sociotechnological developments”; they add that this has been largely ignored by researchers and call for it to be taken up – a call to which this study responds. Social and technological combine to help the user process large volumes of information effectively, by aggregating many reviews into a simple ranking number and by identifying reviewers who are relevant and whose words will be useful. With these controlling the mass of information, once again it is proposed that trust may become less important.

1.4. This dissertation

This dissertation is organised as follows. First, it outlines key theories and concepts and places the research in a broad context of online information providers. Second, it describes the theories and concepts in more detail, linking them to literature on the subject. Theories include uncertainty reduction theory, the technology acceptance model, and social identification theories. Key concepts include the risk inherent in using travel, self-efficacy, social identification, technological features, trust, and behavioural intention. It considers recent thought on those subjects which leads to hypothesis formation. A fourth chapter places these in the environment of TripAdvisor. The methodology chapter outlines the approaches used for the survey

and the interviews, and how concepts were operationalised and analysed. Two chapters of analysis are followed by discussion which outlines findings and suggests ways in which they might be understood, and finishes with suggestions for future research.

Chapter 2 – Theoretical and conceptual perspectives

“Many believe that digital media are shattering traditional models of authority and, as a result, credibility is being turned on its head”

Andrew Flanagin and Miriam Metzger,

Digital media, youth and credibility (2008) p. 19

2.1. Theoretical perspectives

Rather than testing one overriding theoretical position, this study borrows from three theories each of which offers a perspective that guides understanding of the subject. The background to this study is the concept of uncertainty in travel planning, the subsequent decision-making that demands an information search which allows the individual to overcome risk and ultimately to make a decision, and act; at its heart is how, in this environment, trust, self-efficacy, risk, social identification and technological features engage.

Previous research has explored all the variables considered in this dissertation (outlined in Table 1). Interest in trust and OURS has risen, although often examining different aspects separately rather than together. Grabner-Kräuter and Kaluscha (2003) said that one challenge facing any study of online trust is that “In most

empirical studies trust has been conceptualized in relatively narrow ways, because it seems impossible to empirically test all potential relationships between trust and its antecedents and consequences in a single study” (p. 804). While it is not possible to include all possible antecedents and outcomes, one original contribution of this research is to integrate strands of research that consider the experience, risk, self-efficacy, social identification and technological features of the site that feed into an information search using this new breed of OURS; the way these elements affect trust; and to examine their effect on decision-making and behavioural intentions. These are integrated into an exploratory study into the role of trust and its antecedents on an information-rich apomediary OURS such as TripAdvisor.

Table 1: Inclusion of selected variables in previous research

		General trust	Reviewer trust	Site trust	Self- efficacy	Social aspects	Tech aspects
Tan & Thoen	2000		x	x			
Gefen & Straub	2000	x				x	x
Gefen	2000	x					
Lee & Turban	2001			x			x
Shankar, Urban & Sultan	2002	x					x
Corbitt, Thanasankit & Yi	2003			x			x
Gefen, Karhanna & Straub	2003	x					x
Pavlou	2003	x					x
Grabner-Krauter & Kaluscha	2003		x	x			
Hassainen & Head	2004	x				x	x
Bart, Shankar, Sultan & Urban	2005	x				x	x
Tanis & Postmes	2005	x				x	
Lim, Sia, Lee & Benbasat	2006	x				x	
de Vries	2006	x				x	
Dash & Saji	2007	x			x	x	x
Racherla	2008	x			x	x	
McKnight, Carter & Clay	2009		x	x			
Yoo, Lee, Gretzel & Fesenmaier	2009		x				
Zhang, Prybutok, Ryan & Pavur	2009	x			x		x
Kim, Kim & Hwang	2009	x			x		
Zheng, Zhao & Stylianou	2010	x				x	x
Casaló, Flavián & Guinalú	2011	x				x	x
Jeacle & Carter	2011		x	x		x	x
Gibbs, Ellison & Lai	2011	x			x		

2.1.i. Theory 1: Uncertainty reduction theory (URT)

URT was developed to explain first meetings between two people who might anticipate meeting again, or could foresee some value to a continued relationship (Berger & Calabrese, 1975; Berger, 1979). Individuals exchange information that will allow them to predict the other's attitudes and behaviours, to help them make sense of the other and to gain a sense of control over the exchange. The theory proposed that the desire to do away with or limit uncertainty would predict how people communicate in an initial encounter. Uncertainty would be reduced so that the individual would have a feeling of control over their environment. Uncertainty itself can be defined as "a cognitive state resulting from an individual's assessment of a number of alternative predictions available for a stranger's future behaviour" (Bradac, 2001, p. 464).

Berger and Calabrese identified two forms of uncertainty: predictive uncertainty, where the individual finds it difficult to predict the other's behaviour and hence needs to reduce the uncertainty that it elicits; and explanatory uncertainty, in which the individual finds it hard to explain the behaviour or actions of the other. They further identified three ways in which people reduce uncertainty: passively, perhaps by observing a stranger from a distance; actively, by asking mutual friends about a third party, for example; and interactively, by engaging in conversation with the other person. On TripAdvisor, passive strategies of social comparison would relate to the user looking at reviews to see if they are written by someone similar; active strategies of information seeking might relate to using search terms to focus the search or

seeing how many 'likes' a reviewer has received; while the third, interactive strategy, could be writing to a reviewer for more information about a hotel they have reviewed (Berger, 1979; Ramirez, Walther, Burgoon & Sunnafrank, 2002). Other studies place OURS among uncertainty-reduction theory studies in communication behaviour, and it is easy to see how this can be applied to a user looking at a travel website for advice in choosing between a hundred hotels, concerned that a wrong choice could mar a holiday (Racherla, 2008).

In the original theory, Berger and Calabrese proposed seven axioms, of which four are appropriate here. First, when levels of uncertainty are high that can lead to high levels of information seeking, which can be seen when individuals looking at TripAdvisor are travelling with others and therefore need to justify their choice of hotel, so put more effort into choosing it. Second, as uncertainty declines, so too does information seeking, which refers to when a traveller has shortlisted a few hotels and does not look for any more, or has chosen one and if he or she searches further it is done to validate the choice. Third, similarities between persons reduces uncertainty, which is relevant to the way users of OURS value information from people they judge to be socially similar more than they do information from those they judge to be dissimilar. And fourth, people produce mental models that help them process information to reduce uncertainty, which corresponds to a TripAdvisor user's preconceptions and expectations about certain types of hotels and reviewers that will impel them to process information in ways that conform to these models.

In the years since the theory was first propounded, it has been used for more than just the meeting of individuals, and has been employed to examine existing personal relationships, organisations, health-care meetings between doctor and patient, online dating, and often intercultural encounters (Goldsmith, 2001). Two important extensions of URT for this research were Parks and Edelman's additional axioms that shared communication networks reduce uncertainty; and that shared communication networks and similarities are related positively (1983). The inclusion of a social element in the original theory has been a guiding principle for this research. Goldsmith went on to say that the theory's main contribution has been "its heuristic value in directing our attention to the role of uncertainty in various communication situations and to practical concerns with how individuals manage uncertainty in problematic situations" (p. 514). It is used in this way in the current study, not with a view to directly testing it, but as part of a framework for considering uncertainty and risk and its role in this relatively new phenomenon.

One criticism directed at URT is that, in initial meetings, uncertainty does not always decrease in a relationship – indeed, it may even increase if information gathered is inconsistent with prior knowledge (Gudykunst, 1995). Others have criticised it for its lack of generalisability as it was based on studies of white, middle-class Americans (Gudykunst, 1985). Moving online, URT has faced further criticism that it is at best only partially effective on asynchronous CMC communication (Pratt, Wiseman, Cody & Wendt, 1999). Parks and Floyd (1996) pointed out that most theories of interpersonal communication were developed based on face-to-face interaction, and involve

reading physical cues; and yet Walther (1992) suggested that it merely takes individuals longer to assess different cues in online communication, to reduce uncertainty. Indeed, Tidwell and Walther extended URT into the virtual world with a study that found that CMC interactants employed more direct and intimate uncertainty reduction behaviours than did people engaging in person (Tidwell & Walther, 2002). Looking at relationship-formation in online news groups, Parks and Floyd (1996, p. 84) went on to state that “none of these theories require physical proximity and frequent interactions as necessary conditions for relational development. These conditions may be helpful, but they are not necessary to arrive at predictions of how rewarding future interactions might be, how one might feel about another person, or how one might be treated by that person.” Hence, the theory may be reasonably applied in an online environment.

2.1.ii. URT and risk-reduction strategies

Uncertainty and risk are connected but not synonymous. If a rich relative dies leaving an individual either \$1 million or \$2 million, that individual is uncertain but not at risk – unless the individual owes \$1.5 million to gangsters. Risk involves both uncertainty and loss. It is also relative to the observer (Kaplan & Garrick, 1981). However, while URT was named for the uncertainty (and to a lesser extent risk) that comes with meeting someone new, the uncertainty that confronts someone booking a hotel is more akin to risk that they will lose, either the opportunity cost of booking a sub-standard place, or the financial cost of being bilked, or the social cost of choosing a hotel that does not please travelling companions or gain the respect of fellow

travellers who think he could have made a better choice. Hence risk rather than uncertainty is used as a primary concept for this dissertation.

Risk reduction has been described as “a process by which consumers seek to reduce the uncertainty or consequences of an unsatisfactory decision. Uncertainty is usually reduced by obtaining additional information” (Mitchell, Davies, Moutinho & Vassos, 1999, p. 169). They identified 15 risk-reduction strategies for travellers, most of which involved gathering more information from independent travel reviews, family and friends, expert guidebooks and travel agents, or locals.³ The greater the risk, the greater the effort put in to gathering information. de Ruyter, Wetzels and Kleijnen (2001) investigated the way risk influences trust and decisions to stay in a financial relationship and concluded that risk is an essential prerequisite for trust. Casaló, Flavián and Guinalú (2011, p. 623) state that “in order to develop trust there must exist uncertainty about a potential or existing relationship that leads to a certain perception of risk or vulnerability.”

The advent of Web 2.0 and OURS means that a user looking at TripAdvisor faces three slightly different risks: first, of a less-than-perfect travel experience should they choose the wrong hotel; second, that they will be taken in by a fraudulent review; and third, that they will lack the skills to differentiate honest from bogus reviews and right from wrong hotels. Each of these obliges a user to employ a different form of trust: the first requires trust that the site will provide the information they need (site trust);

³ The three that did not involve gathering information were buying travel insurance; buying items such as travel adaptors and comfortable shoes; and waiting until the last minute to pay for the holiday,

the second requires the writers to behave honourably (reviewer trust); and the third requires them to trust their own competence in searching, discriminating and deciding (trust in self, here considered as self-efficacy).

2.1.iii. Uncertainty reduction and social identification

Berger and Calabrese's original monograph took perceived similarity as an element in URT, and likewise, social identity theories have suggested that individuals look for similarity cues to reduce uncertainty. Hogg and Grieve (1999) argued that "subjective uncertainty reduction may be a critical motivation for social identification... Things that we are certain about are linked to who we are via prototypical features of social groups with which we identify and which form part of our self-concept" (p. 81-82), so that they seek social identification in order to reduce uncertainty in a given situation. Further, they offer empirical support that "uncertainty reduction [is a] fundamental human motive that can be readily satisfied by group membership" (p. 82). Hogg went further to propose an uncertainty-identity theory, which addresses people's motivations for identifying with a group in order to reduce uncertainty (Hogg, 2006).

On TripAdvisor, uncertainty about choice of hotel can be moderated by looking for reviews from socially similar people; and uncertainty about whether people are socially similar (and therefore with relevant experience) may be moderated by the cues given on the site. Indeed, in a reciprocal arrangement, social identification with an in-group reduces uncertainty and this in turn increases trust and respect for the in-group (Hogg & Mullin, 1999), as well as for the self as a part of that in-group, increasing self-efficacy as well. Hence, in this study both uncertainty reduction and

social identity theories – as well as self-efficacy – are integrated into the model of trust in an apomediary site.

2.1.iv. Theory 3: Social Identification

As it takes the position that users of an apomediary OURS such as TripAdvisor pay more heed to reviews written by those who are similar to them and therefore with whom they identify, this study considers previous research into social influence (Cialdini, 2001; Wood, 2000) and persuasion (Briñol & Petty, 2009). In this study, the term ‘social identification’ is used to mean the way a user identifies with a reviewer as having salient similarities which unite them in the shared attitudes, opinions, activities and intentions of a prototypical group of likeminded people. Such a prototypical group is helpful for making swift judgments of similarity given very limited amount of time and information, and as a result social identification can be seen as a form of personal identification based on group identification.

2.3.v. Social influence

People are influenced by others in making decisions (Huang & Chen, 2006). They want to form valid and accurate attitudes, and open themselves to information that will help them do so (Chaiken, Lieberman & Eagly, 1989; Cialdini & Goldstein, 2004). To do this they open themselves to social influence,⁴ of which two types present themselves in the early literature: Normative, which concerns influence to conform to what others

⁴ Most research into social or group influence has been done within an organisation or a community, however, and TripAdvisor is neither although it has elements of both. The individual and the group are hard to tease apart in an online recommender platform. While each user approaches the site and each reviewer posts their texts and photographs as an individual, as soon as the words are written they are written for a group; and the words are read as a small part of a larger whole.

say or do; and informational, which states that people are influenced by relevant others' thoughts, feelings and behaviours and accept them as credible evidence of reality (Deutsch & Gerard, 1955).⁵ This second is the more relevant to TripAdvisor, with the additional recognition that people need to interpret information correctly as "one inaccurate perception, cognition or behaviour could mean the difference between getting a bargain and being duped" (Cialdini & Goldstein, 2004, p. 592). Social influence becomes particularly salient in situations where one is unable to experience the object for oneself, making it relevant for TripAdvisor where as it is impossible to test the hotel before booking one will accept others reactions about it as evidence of truth (Burnkrant & Cousineau, 1975).

People are guided by what others write and say. This is rational; if the majority is positive about something then it is safer and sensible to start from a position of agreement with them. Numbers play a role and people are more receptive to opinions from the majority. On TripAdvisor, users consult the site and often, on the balance of probability, will be swayed more by many positive reviews of a hotel than by a few negative reviews, or by many negative against a few positive. This is consistent with dynamic social impact theory which states that "all else being equal, an individual occupying a given social space will be more likely to conform to the attitudes, beliefs, and behavioural propensities exhibited by the local numerical majority than by... the

⁵ It is also worth noting that some have seen normative and informational as overlapping rather than being separate, as normative influence implies a search for accuracy every bit as much as information-based influence does (Cialdini & Goldstein, 2004). Others have suggested tripartite models that involve a coherent self-image, keeping good relations with those who could reward or punish, and gaining understanding of the object of interest (Wood, 2000).

local numerical minority” (Cialdini & Goldstein, 2004, p. 608). Equally, the vast number of reviews indicates that the site is popular and therefore relevant. But it does not mean people follow blindly. Any herding effect is offset by the variety of comments that may be found, hence the wide difference in reviews and in reactions to postings on OURS (Huang & Chen, 2006). Even so, social identification is expected to play a part in developing trust.

2.1.vi. Social identification

The starting point for social identification is social comparison – individuals cannot know if they are similar to another until they have compared themselves to them (Festinger, 1954). Social information processing theory (Walther, 1992), meanwhile, centres on the idea that people want to gain accurate evaluations of themselves and their opinions, and compare themselves with other to achieve this. The role of social identification in persuasion hinges on the proposal that people tend to be more easily swayed by those whom they like; people look for social proof and tend to follow the actions of others who are similar to them. Social information processing theory suggests that people find ways to verbalise what is not made verbal online, and to fill in gaps in reduced social cue environments to develop meaningful online relationships over time. Third, social categorisation proposes that individuals place themselves in groups to make such a comparison. Hogg (2000) built on self-categorisation theory to develop a “subjective uncertainty-reduction model of motivation associated with social identity processes and intergroup behaviour” (p. 223). He found that, in order to reduce uncertainty, individuals assigned to themselves a prototypical shared identity

with a group. "Social categorization of self... depersonalizes self-perception, but goes further in transforming self-conception and assimilating all aspects of one's attitudes, feelings and behaviours to the in-group prototype" (Hogg, 2000, p. 226). Prototypes, he went on to say, are "context-specific fuzzy sets that define and prescribe attitudes, feelings, and behaviors that characterize one group and distinguish it from other groups."

One effect of this is that people may not interact just as individuals but more as members of a prototypical group; TripAdvisor users may mentally assign themselves to the group of 'young adventure lovers', for example, and assume that they share with some writers a wide variety of personal characteristics based on that prototypical identity, whether or not that is the case. This builds trust, as "people believe that demographically similar others are more honest, trustworthy and cooperative (Levin, Whitener & Cross, 2006, p. 1164).

Users look for many things in an OURS and Green suggested that expertise and sincerity are important: "Cues to expertise might include specific statements about relevant experience ('I worked in the cruise industry for 20 years') or messages that convey knowledge through details or the use of appropriate technical terms; alternatively, individuals who have been part of a community... over time may establish reputations for giving especially useful information" (Green, 2007, p. 45). And yet even an expert may not be heeded if their opinions differ from one's own. Consistently the most significant factor affecting whether or not a user will be influenced by a review is source similarity. As Wood (2000) put it: "people are

motivated to adopt attitudes of relevant reference groups to the extent that the group identity is salient and desirable.”

People need to have a consistent view of the world, and look for information that reinforces and supports that view. Hence they find those people who support this view to be more attractive while those who challenge it and create an uncomfortable inconsistency are less attractive (Montoya, Horton & Kirchner, 2008). People are more influenced by friends than by strangers (Bakshy, Karrer & Adamic, 2009). The friendlier one feels towards someone, the likelier one is to be influenced by them as affect or emotional involvement are correlated to cognitive trust (McAllister, 1995). Hence social identification is a key concept in this study.

Social comparison can be mediated through mass media, as is the case with TripAdvisor. “It is well known in the field of information seeking that information exchange between two parties works best when they share similar beliefs, values, educational levels and social statuses” (Soo & Hilligoss, 2008, p. 65). One study of travel advice sites has found that a user judges the credibility of a reviewer based on the perceived similarity of interests, life stage and objectives with the user (Cox, Burgess, Sellito & Buultjens, 2009); hence this study includes the effect of social identification between user and reviewer.

Research among first-time visitors to a site showed that satisfied customer endorsement by similar peers increased consumers’ trusting beliefs and likelihood to buy (Lim, Sia, Lee & Benbasat, 2006). Recommendations by dissimilar peers were not effective. In an early study involving TripAdvisor, Rabanser & Ricci quote Resnick &

Varian (1997): "In everyday life consumers in such a situation rely on recommendations from other people by word of mouth, known products from advertisements or inform themselves reading reviews printed in newspapers or theme specific guides. A recommender system mimics this natural social process aggregating input provided by web users and directing it as recommended output to appropriate recipients" (2005, n.p.).

That is not to say that social identification is simple. There are several layers that have different effects and "similarity in values and personality is more important than similarity in background" (Green, 2007, p. 48). When looking at hotel reviews, the current study suggests that users will find that a review's persuasive effect is based to a large extent on the level to which they identify with the reviewer. TripAdvisor classifies reviewers as business or leisure travellers or travelling alone or with children or as a couple, which allows the user to identify with reviewers and judge if their interests are similar enough for the review to be taken seriously, or if they are 'other' and their review can be ignored. This may increase identification between user and reviewer if they already have something in common; or equally it may be used to decrease identification if there is the perception that their travelling interests are not comparable. The shorthand labels of 'travelling on business' or 'travelling with teenage children' provided by TripAdvisor are thus social cues which help users decide the salience of a reviewer.

Social identification must also be combined with relevant experience: "We may say that the peers are not simply peers, but peers exhibiting 'optimal heterophily': They

are like us in terms of interests and in their shared perspective (e.g., also customers rather than vendors, students rather than teachers) except for one important difference: They have experience with the specific target (vendor, professor etc.) while we do not” (Walther, Carr, Choi, DeAndrea, Kim, Tong & Van Der Heide, 2011, p. 26).

The social aspects of a site may not be enough, though, and the strength of trust shown towards a reviewer is likely to depend also on the attributions made about that person. SIDE states that CMC can be rich and that when people feel they are part of a group or identify with someone in group terms, they can fill in the absence of social cues with attributes of their own (Lea & Spears, 1991). This is evident on TripAdvisor which describes reviewers as ‘businessman’ or ‘couple’ or ‘family’ so the user can decide whether they identify with that group, and may attribute motivation, opinions, attitudes and behaviours to the writer based on presumed membership of that group.

Walther’s (1992) theory of social information processing (SIP) also suggests that users attribute characteristics to writers to reduce uncertainty in situations of little information. Although SIP is concerned with relationship formation using e-mail (and earlier teleconferencing), it is helpful in exploring the relationship between reviewer and user on OURS, as Walther and D’Addario (2002) stated: “a key aspect to the SIP model is that users adapt to the medium and find ways to overcome the relative shortage of cue systems” (p. 325).

In addition, the reduced social cues model is a starting point for how individuals relate to others online where social cues are missing (Sproull & Kiesler, 1986). In a cues-filtered out medium, users filter the cues back in again, so to speak. Even when non-verbal cues are removed, users attribute intent, status and characteristics to writers based on the verbal cues that *are* there: “It is apparent that textually based, computer-mediated information can provide the data for interpersonal impressions” (Walther, 1992, p. 71). One study of the ‘relational world’ of cyberspace reported the findings that in such a reduced-cues environment, people adapt textual cues to reduce uncertainty about others; for example, they use smileys or emoticons to show their emotional state of mind, or use phrases such as ‘grins’ or ‘just kidding’ to indicate the way in which their remarks should be interpreted (Parks & Floyd, 1996).

Walther proposed a hyperpersonal model of CMC, in which the medium and social and psychological attributes combine to make communication online more rather than less intense and personal (Walther, 1996). Using SIDE as a starting point, he noted that in the absence of social cues people can idealise the person with whom they are communicating: “CMC partners engage in an ‘overattribution’ process; they build stereotypical impressions of their partners without qualifying the strength of such impressions in the light of the meagre information – misspellings, typographical errors, or excessive punctuation – on which they are built” (Walther, 1996, p. 18). Given the limited information about each reviewer on TripAdvisor, the user is likely to fill in the blanks by attributing characteristics to either build a feeling of similarity or to dismiss the reviewer as irrelevant. As one interviewee for this study put it, “When you

look at somebody and they look like new Russian money, I assume that they want to do one thing, you can also look at their name and what they have written... I make assumptions about whether it's somebody I think is reliable" (Subject 1, female, 48, UK).

Taken together these theories suggest that social aspects will be actively engaged by users to achieve their goals. Researchers have drawn a connection between trust, SIDE, SIP and the hyperpersonal model in that the lack of trust cues means that the few that are present become more salient in forming opinions (Flanagin, Metzger, Pure & Markov, 2011). This study argues for inclusion of social identification alongside other social aspects to overcome risk online. It asks about shared interests, similar behaviour and personal similarity as a benchmark for reviewer relevance, to test the relationship between different forms of trust and the social aspects of a site. In terms of overcoming risk, however, it is proposed that social identification will only deal with the *social* risk of the identity of the reviewers, not with the risks of choosing the wrong hotel or not getting value for money.

Reviewers post because they want their words to persuade others to book or avoid a hotel; to encourage a hotel to change its ways or continue on its current course; or they want to tell the world at large that they are travelled, reliable, well-informed or possess other socially acceptable attributes. They want to persuade. On the other hand, users coming to the site want information that will help guide their actions, they want to hold correct attitudes (Petty & Cacioppo, 1986), and they will look at others'

opinions in order to see how correct these attitudes are (Festinger, 1954). They are open to persuasion.

Cialdini (2001) identified social proof (the opinions of others) as one of six tactics people use to persuade. Confronted with uncertainty, an individual will look to others to suggest how to act and what to think. Social proof is more effective when there is similarity between the two people, however, and individuals are more likely to act if they believe that someone like them has acted in a similar way before. Further, Harper, Li, Chen and Konstan (2007) suggested that social comparison can motivate people to contribute to a public good and found that comparison of information does increase the desire to boost relative standing, but does not increase overall interest in the community.

2.1.vii. Theory 3: Technology acceptance model

The starting point for a consideration of technological features is the technology acceptance model (TAM). TAM states that intention to use information technology is determined by the perceived usefulness (PU), which is defined as how much people “tend to use or not use an application to the extent they believe it will help them perform,” and perceived ease of use (PEOU) of the technology, which is defined as “the degree to which a person believes that using a particular system would be free of effort” (Davis, 1989, pp. 320-1). PEOU also positively influences PU. Usability is defined as “the ease with which the customer is able to learn to use the system and memorise its basic routine operations” (Sanchez-Franco & Rondan-Cataluña, 2010). TAM was criticised for not including social influence on technology acceptance, and in

2000, Venkatesh added self-efficacy to TAM, and two years later Dabholkar and Bagozzi added consumer traits and situational influences (Perea y Monsuwé, Dellaert & de Ruyter, 2004). Flanagin et al. see it terms of the site's ability to aggregate (technology) and connect people (social) (Flanagin, Metzger, Pure & Markov, 2011).

Searches using Web 2.0 are in part characterised by breadth of information and the technology that allows individuals to access, filter, organise and judge it, and "Digital media's ability to aggregate information and to connect individuals to one another... provides new potential for determining information credibility and for undermining traditional authorities" (Metzger, Flanagin & Medders, 2010, pp. 414-5). Technology has allowed people to connect online, but there is more to TripAdvisor than technology. The social aspect of connecting with like-minded people has long been a part of planning travel and TripAdvisor offers the ability to do so on an industrial scale.

At the same time, extended use of the site may weaken the effect of technological features as they become the norm, based on the concept of institutional embeddedness whereby people do not even notice the trust that comes from technology, because it conforms to 'situational normality' (Riegelsburger, Sasse & McCarthy, 2003); and "the computer is no longer seen as a mere medium of communication, but as a source of interaction... That is, users orient toward computers as autonomous beings instead of as conduits for delivery of pre-programmed content" (Sundar, 2007, p. 89).

There has been some discussion as to whether it is possible to trust technology, as it has neither will nor volition as a person does. However, this study takes McKnight,

Chervany and Clay's (2009, n.p.) position, that: "If competence is a viable trust issue, and if technology can be said to have the capability or functionality to do for us what we want it to, then trust in technology in terms of believing that a technology is competent is just as viable a concept as trust in the competence of a doctor."

One major study into the subject identified 28 technological aspects that engender trust, which include navigability, or how easy it is to use, how consistent it is and the presence of guides and tutorials; technology, or how well the site works and the speed with which images and text appear; and presentation, or how effectively the visuals communicate the purpose of the site, how much it looks like other trusted sites, and whether the user believes the developers were skilled (Cheskin/Sapient, 1999). To this one might now add Web 2.0 aspects, such as the variety of media including streaming video and audio, as well as interactivity with other users that "is arguably the single most important feature that distinguishes mass communication via the Web from traditional mass media" (Sundar, 2007).⁶

The Cheskin/Sapient report placed trustworthiness and functionality in perspective, saying: "trustworthiness is only one of several aspects to e-commerce that consumers take into account. Still, the key components of creating trust – brand, navigation and

⁶ Sundar demands more than one exchange for true interactivity to take place: "in a chat room, if two people post messages without acknowledging each other's messages, then it is non-interactive; if one interactant posts a message that is a direct response to another's posting, then it is considered reactive. If the latter interactant then responds to this posting in a manner that takes into account not only the latter's posting but also those before them, then it is considered responsive. For a message exchange to be fully interactive, the messages should have a flow or coherence, i.e., they can be threaded together in a sequence" (Sundar, 2007, p. 95). A less stringent definition of Web interactivity is that a site offers the potential for a user to personalise data searches and engage with other people.

fulfillment – influence perceptions of the Web site meeting consumers’ overall needs. Strong navigation not only communicates trustworthiness, it also increases consumers’ perceptions that a Web site can meet their needs” (Cheskin/Sapient, 1999). Another study took a broad overview of trust in online communities to find that technological features such as usability, transparency, security, privacy and quality-assured content have different impact on trust, and this has contributed to the current study’s interest in technological features of the site (Benlian & Hess, 2011).

More recently, Sundar has coined the MAIN model that technological affordances help explain media credibility, beyond the content itself (Sundar, 2008). The mere presence of technological affordances can prompt trust, based on an affordance’s value-added function. For example, interactive elements on a site suggest self-determination, and aggregation can suggest the site is more relevant to the user: “In sum, technological affordances in digital media trigger cognitive heuristics that aid credibility judgments by offering both new functions and new metrics that are rich in cues. Given that the overload situation presented by most digital media creates a reliance on cues, today’s youth are likely to make quick decisions about the credibility of information they consume on the basis of these cues” (Sundar, 2008, p. 78). This study places technological features alongside social identification and hence measures opinions on such things as ease of use, navigation, updates and aggregation technological features.

2.2. Connecting the theoretical perspectives

All three theories contribute to this exploratory study of apomediary sites in the following way: as the hallmark of such OURS is that users visit them to reduce uncertainty (although there may be other motivations, such as posting a review, validation of an existing choice, looking for a friend's review and so on); and they require acceptance (PU and PEOU) of the technology that aggregates the mass of reviews, as well as the social identification to reduce that number to a useable amount. Thus three theoretical perspectives taken together can offer an overview that no single theory can: URT on its own can explain the reader's motivation for using a site and activities undertaken while there, but does not account for what happens while on the site that builds confidence and expertise. That is the role of self-efficacy, which can explain the reader's feelings of confidence and skill they bring to the site and they develop by successfully using the site, but not the motivations for visiting the site in the first place – which is provided by URT. Self-efficacy (or rather social cognitive theory) further explains the individual's vicarious observation of others' experiences that builds personal efficacy, which is more likely to happen when the others are similar to the individual – which in turn helps them reduce uncertainty.

This study proposes a cohesive structure that borrows from these three theories and integrates six primary concepts to examine the role of trust on TripAdvisor as follows: *a reader turns to TripAdvisor to reduce uncertainty (URT) in choosing a hotel. He combines self-efficacy in using the site with the social (social identity theories) and technological features (TAM) that constitute an apomediary site. This leads him to*

trust the site and the people writing on it, and his own efficacy; and this in turn allows for behavioural intention and action. The relationships between each of these variables (excluding behavioural intention as the outcome variable) are as follows:

- TRUST↔RISK trust exists to overcome risk
- TRUST↔SOCID we trust people more if they are similar to us
- TRUST↔SELFE skills → trust in self/replaces trust on others
- TRUST↔TECH sites engender trust with navigation, fulfillment
- RISK↔SOCID we look for similarity to reduce risk
- RISK↔SELFE own skills + others' experience overcomes risk
- RISK↔TECH site offers reassurance that there is no risk
- SOCID↔SELFE vicarious observation of similar others → efficacy
- SOCID ↔TECH mutual support → trust on apomediary site
- TECH↔SELFE own skills using tech to achieve goals

2.3. Conceptual perspectives

Six primary concepts are employed in this dissertation: risk (and risk reduction); social and technological features of the site; self-efficacy; trust; and behavioural intention. To these are added secondary, contextual concepts that include information search; information self-reliance; decision making; e-wom; and apomediary sites.

2.3.i. Primary concept 1: Perceived risk

Risk can be defined as “the consumer’s perceptions of the uncertainty of adverse consequences of buying a product (or service)” (Dowling & Staelin, 1999, p. 119). They

found that risk influences search behaviour which depends on the level of risk. An earlier exploratory study noted that travel inevitably involves uncertainty and identified three forms of traveller risk as physical-equipment risk, vacation risk and destination risk (Roehl & Fesenmaier, 1992).

The purpose of the information searches is to overcome the perceived risk or uncertainty inherent in all buying decisions. The concept of perceived risk has been much used in travel literature as travel itself is fraught with risk and “the influence of perceived risk... often dominates travelers’ decision-making processes” (Kim, Qu & Kim, 2009, p. 203).⁷ This current study uses perceived risk theory which suggests that risk has many dimensions, that is “it is related to financial, performance, psychological, social, physical and timing factors” (ibid, p. 204, citing Jacoby & Kaplan, 1972). These dimensions of risk do not have uniform effects and differ from person to person and situation to situation. As a result not all are considered relevant to this study, which includes financial risk (that the hotel chosen may not offer value for money), performance risk (that the hotel may not live up to expectations) and social risk (that peers may not be impressed by a choice of hotel). The current study looks at perceived risks in using TripAdvisor.

⁷ Throughout this dissertation, perceived risk will be referred to simply as risk, as in TripAdvisor use it is unlikely to be quantified and thus remains as perception rather than a concrete reality. It does not matter that risk is perceived rather than real: “regardless of whether real or perceived, the presence of risk has the potential to change the nature of travel decisions” (Sönmez & Graefe, 1998, p. 172).

2.3.ii. Primary concept 2: social identification

Social identification can be defined as the way a user identifies with a reviewer as having salient similarities which unite them in the shared attitudes, opinions, activities and intentions of a prototypical group. Social identification can be seen as personal identification based on group identification.

In the past, social identification has been seen as a community activity and Casaló, Flavián and Guinalú (2010) defined this as “identification with a community is the degree to which the member sees him- or herself as part of the group; and this shared identity in turn may help increase the value of the community” (p. 900). In the case of TripAdvisor, the larger community is broken down into smaller ones identified according to demographics and travel type (travelling with families or on business, for example) and the social identification is with smaller groups or even individual writers than with the overall community of travellers. Throughout this study, the term ‘social identification’ is used to mean the way an individual user identifies with an individual reviewer as showing salient similarities which unite them in the shared attitudes, opinions, activities and intentions of a prototypical group of likeminded people.

Many elements of a website have been proposed as precursors of trust (see Table 1), moving from a preoccupation with security and privacy issues at the turn of the millennium to design cues in the early years of this century and to social concerns more recently. They include perceived privacy and security (Chellappa & Pavlou, 2002); technical reliability, security and third-party certification (Lee & Turban, 2001); rating mechanisms, feedback and reputation systems (Ba, 2001); the extensiveness of

the review (Poston & Speier, 2005); credibility, customisation and choice (Dabholkar, 2006); PU and social presence (Kumar & Benbasat, 2006); and pictures, style, structure, comprehensiveness and links (Lucassen & Schraagen, 2010). Technological features and social identification are among these precursors, and as they combine in a Web 2.0 site they are considered central.

2.3.iii. Primary concept 3: technological features

The technological features specifically under consideration are those that can aggregate a large number of hotel reviews into a single score; and that enable a user to search the reviews for the most relevant. These take their place among other trust-inducing features, such as the four identified by Wang and Emurian (2005) included social cue design with structure, content and graphic (i.e. more technology-driven) features. It is important to examine both, as both can be objects of trust and humans can trust technology in a similar way to how they trust other people (Grabner-Kräuter, Kaluscha & Fladnitzer, 2006). Jeacle and Carter's (2011) distinction between personal trust and system trust echoed this, as Web 2.0 involves social and technological working together, citing TripAdvisor as "an illustrative example of how personal trust and systems-based trust is constructed in contemporary society" (p. 297).

Consideration of the technological features of the site uses the technology acceptance model (TAM) and its concepts of perceived usefulness (PU) and perceived ease of use (PEOU) of the site (Davis, 1986; Davis, Bagozzi & Warshaw, 1989). TAM analyses user behaviour by examining PU and PEOU, and posits that there will be a positive relationship between using a technology and the performance resulting from its use.

Hence this study looks at usability features on the site that help generate trust and behavioural intention. As Gefen, Benbasat and Pavlou (2008) stated: “New users, as well as experienced ones, choose whether to use the Web site based on both trust and the usefulness and ease of use consideration” (p. 277).

2.3.iv. Combining social and technological in an apomediary site

This study takes the position that social identification with a reviewer will help grow trust in that reviewer and in the site as a whole. However, social identification is not all, as the user also needs to trust the technological features of the site that allowed for the social identification to take place. This study suggests that this should be seen as part of a societal shift of the role of the individual within the system. Such democratic information sources as OURS allow the individual to evaluate the performance of businesses and organisations (in this case hotels), which necessitates the user switching between assessment of the credibility of the system to which the individual contributes, and of the individual who contributes to the system. Social identification and the technological features are two parts of this system, and the user switches between using, evaluating and appreciating both to achieve a final goal.

Bart, Shankar, Sultan and Urban (2005) offered a list of 91 site-based drivers of trust; however, this study suggests that most can be accounted for by technological or social aspects which are the hallmark of an apomediated Web 2.0 site. Hence, just those two are considered.

On the social identification side, peer reviews can recreate the effect of offline personal interaction (Kumar & Benbasat, 2006). One study examined trust-building

strategies that e-commerce sites could employ and found that endorsements by satisfied peers was likely to increase trust in an online store, which led to hypotheses in this study that in some circumstances social identification was more important than technological features (Lim, Sia, Lee & Benbasat, 2006).

Metzger, Flanagin and Medders (2010) pointed out that the Internet is a social arena and write of “social computing technologies” with which individuals use sociotechnological means such as aggregation of data and interaction with other people to determine credibility, using “social collaborative efforts to evaluate information online (p. 415). Building on pioneering work by Walther, researchers have studied how socially rich interfaces can build online trust in commercial sites and how that trust in turn interacts with technological features (Hassainen & Head, 2004). This also connects with research concerned with the technology of such sites that allows for interaction to take place (McKnight, Carter & Clay, 2009), and the link between trust and the usability and site design (Sanchez-Franco & Rondan-Cataluña, 2010). Hence this study proposes that it is valuable to consider both at the same time: “one of the most fruitful approaches to understanding new technology may be through consideration of the multiple and simultaneous influence agents embodied in the channels that these technologies make salient” (Walther et al., 2011, p. 26).

2.3.v. Primary concept 4: Self-efficacy

The final element of the information search that overcomes risk, contributes to trust and leads to action is the concept of self-efficacy. Self-efficacy is defined as an individual’s belief that he or she has the skills necessary to complete a task, and is

taken from social cognitive theory (Bandura, 1977, 1982). Self-efficacy predicts attainment, and high-efficacy leads to greater time and effort expended by the individual, while low-efficacy is associated with failure or giving up. In this study, it is expected to be associated with confidence and expertise in using the site, both the technological features and also identifying how users look for social similarities with reviewers. It is also expected to be associated with behavioural intention, as the confidence to act requires a belief in one's own effectiveness. However, the relationship between self-efficacy and trust is not apparent. Confidence is not the same as trust (Mayer, Davis & Schoorman, 1995), so the confidence that comes with high-efficacy does not equate to trust; while equally self-efficacy can be seen as trust-in-self to achieve something, rather than trust in another party; while trust may be what takes over when self-efficacy has reached its limit, and one has to take a step into the unknown.

Self-efficacy concerns a user's ability to "organize and execute courses of action required to attain designated types of performances" (Bandura, cited in Hernández, Jiménez & José Martín, 2008, p. 965). Self-efficacy is not generalised but is applied to situations or technologies. Online self-efficacy has been explored in terms of trust and risk in relation to e-commerce sites, finding that it affects trust and hence purchase intention (Kim & Kim, 2005; Kim, Kim & Hwang, 2009); and that self-efficacy affects adoption of online privacy protection behaviour (Cho, Rivera & Lim, 2009).

This study includes self-efficacy alongside technological features of the site, following earlier research which has added the concept to TAM (Davis, 1986). Self-efficacy has

been added to TAM as an antecedent of successful action (Hernández, Jiménez & José Martín, 2008), and as an antecedent of trust in online shopping (Ha & Stoel, 2008). Hernández, Jiménez and José Martín found that when users feel they are more competent and confident they have better perceptions about shopping online and hence do so more often. They pointed out, though, the limitation in their study that Spanish culture may have influenced the results and indicate that different results may be found in more risk-averse cultures. Hence this current study looks at a broader, non-culture-specific group to see if results differ.

People gain feelings of self-efficacy from four experiences: performance accomplishments, vicarious experience, verbal persuasion and emotional state of mind (Bandura, 1982). Of these, the first two have clearest relevance to this study: a user who has successfully used TripAdvisor to choose a hotel in the past will experience feelings of high-efficacy when he or she attempts to do so again, while a traveller who has confidence in his or her ability to choose a hotel will do likewise; the reviews act as a proxy for personal experience so that a user can feel confident in finding a hotel by reading reviews by others who have been successful. One study that included trust and self-efficacy online found that “self-efficacy... affects trust, perceived usefulness and perceived risk in the online customer, and in turn positively influences the customer’s intention to purchase products online” (Dash & Saji, 2007). This is how it is considered in the current study.

Some studies have sought to reduce self-efficacy to a single essence, positing a generalised self-efficacy within the individual (Chen, Gully & Eden, 2001); but it is

widely accepted that it is domain-specific. For example, studies have used self-efficacy to add to TAM to build models of computer self-efficacy (Marakas, Yi & Johnson, 1998; Murphy, Coover & Owen, 1989); and it has joined forces with social presence in studies of online shopping (Dash & Saji, 2007); and with computer-based self-service (van Beuningen, de Ruyter, Wetzels & Streukens, 2009). Gibbs, Ellison and Lai (2011) studied uncertainty reduction, experience and self-efficacy in the reduced-cues environment of online dating. They found that self-efficacy had the greatest impact on the choice of uncertainty-reducing behaviour, while Internet experience did not affect uncertainty reduction, which they suggested indicates that experience on some sites is not necessarily transferrable to others.

Empirical data has shown that self-efficacy is more significant when it comes to explaining the behaviour of experienced online shoppers (Hernández, Jiménez & Martin, 2008). At the same time, self-efficacy in this study includes confidence in judging which reviews are relevant. Yet there is also a technological features, as low-efficacy can affect the adoption of technology (Craig, Tams, Thatcher & Clay, 2010) and the use of e-services (Daugherty, Gangadharbatla & Eastin, 2009). Kim, Kim and Hwang (2009) combined it with trust and behaviour in business-to-consumer e-commerce and found it positively influenced purchase intention.

This analysis of self-efficacy also raises questions of how much the user trusts him or herself to use the site to achieve their goal, following the movement towards information self-reliance (Lankes, 2008). Self-efficacy is to do with self-reliance and one common theme in the interviews was that users check TripAdvisor against other

sources – indeed they cross-refer all sources against others – and rely more on their own judgment of these different sources than on any single source.

2.3.vi. Primary concept 5: Trust

Why does anyone need to trust? After all, with enough information they should be able to make decisions without resorting to something as ephemeral as trust. Yet, faced with risk or complexity, people gather information to overcome risk; then because it cannot be eliminated completely, they turn to trust (Mudambi & Schuff, 2010). Where there is insufficient information, trust allows people to act. Trust exists where there is little or no control; indeed, there is no need for the two of them to co-exist (Tan & Thoen, 2000). This is what makes the role of trust on TripAdvisor worthy of study: most trust studies have been concerned with poverty of information that necessitates trust in order to act; but what role will trust play when there is an abundance of information?

Three streams of academic thought on trust present themselves.⁸ Economists view trust as calculative, where trust is determined by a rational assessment of costs and

⁸ This study barely mentions one of the leading academic lights in the field of trust, Russell Hardin, simply because his model of trust –although written just 10 years ago –fails to mention the Internet, and hence is considered peripheral. He conceptualises trustworthiness as ‘encapsulated interest’; that is, “I trust you because I think it is in your interest to take my interests in the relevant matter seriously in the following sense: You value the continuation of the relationship, and you therefore have your own interests in taking my interests into account. That is, you encapsulate my interests in your interests” (Hardin, 2002, p. 1). He separates trust (which can be directed towards people) and expectations (which are reserved for organisations), and states that “we cannot trust large groups of individuals as such. We might be able to trust most or even all of the members of a collectivity if we engage with them dyadically but we often cannot count on them as members of a group to encapsulate the interests of others in the group of cooperating for any collective purpose” (p. 174). However, this researcher argues that experience with an individual can generate trust in an organisation that individual works for; and trust in an organisation can suggest trust in an individual

benefits; or institutional, where trust comes from a feeling of security based on such things as guarantees, trust-marks and other indicators of trustworthiness (Gefen, Karahanna & Straub, 2003). To psychologists it is internal cognition based on people's life experiences (Rotter, 1980). Sociologists, meanwhile, see it in socially embedded properties of interpersonal relationships (Rousseau, Sitkin, Burt & Camerer, 1998). TripAdvisor is a business, a social phenomenon and also a collection of individuals' ideas, so all of these forms of trust might be considered for this study. However, it is the interaction between psychological and sociological, the individual within the system, that is most applicable, concurring with Lee and Turban (2001) who said that "the social-psychological perspective appears to be the most relevant for understanding consumer trust in Internet shopping" (p. 7).

Many researchers have investigated what leads to trust online and whether it is distinct from what leads to trust offline. Early research was on e-commerce sites (Gefen, 2003), and the necessity of building trust with this new shopping platform (Wang & Emurian, 2005). These early studies into retail were augmented by studies looking at informational sites and entertainment sites, usually in terms of privacy and security (Cho, 2010; Koehn, 2003). Trust has been seen as essentially unchanged when

within that organisation. For this study, experience with TripAdvisor can engender trust even if experience with individual writers may not always do so; and repeated trust in writers can lead to trust in the system, so to take Hardin's separation between trust-in-person and trust-in-system is counter to the sociological imperative of this study.

By limiting himself to the 'encapsulated interest' definition of trust, Hardin effectively disallows the possibility of trusting a collective, as he states that "I cannot trust a collectivity to act for my interests because their members are not likely to encapsulate my interests in their own" (p. 182). And yet it is clear that people do trust collectives to a greater or lesser degree – the BBC, a labour union, McDonalds, Wikipedia, TripAdvisor – to fulfill promises and help them achieve their goals.

it moves into cyberspace as online and offline situations have much in common: “...offline trust research is relevant to on-line trust. Since trust can mitigate risk, fear and complexity in the offline environment, it is likely that it can do the same in the on-line environment” (Corritore, Kracher & Wiedenbeck, 2003, p. 738). One agenda for research into online trust stated that: “Trust in online environments is based on beliefs in the trustworthiness of a trustee, which is composed of three distinct dimensions – integrity, ability, and benevolence” (Gefen, Benbasat & Pavlou, 2008). The fundamental dimensions of trust – benevolence, integrity, competence – are the same in both contexts (Chen & Dhillon, 2003; McKnight & Chervany, 2001). These dimensions of trustworthiness are examined in this study, while trust itself is split into two: trust in the reviewers and trust in the site.

Trust does have a role to play on the site. One survey showed 61% of users believed travellers’ reviews are more credible than anything from more traditional service providers, while a Guardian/ICM survey in 2010 mentioned TripAdvisor as having a high degree of trust (Jeacle & Carter, 2011). Other studies found that consumers place more trust in their peers than in the experts as they are “perceived to have no vested interest in the product and no intentions to manipulate the reader” (Bickart & Schindler, 2001, p32); and that simply reading reviews, positive or negative, enhances a traveller’s view of a hotel (Vermeulen & Seegers, 2008).

Academic thought on the subject of trust has moved between those who would reduce it to its fundamentals to those who would expand it to be more inclusive and subtle. This study allies itself with the former to make the concept of trust not too

unwieldy, as its aim is not to have the last word on trust but to find a working model relevant for this new apomediary source.

2.3.vii. Defining trust

While most would agree that trust exists, it is not agreed what trust *is*. One commonly used definition from Gambetta (1988) that it is “the subjective probability by which an individual A expects that another individual B performs a given action on which its welfare depends” (p. 217). Gefen expanded it to say: “Trust, in a broad sense, is the confidence a person has in his or her favorable expectations of what other people will do, based, in many cases, on previous interactions” (Gefen, 2000, p. 726). More philosophically, Uslaner called trust “the chicken soup of the social sciences. It brings us all sorts of good things – from a willingness to get involved in our communities to higher rates of economic growth ... to making daily life more pleasant. Yet, like chicken soup, it appears to work somewhat mysteriously” (Uslaner, 2002, p. 1).

Rousseau et al defined it as “a psychological state comprising the intention to accept vulnerability based upon positive expectations of the intentions or behaviour of another” (Rousseau, Sitkin, Burt & Camerer, 1998, p. 395). It is not a choice to trust, they say, but rather an underlying psychological condition. However, it is Mayer, Davis and Schoorman (1995) who gave the definition of trust that will be used for this study as it incorporates two aspects – lack of direct control for the individual, and placing trust in a relationship rather than as a personality trait – that seem apt for trust in apomediary OURS:

[Trust is]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 truster, irrespective of the ability to monitor or control that other party. (p. 712).

TripAdvisor users are vulnerable – they need the experience of the reviewers but cannot control it; they must believe that the reviewer intends to be helpful; and they cannot control the reviewer. On a larger scale, they need the experiences on the site, must believe that the site is benevolent, and they cannot control the site. Hence users on TripAdvisor require trust that follows this definition.

2.3.viii. Common factors of trust

Definitions of trust may vary, but according to Grabner-Kräuter, Kaluscha and Fladnitzer (2006) all have one or more of the following aspects: context characteristics such as a risky environment necessary for trust; properties of the truster, such as attitudes, beliefs, intentions and behaviours; and characteristics of the trustee such as benevolence, predictability, dependability and integrity. For this study these are operationalised as risk (context characteristic), experience (properties of truster), and social and technological features of the site (characteristics of the trustee). They made a further distinction between two dimensions of trust, hard and soft. For this study, hard trust is functionally based and pragmatic, and involves the competence of the reviewers and the site; soft trust can be seen as affect based and involves trust dimensions of benevolence and integrity.

2.3.ix. Collective trust

The academic study of trust as a sociological phenomenon gained momentum in the late Seventies with Luhmann (1979) and the early Eighties with Barber (1983), adding to existing research on the subject by psychologists and political scientists for whom trust was an individual, internalised activity. Lewis and Weigert (1985) drew on earlier works to create a sociological construction of trust, which has been invaluable for this study. Trust needs familiarity and evidence as a launch-pad. It should be viewed as a social construct which leads to solidarity within a group on the understanding that when people make the leap to trust, they do not leap alone. Simmel (1978) said that: “Without the general trust that people have in each other, society itself would disintegrate, for very few relationships are based entirely upon what is known with certainty about another person, and very few relationships would endure if trust were not as strong as, or stronger than, rational proof or personal observation” (cited in Meyerson, Weick & Kramer, 1996, p. 181). An added benefit of trusting is that it opens new possibilities. Hardin (2002) made the point that trusters gain more opportunities by trusting and have a wider network; as a result trusters have an advantage. Distrusters, on the other hand, have reduced opportunities for interactions that might help them and there can even be a downward spiral of distrust as it limits the information available to make decisions.

2.3.x. Online trust

Does trust change when it moves online? For a while, it was argued that trust could only exist between people but that has been challenged by research into human-

computer interaction (Lenzini, van Houten, Huijsen & Melenhorst, 2010). Some propose that websites can be objects of trust thanks to the intentionality of the actors posting on them, and give a clean definition that trust in a transactional or informational website is “an attitude of confident expectation in an online situation of risk that one’s vulnerabilities will not be exploited” (Corritore, Kracher & Wiedenbeck, 2003, p. 738). Sundar also stated that “the computer is no longer seen as a mere medium of communication, but as a source of interaction... That is, users orient toward computers as autonomous beings instead of as conduits for delivery of pre-programmed content” (Sundar, 2007, p. 89).

And yet, as anyone with the will and the capability can post online and much is done anonymously, it can be hard to know what is trustworthy (O’Mahony & Smyth, 2010). Trust does develop, however, and studies have identified factors that influence online trust, including website characteristics such as privacy issues, order fulfillment and design; alongside personal characteristics such as propensity to trust, experience and familiarity (Yoo, Lee, Gretzel & Fesenmaier, 2009).

Differences between online and offline trust include the issue of anonymity and concerns over accurate representation of identity (Grabner-Kräuter & Kaluscha, 2003), and “the opportunity to misbehave without paying reputational consequences” (Ba, 2001, p. 323). The absence of online identities behind OURS leading to untrustworthiness has been highlighted (Zhang, Lee & Zhao, 2010); although this may be balanced by the power of the plethora of messages on TripAdvisor that makes the anonymity behind each one less relevant. The Internet brings out the best and the

worst in people and Whitty and Joinson (2009) took a balanced view that people are both more honest and more dishonest online. The Internet allows users to hide their true identity but Whitty and Joinson also described the 'strangers on a train' approach that people disclose more to those with whom they have no real contact than to those who are close to them, and hence they can be more open and honest with someone in a chat room who they will probably never meet than they could be with a friend, relative or neighbour who they will probably see again soon.

At the same time, online communication allows for more time to plan what one is going to write, allowing for greater control of message and self-presentation. Whitty and Joinson added that much time online is spent managing one's identity to meet one's own goals and others' expectations, which can be viewed as the other side of social identification examined in this study as writers present themselves to be representative of a certain kind of person's viewpoint.

And yet there is the dark side. Ingénues in online chat rooms find they are accused of lurking, or listening without contributing; or if they speak out of line they can be flamed, or attacked for their views.⁹ Dating site profiles that promise wealthy, tall, dark, handsome men may not deliver on any of those. "Technology that enables truth also, paradoxically, facilitates all kinds of deception" (Whitty & Joinson, 2009, p. 143). Early studies of e-commerce centred on the problem of misrepresentation and non-delivery. In other words, the seller was dishonest about the quality of the goods on

⁹ Indeed, this researcher had his postings removed from TripAdvisor for asking people to fill in an online survey, resulting in a dramatic reduction in responses...

offer, and might not even send them once the payment had been received (Pavlou, 2003; Ratnasingham, 1998). To avoid damage to his reputation the trader could then close down trading under that name and start again under another one. As a result of such dangers, users must be (indeed have become) more attuned to whatever social cues are available, consistent with Walther's hyperpersonal model of online communication (Sassenberg & Jonas, 2007). TripAdvisor has been accused of allowing fraudulent or bogus reviews that can damage or misrepresent a hotel. All these dangers increase feelings of risk.

Studies have addressed in general terms the site features that develop trust in e-commerce websites, including design and navigability, branding and order fulfilment, trust marks and privacy issues, a sense of community and advice from likeminded people and Bart, Shankar, Sultan and Urban (2005) offered an exhaustive list of 91 site-based drivers of trust. Looking at trust and TAM, one study found that trust is as important in online commerce as PEOU and PU, which led to this research into the central role of trust in OURS (Gefen, Karahanna & Straub, 2003). Lacohee, Phippen and Furnell (2006) found that users were not convinced by simple declarations of security but were more swayed by evidence of restitution should something go wrong; and are likely to carry out their own risk assessment rather than relying on a site's declaration of security. This form of information self-reliance was confirmed by the interview data in this research that users check information on TripAdvisor against other sources.

People gather information to overcome risk, and then because it cannot be eliminated completely, they turn to trust (Mudambi & Schuff, 2010). Information brings control, and without that people use trust instead (Tan & Thoen, 2000). Lewis and Weigert (1985) stated that trust occurs when the demand for rational thought has been fulfilled: “No matter how much additional knowledge of an object we may gain... such knowledge alone can never cause us to trust. The manifestation of trust on the cognitive level of experience is reached when social actors no longer need or want any further evidence or rational reasons for their confidence in the objects of trust.” (p. 970). If one were omniscient, they wrote, one could act with complete certainty and hence would not need to trust – indeed, there would be no possibility of trust. TripAdvisor does not quite achieve omniscience, but the amount of information can build certainty to a point where trust is less necessary. Metzger, Flanagin and Medders (2010) stated that: “The abundance and diversity of such information sources make traditional notions of credibility as originating from a central authority (e.g., a teacher, expert, doctor, or organization) problematic, and traditional credibility assessment strategies and techniques potentially outdated” (p. 414).

2.3.xi. Breaking trust down

Despite this, it was anticipated that trust would still have *some* effect on behavioural intention, as there is still risk inherent in the site that even the volume of information on the site cannot counteract; it is the risk that is *caused* by that volume of information. The question is, what form would that trust take, and what effect would it have on intention?

One common division is into trust in the source and trust in the message: however, it can be hard to disentangle these (Flanagin & Metzger, 2008), so for this study it is accepted that trust in the message is based on trust in the writer while trust in the writer is based on the message and hence these are combined into *reviewer trust*, defined as the trust a user shows in a reviewer.

In addition, Lewis and Weigert (1985) mentioned two forms: personal trust and system trust. Personal trust rests on an emotional bond between people, and links to issues of identity and selfhood: “such ‘trust in identity’ is essential for communication and is a constituent bond of society” (p. 974). Yet as society becomes more complex and we cannot gather enough information on every individual we engage with, we increasingly rely on trust in systems, which rests on the idea that everything is in order. Luhmann offered the theoretical insight that trust cannot be studied exclusively as psychological or institutional, because it permeates both. “For this reason, an adequate sociological theory of trust must offer a conceptualization of trust that bridges the interpersonal and systemic levels of analysis, rather than dividing them into separate domains with different definitions and empirical methodologies for different social sciences disciplines” (Lewis & Weigert, 1985, p. 974). Hence this current study proposes that personal trust and system trust must be considered together, as each depends on the other.

Brands, laws and regulations, meanwhile, all help create *site trust*, defined as the level of trust a user shows in the site itself. Site trust is made up of several elements, including structural conditions that suggest security, reliability and trustworthiness of

the content on it and the contributors who created that content (Flanagin, 2007; Lewis & Weigert, 1985; McKnight, Choudhury & Kacmar, 2001). An information site hoping to garner trust must establish that controls are in place to minimise fraud. People are likelier to trust a site if they can see structural elements that reduce the risk of making transactions (Flanagin, 2007). In such cases, trust in the site comes from a cognitive reaction to the whole based on use, experience and familiarity, supported by a secondary, emotional reaction to the site and reviewers. For this study, site trust includes the “belief that needed structural conditions are present (e.g., in the Internet) to enhance the probability of achieving a successful outcome in an endeavour like e-commerce” (McKnight, Choudhury & Kacmar, 2001, p. 339). Luhmann (1979) posited that trust is based on the feeling that everything is as it says it is, and that people are who they say they are. Cyberspace has worked hard to build credibility as many of the standard social and physical cues that lead to trust or distrust are absent. As the *New Yorker* cartoon had it, “On the Internet, nobody knows you’re a dog” (Steiner, 1993).

Jeacle and Carter (2011) wrote of “the importance of both personal and systems trust for understanding the phenomenon that is TripAdvisor” (p. 305). As a result, these two are yoked together. They were concerned with the increasing number of rankings and league tables that have come to generate trust and dominate our ‘audit society’ (p. 204) and said that TripAdvisor relies on interaction between the expert system and the user. “The expert system is a calculative practice that engenders trust; it offers users the objectivity and rationality of hard numbers” (p. 305). Rankings combine personal trust (benevolence, competence and integrity) with system trust – based on

rankings that reduce something as complex as taste in hotels to just one number and are trusted for their scientific objectivity.

This raises the question of the relationship between the writer and the system. As the rankings are in part based on the reviews, that would suggest the social or reviewer trust contributes to system or site trust. Yet as the user considers an individual review for social identification, he or she disembods that review from the calculative system that leads to the ranking. At this point, “systems trust becomes secondary to personal trust” (Jeacle & Carter, 2011, p. 305). Consequently, there is a constant movement from system to personal, from reviewer trust to site trust. Trust in the reviewers would be weakened without the guarantees of credibility that come with inclusion on the site; and the site trust is in part generated by a trust in the reviewers to exhibit benevolence, integrity and competence. Each form of trust feeds the other.

2.3.xii. Operationalising trust and trustworthiness

The distinction between trustworthiness and trust is as follows: individual A shows trustworthy behaviour of competence, integrity and benevolence, causing individual B to trust him. However, the perceived trustworthiness is only the perception of individual B, as is the trust; hence trust resides within individual B, as does the perception of trustworthiness. This research measures the dimensions of trustworthiness of reviewer and site as indicators of the trust in the reviewers and the site. If they are considered trustworthy, then the individual has trust in them. While it is possible for one to consider something trustworthy yet still not trust it, this would be unreasonable, counterintuitive and not consistent. As a result, it is assumed for this

study that indicators of perceived trustworthiness can be a reliable indicator of trust in something.

Trustworthiness is not simple, however. Several authors have noted that it is not a unified concept and have broken it down. Mayer, Davis and Schoorman (1995) identified three dimensions of personal trustworthiness as integrity, benevolence and competence, and this triad has been a constant in the literature and will be employed in this study. Benevolence is “the extent to which a trustee is believed to want to do good to the trustor, aside from an egocentric profit motive” (p. 718); Integrity takes the idea that “the trustee adheres to a set of principles that the trustor finds acceptable” (p. 718); while competence is “that group of skills, competencies and characteristics that enable a party to have influence within some specific domain” (p. 717).

Trustworthiness was operationalised for a survey to examine several questions, starting with: what of the three dimensions (competence, benevolence, integrity) of trustworthiness in its different forms (reviewer and site) are most likely to lead to behavioural intention on a site like TripAdvisor? Several studies have examined the link between trust and action. Luarn and Lin (2005) placed perceived credibility of a system alongside PU, PEOU and self-efficacy and found it was the strongest predictor of intention to use that system. McKnight, Choudhury and Kacmar (2002) found that trusting beliefs in a web vendor had significant (but not strong) associations with behavioural intention to follow that vendor’s advice but less so to actually buy from the site; and Pavlou (2003) achieved similar results. This study complements all of

those by testing the relationship between two forms of trust and three behavioural intentions (to compare it against other information sources; to recommend it to a friend; and to book a hotel).

This study considers trust as a sociological construct and that the difference between online and offline trust is one of environment rather than form. Additionally, and most importantly, there are benefits to trusting OURS. One survey of over 1,000 users found the more people trust in OURS, the more the sites help them find information, evaluate alternatives, gain a clearer idea of the place they are going to, have greater confidence that their trip will be a success, and even get better value for money (Yoo, Lee, Gretzel & Fesenmaier, 2009).

The value of trust is that it augments experience and information, leading to action. Jarvenpaa, Tractinsky and Vitale (2000) showed a link between trust in an online store and intention to purchase there, although noting that Web experience is associated with lower trust. Pavlou (2003) offered a conceptual model of trust mediated by TAM constructs of PU and PEOU, as well as perceived risk, when leading to behavioural intention. He used Zwass's definition of transaction as "the consumer's intent to engage in an on-line exchange relationship with a Web retailer, such as sharing business information, maintaining business relationships, and conducting business transactions" (p. 72). These were adapted (with measures from McKnight, Chaudhury & Kacmar, 2002) for the current study, and the behavioural intentions measured include introducing friends to the site and booking a hotel.

2.3.xiii. Primary concept 6: Behavioural intention

The concept of behavioural intention was introduced into the academic literature with the theory of planned behaviour (TPB) which states that people are more likely to behave in a certain way if they value the outcome of that behaviour (Ajzen, 1991). It can be defined as an individual's anticipated or planned future behaviour; it represents expectancies about that behaviour in a given setting; and it can be operationalised as the likelihood to act (Lam & Hsu, 2006). TPB proposes that three main constructs drive behaviour: the individual's attitude towards that behaviour, the subjective norms to which he is exposed (how other people might think about the behaviour), and the level of perceived control the individual has to engage in the behaviour (Sparks, 2007). Research has shown that TPB is effective in predicting intentions and ultimately behaviour (Ajzen, 2001); and a study of travel planning found that all elements of TPB successfully predicted behavioural intention to choose a travel destination (Lam & Hsu, 2006). They added that, in a travel context, "attitudes are predispositions or feelings toward a vacation destination or service, based on multiple perceived product attributes" (Lam & Hsu, 2006, p. 591).

Further, they include the influence of a peer group in setting the subjective norm: "Any person or group served as a reference group could exert a key influence on an individual's beliefs, attitudes, and choices because an individual may conform to his/her referent group(s)" (Lam & Hsu, 2006, p. 591). Placing TPB in the TripAdvisor context, this study proposes three behavioural intentions, each of which involves making a decision to act: to recommend it to a friend, to book a hotel, and to compare

information from the site with other sources. Based on TPB, it is proposed that users are likelier to act after using the site if they 1) hold a positive attitude that any of these behaviours will benefit them; 2) believe that engaging in one of these behaviours will coincide with what valued others think is a worthwhile behaviour; and 3) feel they have the ability to engage in that behaviour.

The fundamental question for this study of what people trust about OURS such as TripAdvisor is primarily of interest insofar as that trust allows people to make a decision and act. Hence the outcome variable for this research is behavioural intention to do something – recommend it to a friend or book a hotel – based on information gleaned from the site.

These outcomes are taken from McKnight, Choudhury and Kacmar (2002) who found that different forms of trust had different levels of significance on different outcomes. Looking at online communities, Wu and Tsang (2008) identified two outcomes of trust: stickiness, where customers show commitment to a site; and a willingness to share information: “members’ trust towards virtual communities has a direct influence on whether they will continue to visit the communities and whether they will share information with the other community members” (p. 124). To these outcomes, this study adds a financial commitment of booking a hotel, and the intention to compare with other sites. McKnight, Choudhury and Kacmar (2002) added that it is not uncommon for researchers to examine intention rather than action, as it is hard to capture real action in an experiment. They added that the correlation between intention and actual behaviour is strong enough to justify this. Ajzen (1991)

stated that intention to act is the immediate determinant of behaviour, so for this study intention was considered a good measure for real action.

2.4. Framework for this study

This study proposes four concepts as significant contributors to the information search: risk, self-efficacy, and Web 2.0 technological features and social identification. These variables contribute to trust which, while important for action, is not the same as the final dependent variable of behavioural intention.

Several models have informed the framework proposed for this study. Corbitt, Thanasankit and Yi (2003) placed perceived trust at the centre of a web of influences that included participation in e-commerce, risk, technical features, site quality and market orientation of the site. They found that experience level inspired trust, and site quality and technical trustworthiness also contributed. They did not, however, consider social identification on the site, and this is added to the model for this study. A model proposed by Casálo, Flavián and Guinalú (2011) suggested that trust and PU contribute to attitude which leads to behavioural intention, and found that both trust and PU bypass attitude to influence behavioural intention directly. Again, they did not include social identification, nor did they consider risk. Sidali, Schulze and Spiller (2009) had the expertise of the writer, the writing style and the user's familiarity with the brand as well as the credibility of the site itself all contributing to trust in the reviews and thence to choice of accommodation. Again, this current study adds to this

model an awareness of social identification and technological features, alongside risk. Finally, Hernández, Jiménez and José Martín (2008) offered the most sophisticated model, with acceptance and satisfaction with the Internet leading to self-efficacy, which in turn influenced PEOU and PU, driving attitude towards e-commerce and ultimately purchase intention. What all these models have in common is that they overlook the element of social identification driving trust in the reviewers and in the site; and they all reduce trust to one dimension and one type. This study aims to offer a more complex view of the relationships among variables that influence trust, and the further effect they have on behavioural intention. Hence this study proposes a framework (Figure 1) of how a user employs OURS, based on a framework offered for online shopping (Perea y Monsuwé, Dellaert & de Ruyter, 2004). The user starts with a desire for knowledge to overcome risk and uses the OURS which is a Web 2.0 blend of technological features and social identification that the user combines with prior experience and self-efficacy to attenuate risk by attaining a level of trust that allows for action.

In any model of risk and trust, it is important to decide where risk is placed. “It is unclear whether risk is an antecedent to trust, is trust, or is an outcome of trust.” (Meyer, Davis & Schoorman, 1995, p. 711). They argue for the latter, and place risk as an intermediary variable between trust and behavioural intention. They argue that trust is not taking risk, but it is a *willingness* to take a risk. Risk is different from the willingness to take a risk. One can be willing to take a risk, but not at risk; one can be

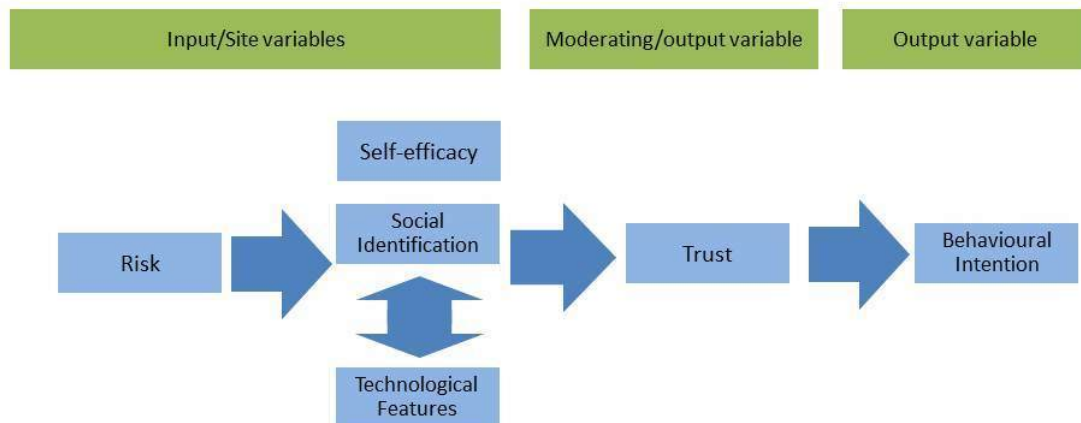
at risk without being willing to do so. They argue that when one has trust, one is willing to take a risk, and as a result trust precedes risk.

Yet Meyer, Davis and Schoorman's model is limited to dyadic interaction between individuals, and they agree that understanding trust in a social system is beyond its scope. Hence, when they subsequently place risk and trust in context, their argument alters. Context can change the nature of the trust, as it can change the assessment of the antecedents of trust. So the individual may have high regard for the trustee's competence, benevolence or integrity under some circumstances, but not under others. This study argues that such a change in context equates to a change in risk; and that hence trust is dependent on risk.

As a result, it takes the viewpoint that risk precedes trust. It argues that one can take a risk without trusting; but one needs to be willing to take a risk in order to trust. Trust follows a willingness to take a risk. When one is willing to take a risk, one requires trust. There is no need for trust without risk, hence risk precedes trust. One can have trusting intentions or propensity to trust that precedes risk; and under such circumstances trust precedes risk. But once behavioural intention is introduced, the relationship between trust and risk alters. Trust then has meaning only in relation to the risk; it exists to counteract that risk. It is a reaction to that risk, and hence must follow that risk, in order to allow the individual to move forwards to the behavioural intention with greater confidence. Risk only becomes a factor when action is intended. It is possible to trust without taking any risk; but when that trust translates into action,

then risk is involved. Hence behavioural intention must be the final outcome variable to give meaning to the relationship between risk and trust.

Figure 1: Proposed model of trust in an apomediary site



2.5. Research question and hypothesis formation

These six primary concepts are linked to six research questions which aim to give a qualitative understanding of the key concepts in this study:

- 1) What risks do people overcome by using the site, and what risks do they encounter while they are there? (RISK)
- 2) Do users trust reviewers more if they are similar to them? (SOCIAL IDENTIFICATION)
- 3) Do users trust the site because it is an apomediary site which uses technology to aggregate many reviews and reduce them to a usable number? (TECHNOLOGICAL FEATURES)

- 4) Do users trust themselves to get what they want from TripAdvisor? (SELF-EFFICACY)
- 5) Do users trust TripAdvisor as much as friends and guidebooks? (TRUST)
- 6) What do users hope to achieve after using TripAdvisor? (BEHAVIOURAL INTENTION)

Hypotheses were linked to the observable relationships among the six variables in the proposed model of trust in an apomediary site. Berger and Calabrese (1975) proposed that individuals gather information to overcome uncertainty, which suggested the association between information search and risk. Racherla (2008) found that self-efficacy and social identification were instrumental in overcoming risk on TripAdvisor. And Jeacle and Carter (2011) look at the site's 'operational features' stating that "we are socialised into being open to scientific knowledge but, more specifically, being receptive to rankings, numbers and calculative practices". This study combines them all. As risk is the starting point and four variables are employed to overcome that risk, leading to the final outcome variable, it was judged that all variables would show a negative correlation with risk.

- **H1a** Risk will show a negative association with self-efficacy, social identification, technological features, trust and behavioural intentions.

Not all these correlations will be equal, however; and as risk is the primary factor that demands trust (de Ruyter, Wetzels and Kleijnen, 2001), the following hypothesis is also proposed:

- **H1b** Risk will be a better predictor of trust than self-efficacy will.

In addition, since an information search is done to reduce risk (Mitchell, Davies, Moutinho & Vassos, 1999), it is proposed that risk will become less influential for the end variable of behavioural intention as information is gathered; and instead other variables will have a greater effect:

- **H1c** Risk will be a worse predictor of behavioural intention than self-efficacy, social identification and technological features will.

Hogg and Grieve (1999) offered support for the idea that group membership can reduce uncertainty, and this is one motivation for self-categorization; hence social identification is a variable in this study. However, their model was tested in situations with little information, while this study is concerned with an information-rich context. While social identification is a central concept for this study, it is assumed that its influence will be limited to social trust, and overcoming the social risk of being misled by the reviewers rather than the risks of choosing the wrong hotel or not getting value for money, as “people believe that demographically similar others are more honest, trustworthy and cooperative (Levin, Whitener & Cross, 2006, p. 1164). However, it is assumed that social identification will also show an impact on trust in the site itself, as there is more to a site than just social similarity, and the site itself can bring risks that are not overcome by identification with the writers (Green, 2007), leading to this hypothesis:

- **H2a** Social identification will predict both reviewer trust and site trust.

The effect that each has on different forms of trust is still unclear, however, and no study has tested the relationship between reviewer trust and site trust (Grabner-Kräuter & Kaluscha, 2000; Tan & Thoen, 2000) and social and technological features (Casaló, Flavián & Guinalú, 2011; Jeacle & Carter, 2011; Zheng, Zhao & Stylianou, 2010). Jeacle and Carter (2011) do place social identification within a calculative system, combining it with technological features, asserting that it is the calculative practices that underpin system trust, leading to the hypothesis that system or site trust comes from technological as well as social aspects:

- **H2b** Technological features will predict both reviewer trust and site trust.

Self-efficacy concerns the individual's abilities to achieve a goal or perform a task successfully; they require the skills, the experience and the motivation to implement a task. Davis (1989) added self-efficacy to TAM, and since then self-efficacy has traditionally been associated with task-oriented behaviour rather than relationship-oriented activities. Lewis and Weigert (1985) mentioned two forms: personal trust and system trust, which become reviewer trust and site trust in this study. Most recent literature for online self-efficacy has been concerned with e-commerce (for example, Dash & Saji, 2007); in which there is no distinction between trust in the site and trust in the people behind the site. Indeed, it has been posited that users will trust a site in a similar way to trusting a person (McKnight, Chervany and Clay, 2009; Sundar, 2007). Offline trust typically is for a person or an organisation while online it is for a technology (Shankar, Urban & Sultan, 2002); while others have argued that the technology itself is neutral and hence online trust is really directed at the humans

behind the technology (Friedman, Kahn & Howe, 2000). This study suggests the opposite, that trust in the individual behind the site is subsumed within trust in the site itself, or 'website social presence', as there is not such a distinction between the site and reviewers who contribute to it:

- **H3a** Self-efficacy will predict both reviewer trust and site trust.

Self-efficacy is also to do with self-reliance, and independent travellers are inclined to cross-check information against other sources, relying on their own skills to analyse and assess information. de Vries, Dijkstra and Kuhlman (1988) included self-efficacy in a behavioural intention model and found it was a strong predictor of intention as well as action, and they concluded that self-efficacy is a good measure for the feelings of control and skill of respondents. Hence it is also hypothesised that:

- **H3b** Self-efficacy will be a strong predictor of the behavioural intention to compare TripAdvisor with other sources.

This study starts from the standpoint that trust helps overcome risk. Individuals gather information to counteract risk, and because it cannot be eliminated, they turn to trust (Mudambi & Schuff, 2010). While this is disputed and some have judged that risk itself is what calls into existence the need for trust (Meyer, Davis & Schoorman, 1995), the link between trust and risk is established. Yet trust's role in engendering action may not be so clear. Studies of risk, trust and uncertainty have found that information is key to overcoming both risk and uncertainty

Trust exists where there is little control (Tan & Thoen, 2000), and a lack of information can lead to a lack of control. If on TripAdvisor, information poverty is replaced by information abundance, however, then that would lead to the proposal that so much information means there is little or no need for trust, and thus other variables will predict behavioural intention:

- **H4a** Trust will be less effective at predicting behavioural intention than self-efficacy and risk will.

Lim, Sia, Lee and Benbasat (2006) found that trust in similar persons can be transferred to trust an online store that those similar persons trust. Hence it is proposed that reviewer trust should be considered subsidiary to site trust as it contributes to the latter – users trust the site in part because they trust the reviews on the site:

- **H4b** Site trust is a better predictor than reviewer trust of behavioural intentions

McKnight, Carter and Clay (2009) make a further distinction between affect-based and cognitive dimensions of trustworthiness and offer a framework that places technology in terms of competence and people in terms of benevolence and helpfulness. It seems likely that different dimensions of trustworthiness will predict different behavioural intentions, so that the social intention of recommending the site to a friend will be predicted by the benevolence dimension of reviewer trustworthiness (and hence of reviewer trust); while the more pragmatic intention of booking a hotel will be better

predicted by the competence dimension of site trustworthiness (and hence of site trust).

- **H4c** The social behavioural intention to recommend the site to a friend will be best predicted by the affect-based trust dimension of benevolence in reviewer trustworthiness
- **H4d** The functional behavioural intention to book a hotel will be best predicted by the pragmatic trustworthiness dimension of competence.

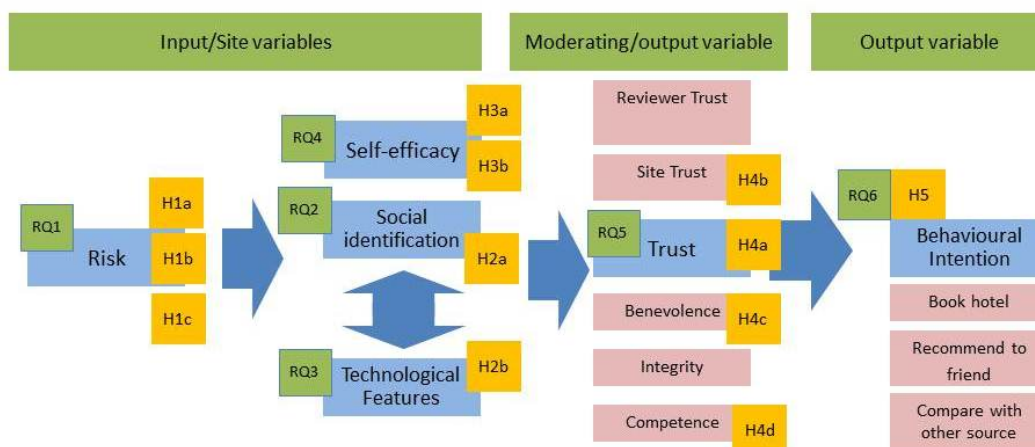
A similar study investigated how the level of social identification with a referent group impacted on behavioural intention and found that perceived norms of a reference group was related to intention, but only for those participants who identified strongly with this group (Terry, Hogg & White, 1999). Countering this, a meta-analysis of intention studies found that this subjective norm was a weak predictor of intentions, which the researchers believe was due to a weak measurement tool (Armitage & Conner, 2001). Given this possible weakness, this research is inclined to follow Terry, Hogg and White's study, and hypothesises that:

- **H5** Social identification on the site will predict all forms of behavioural intention

Using these hypotheses, the aim of this study is to examine the role of trust in an information-rich site such as TripAdvisor. There have been studies looking at the utility of OURS, the risks inherent in them, their design and functionality, the similarity

between contributor and user, as well as the self-efficacy of the user. This research integrates these strands and compares some aspects of them to identify the most significant factors that lead to different forms of trust, and the effect that trust has. It adds to the literature on the relationship between trust and self-efficacy in online information searches, and information self-reliance. Figure 2 indicates how these RQs and Hs correspond to the proposed model of trust in an apomediary site.

Figure 2: Correspondence between proposed model of trust in an apomediary site, and research questions and hypotheses



Key: Research Questions:

- 1) What risks do people overcome by using the site, and what risks do they encounter while they are there? (RISK)
- 2) Do users trust reviewers more if they are similar to them? (SOCIAL IDENTIFICATION)
- 3) Do users trust the site because it is an apomediary site which uses technology to aggregate many reviews and reduce them to a usable number? (TECHNOLOGICAL FEATURES)

- 4) Do users trust their own efficacy to get what they want from TripAdvisor?
(SELF-EFFICACY)
- 5) Do users trust TripAdvisor as much as friends and guidebooks? (TRUST)
- 6) What do users hope to achieve after using TripAdvisor? (BEHAVIOURAL INTENTION)

Key: Hypotheses

H1a Risk will show a negative association with self-efficacy, social identification, technological features, trust and behavioural intentions.

H1b Risk will be a better predictor of trust than self-efficacy will.

H1c Risk will be a worse predictor of behavioural intention than self-efficacy, social identification and technological features will.

H2a Social identification will predict both reviewer trust and site trust.

H2b Technological features will predict both reviewer trust and site trust.

H3a Self-efficacy will predict both reviewer trust and site trust.

H3b Self-efficacy will be a strong predictor of the behavioural intention to compare TripAdvisor with other sources.

H4a Trust will be less effective at predicting behavioural intention than self-efficacy and risk will.

H4b Site trust is a better predictor than reviewer trust of behavioural intentions.

H4c The social behavioural intention to recommend the site to a friend will be best predicted by the affect-based trust dimension of benevolence in reviewer trustworthiness.

H4d The functional behavioural intention to book a hotel will be best predicted by the pragmatic trustworthiness dimension of competence.

H5 Social identification on the site will predict all forms of behavioural intention.

2.6. Secondary concepts

2.6.i. Secondary concept 1: Information search

Travel planning is a complex process involving a series of interrelated and sequential goals and decisions (Jun, Vogt & McKay, 2007). Rather than looking at the entire planning process, this study looks at a single search for information working on the principle that: “knowledge avoids or minimizes risk and improves travel efficiency” (Jani, Jeong & Hwang, 2010, p. 5). Faced with risk or uncertainty, individuals seek for information to help them decide what course of action to take.

Information seeking is defined as the “motivational activation of knowledge stored in memory or information acquired from the external environment” (Engel, Blackwell & Miniard, 1995, p. 14). Its aim is to reduce uncertainty when solving a problem or reaching a decision. Literature consistently finds that when uncertainty is high, information seeking will rise (Guo, 2011). As information seeking is considered goal-related, research has usually taken a task-based and context-specific approach to the subject. This approach is used in the current study.

Past experience also affects information search and choice of source; it requires less effort to find information from a source with which one has experience and to assess the quality of information there (Tversky & Kahneman, 1974). Information sought is processed, then some selected and some rejected. McGuire (1976) suggested that people have an internal filtering system which affects first which information they choose to be exposed to and then what is selected as valuable.

In the past, information was a scarce resource and the challenge was finding enough to make a decision; today, information is an abundant resource and the challenge is sifting through it to find what is relevant and useful to make a decision. Information abundance has reduced one form of risk but has brought another: information overload. Hence filtering information is essential on the Internet where there is no shortage of information; rather users are faced with information overload, defined as what occurs when the information-processing demands on time to perform interactions and internal calculations are greater than the time available (Bergamaschi, Guerra & Leiba, 2010; Miller, 1956). They suggested some effects of information overload, which included difficulty in making decisions because so much time is spent processing information, and finding it hard to select from among many sources on the same topic.

Jacoby, Speller and Kohn (1974) were among the first to identify that more information can lead to worse decisions not better, although the threshold for information overload varies from person to person (Chen, Shang & Kao, 2009). One dilemma a consumer has is that if they try and process all the information, it overwhelms them; then if they skim or scan to get the gist of each review, they can become concerned about the detail they are missing and feel less confident in their judgment (Park & Lee, 2008). So while plentiful information can obviate the need for trust, a surfeit of information can equally oblige an individual to rely on trust. Hence other tactics are required to deal with information overload, and this study proposes

that social identification and technological features of the site combine to achieve this.

Another form of information overload is information validation, where there is conflict or inconsistency in different sources about the same topic which can cause the individual to consult more sources to overcome the uncertainty generated by this inconsistency. Such comparison can also help the individual gain a clearer picture of how good and how valuable information from a source is (Guo, 2011). This is evident on TripAdvisor, where conflicting reports may add to uncertainty.

People face what Blattner and Medo (2012) called the pain of choice, and they identify recommender systems as the solution to this problem. But what happens when the recommender systems contribute to the information overload, and choosing between many reviews of many hotels by well-meaning writers is what causes the pain? Bergamaschi, Guerra and Leiba (2010) proposed a technical solution of ranking, filtering and reducing information to a manageable amount. And yet technological solutions struggle with processing semantic information and as a result the individual will also employ other methods which may include giving more credence to writers who are socially similar to them. This is sometimes called informational social influence, that people are influenced by relevant others' thoughts, feelings and behaviours, accepting them as credible evidence of reality (Deutsch & Gerard, 1955).

Another common way of dealing with information overload is to focus on only a few aspects of the information available and use heuristics (Sasaki, Becker, Janssen & Neel,

2011). Metzger, Flanagin and Medders (2010) have pointed out that in information-abundant environments such as the Internet, people tend to use heuristic processing instead of cognitive processing. Heuristics have often been dismissed as a 'poor cousin', and linked with errors and irrationality. However, as Simon noted in his theory of bounded rationality (1955), logical and statistical reasoning require all the alternatives to be available and given suitable weightage to reach a calculated decision. This, inevitably, is rare and such rational models have limited application so use of heuristics is inevitable. In addition, research into heuristics showed that in some cases they can be more accurate than statistical methods using the same information (Gigerenzer & Gaissmaier, 2011). They go on to offer examples of heuristic use, which can be rational – not every decision is worth expending much effort on; and cognitively limited – individuals' capacity for rational thought may be limited so they rely instead on heuristics. For example, On TripAdvisor the frequency heuristic might be brought into play when a user judges that if a majority of writers like a hotel's breakfast then the breakfast is probably good (Alba & Marmorstein, 1987); while the length-is-strength heuristic might be employed to judge that a long review that took time and effort is probably honest and worth reading, consistent with Talwar, Jurca and Faltings (2007) who said that writing in greater length on a certain subject in a hotel review on TripAdvisor indicates authority.

Other studies of decision making have observed that a large quantity of information does not necessarily lead to a wider array of decisions, but rather that people use the 'follow the crowd' heuristic and opt for the most popular choice (Sasaki, Becker,

Janssen & Neel, 2011). This resonates with TripAdvisor where some users may simply opt for the top-ranked hotel; however, others would avoid such places, not wishing to run with the crowd and choosing instead a hotel that better suits them.

As individuals tend to be cognitive misers and will commit only as much time and effort to the information search as is demanded to overcome the risk/uncertainty or as is demanded by the importance of the decision to be made, searches have a natural limit. The individual reaches a moment of information sufficiency which can be defined as the perceived level of effective information based on the perceived usefulness and perceived completeness what has been gathered (Guo, 2011). While there has been debate between the 'quality-driven perspective' which proposes that people are concerned with the quality of the source and the 'least-effort principle' which is concerned with good enough information, Guo suggested that the latter is likely to dominate external information searches. This seems to apply to most TripAdvisor users interviewed, where few searched exhaustively and most 'satisfied' to the point where they felt confident to make a decision.

The first stage of searching is to consider existing knowledge such as direct experience of a destination or hotel chain. Existing knowledge also includes information that has been gathered over the years and stored for future retrieval, for example newspaper, magazine or television travel reports (Vogt & Fesenmaier, 1998). It can include recommendations from friends and acquaintances. If this does not yield adequate information to make a decision, then external sources are sought. However, fresh information tends to be congruent with existing opinions if it is to be included in

the mix, or it leads to cognitive dissonance (Fein & Anderson, 1987). One aspect of congruence is social identification, which encourages individuals give greater credence to those who are similar to them and whose experiences and world-view connect with their own.

2.6.ii. Secondary concept 2: Information self-reliance

Research has observed a move away from an approach to credibility based on authority to a “reliability approach” of information self-reliance which is a hallmark of online information searches in the digital era (Lankes, 2008, p. 106). The distinction between self-reliance and reliance on others is subtle. If a traveller asks a friend to recommend a good hotel in Moscow and accepts that suggestion, then that is considered relying on others. But if a traveller asks five friends for their recommendations, analyses their replies and chooses the one that suits him or her best, then that is considered self-reliance, even though the traveller had initially depended on others to provide the information.

In addition, people are expected to do more for themselves with the Internet such as booking tickets and ordering services.¹⁰ Digital media has encouraged a greater reliance on individual judgment as well as an assumption that users can customise a solution that is right for them. The rise of OURS is part of this phenomenon and reflects an unprecedented democratisation of information online:

¹⁰ Lankes makes the good point that while this is presented to users as a benefit to them – they have greater control and satisfaction – it also benefits the company by automating a process, saving money on staff costs and transferring responsibility to the customer.

The experience of TripAdvisor can be regarded as analogous with recent developments in the media, which has seen the rise of bloggers and 'non-expert' columnists contributing to on-line fora. While this is clearly enabled by technology it reflects... a broader scepticism toward established forms of authority which are increasingly displaced by a greater reliance on lay opinion. Lay opinion derives its credibility from being the authentic voice of experience, uncompromised by corporate life and other vested interests. That the non-expert is privileged raises questions about expertise. TripAdvisor appears to preference lay experience over formalized expertise, with the attendant notions of dilettantism resonating with ... insights into the role of the amateur” (Jeacle & Carter, 2011, p. 304)

The disintermediation and loss of gatekeepers that have accompanied the rise of digital media has led to a change in the idea of authoritative voices, which have been replaced in some situations with information self-reliance. This is a paradox: *“end users are becoming more responsible for making information determinations, but because they have fewer physical cues to work with, they are becoming more dependent on the information provided to them by others”* (Lankes, 2008, p. 104, his italics). Individuals have to rely on their own judgment instead of that of authority figures, in one of the most significant changes wrought by computer-mediated communication (CMC). Whereas previously an expert guidebook writer would filter information by visiting 20 hotels and only writing about the five considered most

suitable for the reader; now users must do that job themselves and look at 20 reviews of 20 hotels to shortlist five and ultimately one. Individuals rely on themselves to sift through the mass of information to find what is relevant. TripAdvisor helps by allowing them to filter the search, basing it on price, location, popularity and rating. In addition, as well as being a responsibility, self-reliance is an oft-touted benefit of the interactive Web 2.0 where “the notion of celebrating the ‘self’ is becoming an increasingly prevalent and popular part of digital media” (Sundar, 2008, p. 85).

2.6.iii. Secondary concept 3: Decision making

People make decisions constantly and each one carries an element of risk. Information can help overcome that risk and help decision-making, which has been defined as “the process of sufficiently reducing uncertainty, recognition conflict and doubt about alternatives, in which a reasonable choice is allowed to be made” (Eisenhardt, 1989, cited in Guo, 2011, p. 139). In this study it equates to choosing a hotel on TripAdvisor.¹¹

Smallman and Moore (2010) offered a round-up of academic thought on the subject, starting with *classical decision making*, which proposed that people gather information and analyse it to choose the optimal solution, based on expected utility of that solution. Yet this level of pure rationality and perfect information is rarely

¹¹ In terms of travel planning, Cox, Burgess, Sellitto and Buultjens (2009) have adapted a general consumer decision-making five-stage model, and offer in-depth the following: (1) need recognition; (2) information search; (3) evaluation of alternatives; (4) purchase decision (take trip); and (5) post-purchase evaluation (including WOM etc). Use of TripAdvisor would fall under steps 2, 3 and 5. They found that 28% of their respondents looked for information when they had already chosen a destination and wanted to know about accommodation, while 22% were trying to narrow down their choice of destination. Just 5% went on the site afterwards to share their experiences.

observed in reality, and *prospect theory* was subsequently proposed to offer a different view (Tversky & Kahneman, 1974). Prospect theory was intended as an alternative to prospective utility theory. It allowed for uncertainty and risk in decisions and stated that people fear loss more than they desire gain and will decide whether a situation offers loss or gain based on a specific reference point. Smallman and Moore's third high point in thought on the subject was *bounded rationality*. The term was coined by Simon (1955) who claimed that people did not necessarily maximise utility but often preferred to 'satisfice' by setting an aspiration level and being satisfied if they attain it (Köksalen, Wallenius & Zionts, 2011). Simon used the image of a pair of scissors in which one blade was the cognitive limitations of humankind and the other blade was the structure of the environment – and the interplay between the two was what was relevant (Gigerenzer & Selten, 2002). The environment allows people to reduce complex decisions to simple choices by focusing on a few salient factors and ignoring others that are present but not of great importance. Noting that bounded rationality does not consider processes that mediate decision making, the fourth model offered is *adaptive decision making* (Payne, 1982) which took the idea that people use many different strategies to solve a problem depending on circumstances. A *postmodernist* view came fifth in Smallman and Moore's list, where everything is context-dependent and socially constructed. Finally, they cited *naturalistic decision making*, a more descriptive and detailed analysis of individual decision-making processes.

Of these, prospect theory fits well with TripAdvisor. The theory suggests four stages to decision-making. 1) the editing stage where obvious non-starters are eliminated; 2) the comparison of the outcome against some benchmark of quality; 3) the evaluation of outcomes as gains or losses against the status quo; and 4) it proposed that a loss is more unpleasant than a gain is pleasant (Kahneman & Tversky, 1979). Translating this to TripAdvisor, first users dismiss hotels outside a budget or a location; second they compare the shortlist against their expectations or experience; third they choose whether spending more or less would bring significant gains or losses; and fourth they consider potential losses more than potential gains losses to make a decision.

2.6.iv. Secondary concept 4: E-wom

Srinivasan and Ratchford (1991, cited in Fodness & Murray, 1998) listed nearly 60 variables that can affect an information search and these include how difficult it is to make a choice, the existing level of knowledge, socioeconomic status, as well as the importance of what they are buying (for example, whether the hotel is being booked for the individual, or for others in which case the individual may have to justify the choice and may expend greater efforts in choosing). When searches moved online, at first the need for information was fulfilled by marketers and advertisers; this resulted in information gaps between seller and buyer and hence uncertainty. More recently this has been replaced with information abundance in the form of experienced individuals writing on peer-to-peer sharing websites, supplementing word-of-mouth recommendations from a few friends with literally millions of recommendations, delivered electronically.

Electronic word-of-mouth (e-wom) is a new form of interpersonal communication characterised by breadth of reach that goes far beyond anything the spoken word can achieve. There are enough examples of viral videos and ill-judged comments that are re-tweeted around the globe in a matter of hours that no one can reasonably doubt its effect. The travel industry is no different and personal recommendations have always been influential; the difference is that while previously a discontented customer might tell 10 people, they now have the potential to reach thousands (O'Connor, 2010). The difference between this traditional word-of-mouth and e-wom is not just of scale and reach, though; by influencing users to such an extent it can create a new type of reality (Litvin, Goldsmith & Pan, 2008). Some have suggested that it will change the competitive reality of the entire tourism sector (Papathanassis & Knolle, 2011). At the least, the speed with which e-wom can spread can increase transparency and overcome the information gap between seller and buyer (Schegg & Fux, 2010).

2.6.v. Secondary concept 5: Apomediary sites

The traditional notion of credibility coming from a centralised authority is being changed by OURS. New phrases to describe this include 'decentralised credibility',¹² 'distributed credibility' and 'collectively versus institutionally derived credibility', and it can be traced back to the marketplace of ideas where the good chase out the bad, and to Milton, J.S. Mill and Thomas Jefferson (Flanagin & Metzger, 2008). This study uses

¹² Not that information has necessarily been decentralised. TripAdvisor could be seen as a new centre. So rather than a decentralisation of authority, this could be viewed as a re-centralisation of authority if the site is cast as a gatekeeper with power to publish benevolent or damaging reviews.

the term apomediary (Eysenbach, 2008). The advance of apomediary OURS reflects a tendency on the Internet for self-regulation, a move away from traditional sources of authority towards communities of users with a shared interest. It is far from being just theoretical benefit; as long as 15 years ago people were saying that the greatest potential to make money on the Internet would be from these virtual communities allowing people to exchange information and develop relationships (Hagel & Armstrong, 1997).

At the same time, the critical mass of information that has allowed these communities to be more credible has also made it harder for each piece of information to be assessed. This is a common trope in online searches, particularly with a global reach as the number of sources expands and the challenge becomes to understand how people make choices from multiple sources distributed across groups, spaces and cultures (Cho & Lee, 2008). Other problems include commercial interests influencing OURS, irrational or mendacious contributors, potential for defamation, as well as inaccuracy, exaggeration and honest misunderstandings.

Yet analysing each piece of information for credibility may no longer be what matters, an idea that underpins this study. The old model of hierarchical information distribution was based on information scarcity and the expectation that anyone saying something had to be qualified to say it in order to get past the gatekeepers (financial, social, cultural, academic) who controlled the flow in a “meritocratic filtering process” (Metzger, Flanagin & Medders, 2010, p. 414). With scarce information, it was usual to evaluate the credibility of the speaker. That model has been subverted by the Internet

where scarcity has been replaced by abundance and the issue of credibility has changed; reviewers on OURS do not claim to be experts, they claim to be experienced.

2.7. Summary

This chapter has taken three theoretical perspectives as a starting point for a study of trust in the apomediary OURS TripAdvisor: uncertainty reduction theory, social identity theory, and the technology acceptance model. It borrows from these theories to form a model to explain the role of trust in an apomediary OURS. It further employs six main concepts that form this model: risk, social identification, the technological features on the site, self-efficacy of the reader using the site; trust, and the behavioural intentions after visiting the site. It places these in the context of an information-rich environment in which trust may lessen in its importance as a means of overcoming risk and uncertainty.

Chapter 3 – Research context: TRIPADVISOR

“The edifice of TripAdvisor’s entire existence is premised on it being trusted, which goes to the heart of legitimation: why is it legitimate for the TripAdvisor website to provide judgments on hotels? One answer is that the legitimation of TripAdvisor is through its capacity to give ‘voice’ to the authentic opinion of independent travellers”

Ingrid Jeacle and Chris Carter, *In TripAdvisor we trust: Rankings, calculative regimes and abstract systems* (2011) p. 302

3.1. Travel and TripAdvisor

Based in Massachusetts in the US, TripAdvisor is one of the most used and valued recommender systems in e-tourism (Rabanser & Ricci, 2005). It plays matchmaker between tourists who want to find the best place to go, and destinations, airlines, tour operators, hotels and attractions which want customers. The site invites reviewers to write about their experiences at a destination, city, attraction or hotel. Miguens, Baggio and Costa (2008) described it as a website “based on the idea that travelers rely on other travelers’ reviews to plan their trips, or at least can be satisfactorily helped in their decisions by them.” Users visit the site to get unvarnished opinions about where they intend to stay, rather than relying on biased reports on a hotel’s or a tourist board’s website, in keeping with research that says people trust the opinions

of other consumers rather than of marketing agencies (Dickinger, 2011; O'Connor, 2010; Papathanassis & Knolle, 2011). Williams, van der Wiele, van Iwaarden and Eldridge (2010) referred to two surveys four years apart; in 2003, one fifth of respondents chose peers over experts as the most trusted source; by 2007, that had grown to half.

TripAdvisor is too complex to be studied in its entirety so this research focuses on reviews written by guests who have stayed in hotels. Reviewers must register and create a profile and a screen identity which allows them to post reviews, comments, photographs and videos related to recent travel. Part of the identity is whether they label themselves business or leisure travellers. A secondary division for business travellers is whether they travelled alone, with colleagues or with clients. Leisure travellers are subdivided on whether they travelled alone, with spouse/partner, with friends, as a family with young children or as a family with teenage children, as an extended family or as part of a large group. This allows for users to evaluate the salience of a reviewer's opinions based on social identification. The site states that "TripAdvisor is a place you can go for insights and tips, a place that is literally alive with experiences and opinions. It's a place that feels like a local neighborhood coffee shop, a café, a pub. A friendly and relaxed community filled with unscripted and honest conversations between travelers like you."

As a further guide, the site offers tick-boxes for the reviewer to say whether the trip featured certain attractions, all of which help a subsequent user to evaluate the relevance of the review to their own travel plans. In what is referred to as a

'supervised classification approach', the site guides reviewers to describe the hotel as roomy, cosy, trendy, a hotspot or romantic, among other characteristics; and offers a list of facilities for the reviewer to tick. Finally, it asks the reviewer if he/she is willing to be contacted by travellers to share their experience.

To help users search the list of hotels in a destination, hotels are ranked according to the reviews as reviewers are asked to give a thumbs-up or thumbs-down as to whether they would recommend the hotel to a friend. Technological features of the site thus help overcome problems of information overload. Additionally, users can rate the reviews, giving feedback on whether a review was helpful or not which in turn gives users further information to evaluate a review. The date of the visit allows users to ascertain how fresh the review is and therefore the likelihood of their own experience being similar; a hotel with a bad review posted a year before may have had time to clean up its act while a complaint about dirty rooms and indifferent food dated two days before might suggest to a user that they could expect more of the same if they were to go there.

Somewhat separately, TripAdvisor has a commercial arm. In this case, the 40 million visitors are touted as a good reason for a travel-related business to have a presence on the site. The aim of the business listings is to connect the users reading reviews to the hotels that they are reading about. That such OURS can give valuable information for businesses has been well documented (Jennings & Wittes Schlack, 2008) although it is not clear whether TripAdvisor is an effective source of data. Rather, most businesses use it to drive customer traffic to their online booking site.

3.2. The problem of fakes

Inevitably, the temptation for an unscrupulous hotelier to write a review praising his own establishment or criticising his competitor is sometimes irresistible. Users have to develop a sense for reports that may be too good (or too bad) to be true. Dishonest reviews can distort the overall ranking of a hotel; but at the same time it can be dangerous to remove them as it is possible to delete honest but unfavourable reviews at the same time, thereby further distorting the effect that these reviews can have (Wu, Greene, Smyth & Cunningham, 2010).¹³ At the end of each review, users are invited to report problems with the review, which include “violates review guidelines” and the more revealing “review is suspicious.” To help maintain the credibility of its service, TripAdvisor draws what it calls a separation between church and state, and says that “Advertising does not influence the TripAdvisor Popularity Index ranking in any way.”

The problem of fakes has also led to questions of whether the reviews on TripAdvisor can be trusted and hence whether the site as a whole is credible. Some (highly critical) estimates have suggested there are between five and 10 million fraudulent reviews on the site (Smith, 2011); this is probably an overstatement, and even a rival site has been quoted as saying that perhaps 2 per cent of reviews are fake (O’Connor, 2010).

¹³ Unfavourable reviews take two main forms. The first juxtaposes bad with good, which has also been noted as a mechanism to make negative reviews appear more convincing; and the other is to express a disconnect between expectation and reality (Vásquez, 2011). This is interesting as when a hotel delivers above expectations it rises up the rankings, perhaps to the point where expectations become higher than it can deliver on, leading to disappointment and a consequent drop down the rankings.

TripAdvisor users can fall victim to fraudulent reviews or digital deception which is defined as: “the intentional control of information in a technologically mediated message to create a false belief in the receiver of the message” (Hancock, 2007, p. 290). Digital deception takes two forms – identity-based and message-based. On TripAdvisor, these translate to reviewers who claim to be guests but really work for a hotel either promoting their own or denigrating the competition; and reviewers who simply misreport the hotel for personal or commercial reasons. The challenge is identifying these false reviews. TripAdvisor says it has a system for weeding them out, but is reticent on the details to avoid people gaming the system.

Unfortunately, we can't tell you exactly how we do it, since that might offer potential offenders a roadmap to subvert our system. We can tell you that we dedicate significant time and resources ensuring that the content on TripAdvisor reflects the real experiences of real travelers. We have quality assurance specialists who have brought a wide range of professional experience to enhance our prevention methods and our team spends thousands of hours every year ensuring the integrity of content on TripAdvisor. We also use automated tools that help flag questionable content for review, and our large and passionate community of millions of travelers keeps an eye out on our site as well.

(TripAdvisor, 2012b)

The site has automated software for detecting fraud, a team of review integrity experts, as well as inviting the community of users to also police the reviews and alert

them to any that seem suspicious. They also place a red flag icon next to hotels which have been caught interfering with the integrity of user reviews either by posting fraudulent reviews or by offering guests discounted room rates if they write positive reviews. Individual users also have their own approaches and users, when interviewed, said that brevity was often taken as a heuristic for deception while lengthy reports and detailed descriptions were taken as a heuristic for honesty. However, studies have found that, compared to people telling the truth, liars used more words, were more expressive, more informal and tended more to make typographical mistakes, and that “these data suggest that how people use language online may change systematically according to whether or not they are being truthful” (Hancock, 2007, p. 296).

Once a digital deception is identified, however, the effect on the user is dramatic. They switch from concentrating on how much they trust the site, to how much risk there is on the site, in keeping with prospect theory of risk reduction and decision making (Gefen, Benbasat & Pavlou, 2008; Kahneman & Tversky, 1979). This is a weakness in the system but it is an intrinsic danger in an apomediated site and no project involving 20 million people – semi-anonymous for the most part – can hope to be free of these drawbacks which occur when responsibility for information moves away from the experts and into the hands of the masses.

O’Connor (2010) was optimistic and suggested that over time the increase in the number of genuine reviews would overwhelm the impact of the fakes by diluting them to the point where they are irrelevant. That was certainly the opinion of the majority of subjects interviewed for this study. More pessimistically, however, it is possible that

the site is increasingly co-opted by hotels for self-promotion. The further question is how much one can trust a group where one knows that some of the people in it are not trustworthy; and how far should one withdraw one's trust when it becomes clear that some within it cannot be trusted. Finally, when does one decide there are enough bad apples to make one want to distrust the whole group. When does collective trust turn into collective distrust? (Kramer, Brewer & Hanna, 1998).

Rothstein described this in terms of social traps in which trust in institutions or individuals breaks down into distrust and as a result it becomes impossible to make the first move. For institutional benevolence to occur, "the actors must agree to establish institutions that are not ruled by competition and self-interest, but are rather driven by norms such as impartiality and the public good" (Rothstein, 2005, p. 5). He defined the logic of the social trap as everyone wins if everyone chooses to cooperate but if users cannot trust that almost everyone is cooperating, it makes no sense to cooperate in the first place. Therefore non-cooperation becomes rational in situations where most people do not cooperate, so for a system to work users must trust that most people will cooperate. If there is no such trust, the social trap closes. These systems work as long as most people agree with them but there comes a point when the number of freeloaders or people behaving badly reaches a level where trust in the institution evaporates, and once it is gone it is very hard to get it back.

3.3. Reviewer motivation

Reviews are public goods and face the dilemma that few contribute and many freeload or benefit from reading others' opinions but do not post anything themselves. The danger is that over time the freeloaders undermine the contributions of the writers, goodwill evaporates and the system collapses (Lampel & Bhalla, 2007). A survey of nearly 4,000 people found that while people are happy to rely on peer-review ratings to evaluate how credible commercial information is, and indeed 93 per cent of American adults had used the Internet to research something they planned to buy, few contributed to OURS or UGC in general (Flanagin, Metzger, Pure & Markov, 2011).

TripAdvisor reviewers are not paid; indeed, part of the attraction of the site is that they are independent and objective. So what motivates them to write? Five main motivations are to gain social status by demonstrating expertise; to reward the hotel by writing a good review; to punish it by writing a critical review; and to help other travellers have a better experience; and to give back to the community that helped them to travel more effectively. Lampel and Bhalla (2007) argued that status seeking is a significant factor, based on research offline that gift-giving is associated with prestige; gift-giving online is often through the written word. Reviewers may want to be seen as experts, well-travelled, sophisticated or adventurous. Either way, OURS offer a way to present a positive identity to the world. Their analysis found that online status seeking and building identity were the strongest motivations to contribute, with reciprocity (giving back to the community), sharing experience and altruism having

lower scores (Lampel & Bhalla, 2007). Another web-based survey using found that the need for status-seeking was less important, however, and the main motivation was to help a service provider, or reward a hotel, or out of concern for other consumers (Yoo & Gretzel, 2008). Other studies found a gender element, as men post information on an OURS to share the information which they perceive as being a benefit, while women do so more often to give and receive social support to build rapport (Awad & Ragowski, 2008).

3.4. Users

Users turn to OURS for information to help them make better decisions (Dabholkar, 2006). Research into what users value and appreciate on OURS has only recently started to filter through into journals. In-depth interviews with a small sample size of five regular users showed that they want objective information about a hotel, an idea of the reviewers' qualifications and information on their beliefs and expectations (Williams, van der Wiele, van Iwaarden & Eldridge, 2010). Users find review extremity (whether it is very positive or negative) more valuable based on the logic that three out of five stars either indicates wildly differing views or a mediocre product, so one or five stars would give a clearer ideas of what to expect. This is just as well, as reviews tend to be polarised between very high scores and very low, with few in the middle; and the majority are encouraging – one study found positive reviews outnumber negative by a factor of eight to one. However, for experience goods such as travel, the power of extreme reviews is weakened: “Consumers may discount

extreme ratings if they seem to reflect a simple difference in taste ... Consumers are more open to moderate ratings of experience goods, as they could represent a more objective assessment” (Mudambi & Schuff, 2010, p. 189). Conversely, users value density and diversity of argument as indicators that a review is useful, adopting a length-is-strength heuristic, while claims of expertise were not significantly associated with usefulness (Willemsen, Neijens, Bronner & Ridder, 2012).¹⁴

Neilsen quoted a study of traveller behaviour that suggests there are two kinds of people when it comes to making decisions about travel. One is economically rational and wants to get the best deal for his money. The other is worried and concerned while making the choice, becomes confident once the choice is made, but still feels the need to justify that choice after making it (Neilsen, 2001, p. 41). Both kinds have their needs met on TripAdvisor. Users value OURS because they are independent of commercial influence, too: “The persuasive impact of online consumer reviews, as well as of other forms of word-of-mouth, is often attributed to the perceived non-commercial nature of their authors. Consumers are believed to have no vested interest in recommending a product or brand, and their implied independence renders reviews more credible and consequently more useful than marketer-generated information” (Willemsen, Neijens, Bronner & Ridder, 2012, p. 19).

¹⁴ The question of why aggregation of extreme reviews should be unpersuasive while two-sided arguments are persuasive is answered by the idea that a single review that considers good and bad is balanced and objective and therefore of value; while an aggregated mean score does not reveal whether the hotel was both good and bad, or simply mediocre.

3.5. TripAdvisor in the media

Perhaps the most powerful indicator of the effect that OURS are having on users is the reaction from the old purveyors of information, newspaper and magazine journalists who, until the rise of TripAdvisor, were trusted sources on travel destinations and hotels and whose travel pages brought in advertising revenue. Like a recently divorced man, they find it hard to find anything nice to say about the newcomer who has stolen their loved-one's heart. *Travel Trade Gazette* reported on hoteliers complaints about the site (Pearce, 2011). *The Independent* asked: "Just how bereft of common sense do you have to be to take the advice of anonymous strangers on something as important as a hotel stay?" (Randall, 2011, pp. 40-41). Arthur Frommer (founder of the guide book series) reported having argued against the logic of OURS for years, and delighting in reports that they are manipulated by hoteliers (Frommer, 2011). Even *National Geographic Traveler* – while noting that the Internet has taken authority away from the old media – steered people away from the new upstarts. It offered two arguments against the site: that some reviews are bogus and deceptive; and that OURS consolidate power in the hands of just a few players – TripAdvisor, Booking.com, Agoda and their like – which leaves them easier to manipulate by unscrupulous hoteliers and their PR agencies. The writer warned: "More than 81 per cent of hotel guests say they're influenced by these online reviews, which means there's a better-than-average chance you've clicked on a hotel rating, read it, believed it, and booked a room based on the write up. You really shouldn't do that." (Elliott, 2012).

Chapter 4 – Methodology

“Qualitative researchers are essentially concerned with questions about how people construct meanings, and how these meanings may differ over different historical, cultural and individual contexts”

Claire Hewson, *Gathering data on the Internet: qualitative approaches and possibilities for mixed method research* (2007) p. 405

4.1. Introduction

Based on the theories and concepts outlined in the previous chapters, this chapter reports the choice of methodology and the benefits and limitations of the tools chosen. A survey and in-depth interviews were both used in order to create a richer and more nuanced picture. This study responds to the suggestion from Grabner-Kräuter and Kaluscha (2003) for mixed method research into online trust: “From a methodological viewpoint, more studies that use different methodologies are needed... Studies that use a combination of methodologies can potentially explore more advanced facets of on-line trust. An interesting way to broaden the methodological base is the combination or integration of qualitative and quantitative empirical research. Both qualitative and quantitative research methods have

important contributions to make to the field.” (p. 807). Meanwhile, Metzger, Flanagin and Medder (2010) stated that credibility research has been dominated by surveys and quasi-experimental data, and suggest that interviews and focus groups can offer a more nuanced view.

4.2. Mixed methods

A study that involves both qualitative and quantitative elements is widely referred to as mixed-method research.¹⁵ There are challenges inherent in combining interviews and surveys, from sampling to analysis. Elucidating their differences, Sandelowski (2000) pointed out that qualitative data usually involves purposive sampling to elicit idiographic knowledge, moving from a generalised theory to a small sample; while the probability sampling that is a feature of quantitative research is geared towards more nomothetic knowledge, moving from the sample to make generalisations about a population. While single research methods have the benefit of clarity, sometimes a mixed methodology can offer a richer picture: “The complexity of human phenomena mandates more complex research designs to capture them” Sandelowski (2000, p. 246). She stated that the techniques the researchers choose reflect their paradigms, rather than merging paradigms. Hence the first level at which this methodology is mixed is the paradigm level.

Sandelowski warned of the impossibility of blending two paradigms; rather, this dissertation takes one, post-positivist, paradigm. This states that interpretation and

¹⁵ Both research approaches were approved for this study by the Institutional Review Board at the National University of Singapore.

understanding of a phenomenon are both more attainable than is the positivist paradigm that proposes that social science can describe, predict and control human behaviour; as a result, both interview and survey start from this position. It takes the view that the opinions given by the interview subjects and the data collected in the survey cannot be generalisable and apply only to the people and the circumstances in which they were collected. Ontologically, it takes the associated position that reality is context-dependent, and changes over time. Hence this study is exploratory rather than definitive, and aims to suggest a model for future study of an emerging phenomenon, rather than to fix that phenomenon empirically. As a result, the sampling methods for each study take an idiographic approach rather than attempting to be representative; at the same time, it aims to have a sample that is broad enough to include a varied mix of opinions and experiences for a rich understanding. Using a similar sampling approach for both studies makes it easier to combine the resultant data sets.

Mixed-method research can be used to look for convergence or corroboration – where two data sets validate each other; to complement each other so that each method helps illustrate interpretations of the other; and developmental, where one method guides the approach used in the other (Sandelowski, 2000). This study uses the first two, and aims to combine the methods and data sets so that it becomes clear where they converge and to see where they complement each other.

Bryman (1988) placed fact-gathering, validity, reliability, replicability and generalisation at the heart of quantitative methods, with a more naturalistic approach

concerned with perceptions of social reality among individuals as the goal of qualitative methods. The challenges continue through to the results stage, where Sandelowski (2000) recommended that one effective way to combine them is to take a 'linking' approach, keeping each data set analytically separate, but combining them during interpretation. This way, qualitative analysis techniques are used for qualitative data, and quantitative analysis techniques are used for quantitative data. This is the approach taken by this study, as the survey used interval variables to move beyond descriptive statistics and add a level of subtlety to the final analysis, while analysis of interview transcripts used nominal variables and hence cannot be used for inferential statistical analysis. Combination at the final stage of interpretation was deemed the best option.

Given the challenges, why attempt mixed-method research? While some decry it because quantitative and qualitative approaches are based on different assumptions or have differing epistemological underpinnings, others see it as addition rather than dilution (Gantley, 1994; Guba & Lincoln, 1994; Leininger, 1994). Qualitative data can enrich quantitative surveys, while using both techniques together can enhance interpretation of findings (Leech & Onwuegbuzie, 2007). As Labuschagne (2003) puts it, they should be seen as complementary rather than competitive; and Hewson (2007) drily added: "the recognition that the long-standing perceived division between qualitative and quantitative research approaches, and the belief that they are incompatible, is not useful" (p. 423).

If one common reason for researchers to adopt a mixed-method approach is that it can give greater integrity, credibility and validity to a study and make the research more comprehensive, a second is illustration as qualitative data can “put meat on the bones” of quantitative data (Bryman, 2006, p. 106). Jick (1979) put it in physical terms, that “given basic principles of geometry, multiple viewpoints allow for greater accuracy. Similarly, organisational researchers can improve the accuracy of their judgments by collecting different kinds of data bearing on the same phenomenon” (p. 602). Also writing in favour of mixed-method triangulation as a means to validate research, Leech and Onwuegbuzie (2007) stated that while quantitative research answers who, where, when and how much, qualitative research can deal with how and why. While mixed-method research brings problems of combining different data sets and approaches, for this study the benefits were considered to override the drawbacks. The two approaches can work together to elicit deeper meaning.

4.2.i. Mixing methods in this study

A preliminary literature review and observation of TripAdvisor and conversations with regular users led to the six research questions; these in turn were operationalised as 13 interview questions (Appendix B). A more in-depth literature review led to 13 hypotheses and the survey to explore them (Appendix E). The data from these two sources were combined, such that the quantitative survey data added rigour and substance to the qualitative interview findings, while the latter fleshed out the bare bones of the former; this can be seen in the discussions chapter.

4.3. Research method 1: The survey

Surveys have been widely used to understand travellers' behaviour, psychology and economic impact (Pan, 2010). Quite recently, an online survey investigated the motivation of reviewers on sites such as TripAdvisor, finding that most were motivated by a desire to help other travellers more than the wish to vent negative feelings (Yoo & Gretzel, 2008). A similar online survey asked about people's perceptions of UGC in travel planning, and found that trust depended on the type of website and perceptions of the content creator (Yoo, Lee, Gretzel & Fesenmaier, 2009). More recently, an online survey in Australia found that respondents tended to value travel information from government-run tourism sites above those on generic social networking sites (Burgess, Sellitto, Cox & Buultjens, 2011). Another online survey investigated which features of websites generate feelings of trust, and found that usability, transparency and security all vary in their effect on trust in online communities (Benlian & Hess, 2011).

The 75-question survey (Appendix E) examined the attitudes, beliefs and practices of users of TripAdvisor to gain an overview of what aspects of the site they value and trust, and the effect of the interplay between risk, self-efficacy, social identification and technological features on that trust. For this study, a further benefit of a web-based survey is that it can have a global reach, more suited to an international Internet phenomenon such as TripAdvisor (Alreck & Settle, 1995).¹⁶ Hence for this

¹⁶ Alreck and Settle (1995) offer a useful 10-point checklist for surveys, which is used here to clarify some decisions taken for this study, given italicised in parentheses.

research a survey was considered the best tool, chosen specifically over an experimental design because the main aim was to establish a broad picture rather than to test causality.

4.3.i. Sampling and distribution

The survey was distributed both in printed paper format and online in order to achieve a varied response. Some of the benefits of an online survey are low administration cost, potential global reach, as well as the convenience, all of which were apt for this study (Evans & Mathur, 2005). There are also problems associated with online surveys, however, including a lack of representation if the target population does not have access to the Internet, for example, non-response by people

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1. How will the questionnaire be organised and why? *(The first questions are easily answered demographic questions. Items are then grouped by topic: experience; risk; appreciation of technological features of the site; social identification; behavioural intentions; trust in reviewers; trust in site; trust in TripAdvisor as an institution; what is important on the site; self-efficacy scale.)*
 2. What is the sequence? *(The sequence is as above, so that all the five-point Likert scales are grouped in the middle, with the categorical scales at the beginning and the Bandura scale at the end. This is done to make it faster for people to complete the survey.)*
 3. What level of language will be used? *(Simple, friendly everyday language. The aim was to use the language of the community.)*
 4. What kind of grammar will be used? *(As above, a colloquial style.)*
 5. What kind of response scales will be used? *(Respondents reply to pre-set questions, placing a tick in the box on a Likert scale. These scales will be considered interval scales for the purpose of this study. It is understood that there is some debate about this in academic circles.)*
 6. What are the most sensitive questions? *(Age and level of self-efficacy/confidence might be considered by some to be sensitive questions. But data is gathered anonymously to avoid any awkwardness.)*
 7. What ancillary instruments will be used? *(Only an introductory note at the head of the survey.)*
 8. What is the expected size of the survey? *(75 questions; the print survey had five page and took around 10 minutes to complete.)*
 9. How will it be produced? *(Print on paper; and online through Survey Monkey.)*
 10. What will be retained and what will be returned? *(Nothing is retained by the respondent; everything goes to the surveyor for data processing.)*

with social, technological or security concerns, or measurement error caused by poorly designed surveys (Couper, 2000). This study avoids the first problem because the target population all use the Internet; the third by pre-testing the survey; while for the second, it is hard to track why people did not respond, but at least one respondent said he *did* respond because was reassured that Survey Monkey was a secure site.

Three methods were employed to distribute the questionnaire, and data was collected during April 2012. One hundred and fifteen paper questionnaires were distributed by students at the researcher's university completed by a convenience sample of Asian adult users of the site. A further convenience sample of 140 were collected through the researcher and research assistant's social networks, using the online survey tool Survey Monkey, and by contacting regular reviewers on the site itself via e-mail (Appendix D), also using Survey Monkey.¹⁷ The surveys were analysed using SPSS to elicit descriptive and parametric statistics. Details are given in Chapter 5. The completed questionnaires were reduced to a final 237, removing spoiled papers.

A self-selecting sample of people willing to complete the questionnaire brings an unpredictable bias to the results (Bethlehem, 2008). Labuschagne (2003), meanwhile, noted that quantitative analysis is mostly concerned with how much a phenomenon has a certain property, as well as the similarities and differences in such characteristics between different groups, and can yield generalisable findings. However this sample is

¹⁷ Attempts were made to create a purposive sample based on geographical popularity of destination visited, but these were abandoned after it was found to be almost impossible to contact reviewers through the site, as e-mails were commonly delivered to spam boxes rather than in-boxes.

not generalisable to the wider population, and is intended as an exploratory study offering insights into the attitudes about trust among TripAdvisor users.

The survey collected basic demographic information via discrete categorical items of gender, age, and frequency of travel. Altogether 237 usable responses were collected, and 58% of respondents were female and 42% male, with age ranges 21-30 (52.1%), 31-40 (15.1%), 41-50 (20.2%), 51-60 (9.7%), and 3% aged over 60 (Figure 3). This is consistent with higher Internet use among young people. They were predominantly Asian (66%). They were not necessarily regular travellers: their frequency of going overseas in the previous 12 months was 46% going once or twice, 35% going three or four times, 6% going five or six times, 3% going seven or eight times, while 9% had travelled more than eight times (Figure 4). Most had used TripAdvisor more than 10 times in the previous 12 months (35.7%), many had used it 1-3 times (33.2%) while fewer had used it 4-6 times (14.7%) or 7-9 times (6.7%) and a few had not consulted it at all in that time (9.7%).

Figure 3: Age range of respondents by percentage (n = 237)

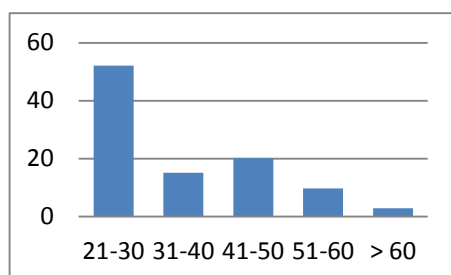


Figure 4: Frequency of travel in the previous 12 months, by percentage (n = 237)

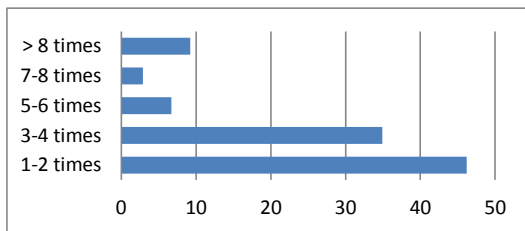
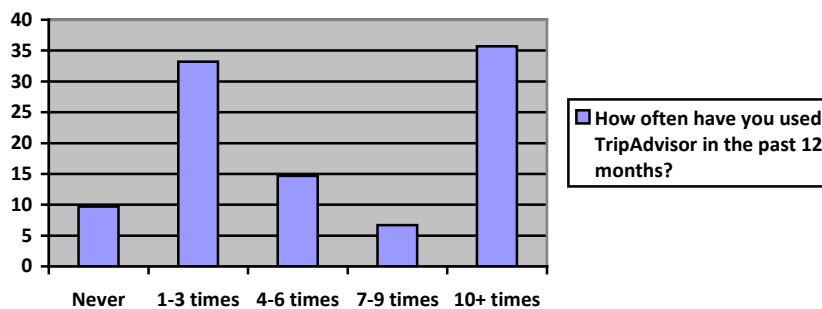


Figure 5: Frequency of use of TripAdvisor in the previous 12 months, by percentage (n = 237)



4.3.ii. Measurement reliability

The survey was pre-tested on 11 travel-writing students and revised based on their feedback. The survey also used and adapted pre-existing measurements.

4.3.iii. Risk. The study assessed two types of risk, when travelling, and when using TripAdvisor. Jarvenpaa, Tractinsky and Vitale (2000) found that online shoppers' attitude was a balance of perceived risk and positive attitude towards a store, and suggested a scale to measure this. Their scale was adapted to be more concerned with choosing a hotel and less with online shopping. A three-item scale ($\alpha = .86$) was used to assess perceived risk using TripAdvisor, using a five-point Likert scale where

1 = 'strongly disagree' and 5 = 'strongly agree' with statements such as: "Choosing a hotel based on TripAdvisor is risky." There is also risk in travelling; for some, that is part of the pleasure, while for others it brings concern: "Since most of the travel experience relies on services that are intangible, consumed simultaneously with production and that are typically hard to standardize, travelers' perceived risk is likely to be high" (Roehl & Fesenmaier, 1992, p. 17). Roehl and Fesenmaier outlined seven types of risk, of which this study uses three ($\alpha = .84$): that the hotel may be poor value for money, may waste the traveller's time and will not provide satisfaction. As the idea of cross-referencing information against other sites was a common theme in the interviews, it was added as a further question. However, in factor analysis it was found to have a factor loading below the accepted .50 benchmark, and was subsequently dropped (Hair, Anderson, Tatham & Black, 1998).

4.3.iv. Social identification. As the social aspect of the site is important, this study adapted Bart, Shankar, Sultan and Urban's (2005) measurements of perceived community, and a sense of community is used as a proxy for prototypical group identification with reviewers. Naturally, it is possible for a user to identify with specific reviewers but not the site; or feel a sense of community with reviewers in general while acknowledging a lack of identification with individual reviewers. This study also adapted Casaló, Flavián and Guinalú's (2011) measurements of similarity, shared interests and shared goals ($\alpha >.70$), and added two measurements concerned with relevance of reviews written by people similar to the user. The final measure of social identification constituted seven items ($\alpha = .81$), with a series of five-point Likert scales

where 1 = 'strongly disagree' and 5 = 'strongly agree' with statements such as: "Other users and I share the same interests" and "The most relevant reviews are written by people who are similar to me".

4.3.v. Technological features. Both social, community aspects and practical, navigational aspects can be determinants of site trust (Shankar, Urban & Sultan, 2002). Such aspects include site design, aggregation of information, and links to other sites to corroborate information, contact information, trust seals, visible security policies, searchability and navigability (Lenzini, van Houten, Huijsne & Melenhorst, 2010). The measures used in this study were adapted from Sanchez-Franco and Rondan-Cataluña (2010) (ease of use, navigability and control), and from Bart, Shankar, Sultan and Urban (2005) (freshness of information and aggregation of reviews), as well as measures concerned with personalisation of searches and ease of comparing information; they used a series of five-point Likert scales where 1 = 'strongly disagree' and 5 = 'strongly agree' with statements such as "When I navigate round the site, I feel that I am in control" and "Aggregating the reviews into rankings makes it easier to choose a hotel." This yielded a seven-item scale ($\alpha = .80$)

4.3.vi. Self-efficacy. One challenge is to create a valid and reliable scale to measure self-efficacy and this study has adapted scales from the last 10 years (Hsu & Chiu, 2004; Kim & Kim, 2005). In a paper suggesting guidelines for constructing self-efficacy scales, it is defined as being "concerned with people's beliefs in their capabilities to produce given attainments... Scales of perceived self-efficacy must be tailored to the particular domain of functioning that is the object of interest" (Bandura, 2006,

pp. 307-8). He suggested a 100-point scale from 0 (cannot do) to 100 (highly certain can do), although he accepted that a 10-point scale may be sufficient and this was used in the current study.

As a reliable and valid self-efficacy scale must be relevant to that which it is supposed to measure, and any scales used to measure Internet activity are liable to be quickly outdated, three established scales for Internet use were adapted and updated for this study (Hsu & Liang, 2011). The first is concerned with the basic skills (Hsu & Chiu, 2004) with questions of how confident they feel to do the following: visit the site and look for information about hotels using the database. The second was concerned with using information to choose a hotel (Kim & Kim, 2005). To these were added more TripAdvisor-specific goals of identifying the relevance of a review and distinguishing between honest and deceptive reviews. This yielded a nine-item, 10-point self-efficacy scale where 1 = 'not at all confident' and 10 = 'extremely confident' that the respondent can perform certain tasks. In pre-tests, this self-efficacy scale had a strong internal consistency ($\alpha = .86$).

4.3.vii. Reviewer and site trustworthiness. For this survey, the concept used Dickinger's (2011) definition of trustworthiness that it includes: "(1) integrity, the belief that the information provider adheres to accepted rules of conduct, is honest, and keeps promises; (2) benevolence, the belief that the information provider wants to help the customer; and (3) ability, the belief that the information provider is competent. Not all of these dimensions are equal" (p. 380). For this survey, ability was re-classified as 'competence', a word more often used in trust literature. For example,

to measure *reviewer trustworthiness* integrity, a five-point Likert scale where 1 = 'strongly disagree' and 5 = 'strongly agree' with statements such as "I do not doubt the honesty of the reviewers," while to measure perceptions of competence, "The reviewers can accurately describe their stay." This was based on Dickinger's (2011) measures, which were designed to analyse both reviewers and tourism boards or service providers, and so were considered a good starting point for another travel-related trust survey. The three aspects of trustworthiness were broken down further using McKnight Choudhury and Kacmar's (2002) analysis of online trust with more specific terms such as sincerity, honesty, reliability, accuracy, good intentions and knowledge (α between .85 and .96). This yielded a nine-item scale ($\alpha = .90$).

Another aspect is *site trustworthiness*, for which this study also used Dickinger's measurement instrument for tourist boards and service providers, which had α between .83 and .84. This measured concepts including whether the site would be reliable and use best judgment, have good intentions towards the user and was well-meaning, with five-point Likert scales where 1 = 'strongly disagree' and 5 = 'strongly agree'. So it examined site integrity, for example, with "I believe the site is sincere in helping me." Together, these measured trust in the site itself and, after one item was dropped for showing an inadequate loading factor of .40, yielded an eight-item scale ($\alpha = .91$).

4.3.viii. Behavioural intention. Among their drivers of online trust, Bart, Shankar, Sultan and Urban (2005) also identified behavioural intention which they defined as including "willingness to conduct tasks, such as clicking through further on a Web site,

abandoning or returning to the site, sending e-mail messages, downloading files, and ordering from the site” (p. 137). Their earlier qualitative study developed measures of behavioural intention which included buying something, recommending to friends, sharing information, bookmarking the page and registering as a member. These measures were used and adapted in the survey to include recommending the site to a friend, booking a hotel after using the site and using the site again, with Likert scales for, for example “I would use TripAdvisor again in the future.” A further measure (reverse scored) considered whether the user would check the information against other sites to see if TripAdvisor could be trusted.

4.3.ix. Scale variables

Several of the survey’s 75 questions were reduced into scale variables using factor analysis (see Table 2). Wherever feasible, existing measurements and scales were either used or adapted so that measurements had internal consistency in measuring the same general construct. The measurements had face validity, and had for the most part been tested in similar forms in other studies. These scales were standardised. The *TripAdvisor risk* scale ($\alpha = .86$) measured risk choosing a hotel. A *TripAdvisor self-efficacy* scale ($\alpha = .86$) grouped together users’ skill at visiting the site and searching for a hotel, interacting with other users, comparing hotels and reviews, and making a decision. The appreciation of *technological features* scale included ease of understanding and navigation, freshness of data, aggregation of data, personalised searches and ease of data comparison ($\alpha = .80$). The appreciation of the *social*

identification scale ($\alpha = .80$) included a feeling that other users and the respondent share similar goals, interests and objectives.

Two scales measured different forms of trust. The *reviewer trust scale* ($\alpha = .90$) measured perception of the reliability, honesty, good intention and competence of reviewers. The *site trust scale* ($\alpha = .91$) measured the site's sincerity in helping travellers, its judgment, its good intentions and its ability to serve people. Finally *behavioural intention* after visiting the site was divided into three variables rather than being collapsed into a scale, as different forms of trust were expected to affect different behavioural intentions. The following three intentions were measured: recommending the site to friends, comparing it against other information sources, and booking a hotel. Three other behavioural intention items were dropped because they had low factor loadings. The reliability scores for the scale items are presented in Table 2, while factor analysis scores are presented in Table 3.

Table 2: Summary of reliability scores for main scale items

Scale item	α
Travelling risk	.84
TripAdvisor risk	.86
Technological features	.80
Social identification	.80
TripAdvisor self-efficacy	.91
Reviewer trust	.90
Site trust	.91

Table 3: Summary of factor analysis results for main survey items

General risk when travelling		
It is possible that the hotel I choose will not be good value for money	.89	
It is possible that the hotel I choose will be a waste of my time	.85	
It is possible that the hotel I choose will not provide satisfaction	.89	
Risk when using TripAdvisor		
There is too much uncertainty in choosing a hotel based on TripAdvisor	.83	
Choosing a hotel based on TripAdvisor is risky.	.87	
I feel safe choosing a hotel based on TripAdvisor.	.92	
I always check hotels from TripAdvisor against another website.	.23	removed
Using TripAdvisor		
On the site everything is easy to understand	.77	
I can find information easily on the site	.81	
When I navigate round the site, I feel that I am in control	.77	
Regular updates mean the information is fresh	.63	
Aggregating the reviews into rankings makes it easier to choose a hotel	.61	
I can personalise the site for my needs	.53	
I can easily compare different hotels using the site	.66	
Identifying with people on TripAdvisor		
I feel a sense of community with people on the site	.69	
I can interact with people who have successfully used the site	.71	
Other site users and I share the same interests	.82	
Other site users and I behave in a similar way	.79	
Other site users and I share the same objectives	.63	
The most relevant reviews are written by people who are similar to me	.58	
The site clearly shows which reviews are most helpful	.51	
Trustworthiness of TripAdvisor REVIEWERS		
Reviewers are likely to be reliable	.63	
I do not doubt the honesty of reviewers	.66	
I can count on the reviewers to be sincere	.75	
I expect the reviewers have good intentions	.79	
I expect the reviewers are well-meaning	.77	
I expect the reviewers have my interests at heart	.50	
The reviewers are competent information providers	.53	
The reviewers can accurately describe their stay	.68	
The reviewers know about staying in hotels	.75	

Trustworthiness of TripAdvisor as a WEBSITE

I believe the site is sincere in helping me	.67	
I do not doubt the integrity of the site	.75	
I believe the service given by the site is done with their best judgment	.70	
I expect that the site has good intentions towards me	.73	
I expect that the site puts customers' interests before its own	.40	removed
I expect that the site is well meaning	.71	
The site is a competent information provider	.68	
The site really knows what travellers want	.61	
The site is able to serve the readers well	.61	

How confident are you that you can do the following on TripAdvisor?

Visit the site	.84	
Look for information about hotels using the database	.85	
Exchange information about hotels with other users	.59	
Use the different kinds of information on the site	.71	
Choose a hotel based on what I see on the site	.74	
Compare prices of a hotel on different sites	.77	
Compare reviews of a hotel on different sites	.80	
Identify if a review on the site is relevant to me	.69	
Distinguish between honest and deceptive reviews	.49	

What would you do after visiting TripAdvisor?

I would book-mark the site	.55	removed
I would recommend the site to a friend	.72	
I would book a hotel after using to the site	.67	
I would sign up as a member at the site	.59	removed
I would go to another site to compare with TripAdvisor	.97	
I would use TripAdvisor again in the future	.54	removed

4.3.x. Sub-constructs of trustworthiness

In addition, trustworthiness was sub-divided into component elements of benevolence, competence and integrity, for both forms of trust studied (Gefen, Benbasat & Pavlou, 2008). All were found to have internal reliability, and all exhibited factor loadings above the .50 benchmark (Hair, Anderson, Tatham & Black, 1998). The

reliability scores for these scale items are presented in Table 4, while factor analysis scores are presented in Table 5.

Table 4: Summary of reliability scores for sub-constructs of trustworthiness scales

Scale	α
Benevolence - Reviewer Trustworthiness	.86
Benevolence - Site Trustworthiness	.86
Integrity - Reviewer Trustworthiness	.86
Integrity - Site Trustworthiness	.79
Competence - Reviewer Trustworthiness	.76
Competence - Site Trustworthiness	.82

Table 5: Summary of factor analysis for sub-constructs of trustworthiness

Benevolence	
Reviewers are likely to be reliable	.77
I do not doubt the honesty of reviewers	.81
I can count on the reviewers to be sincere	.84
I believe the site is sincere in helping me	.76
I do not doubt the integrity of the site	.81
I believe the service given by the site is done with their best judgment	.78
Integrity	
I expect the reviewers have good intentions	.70
I expect the reviewers are well-meaning	.69
I expect the reviewers have my interests at heart	.60
I expect that the site has good intentions towards me	.60
I expect that the site puts customers' interests before its own	.47
I expect that the site is well meaning	.61
Competence	
The reviewers are competent information providers	.57
The reviewers can accurately describe their stay	.77
The reviewers know about staying in hotels	.72
The site is a competent information provider	.73
The site really knows what travellers want	.72
The site is able to serve the readers well	.78

4.4. Research Method 2: Interviews

Interviews have the benefit of delivering information in the form that individuals actually use it, in their own language and revealing their opinions, concerns and attitudes, and hence are valuable if the research is concerned with how people view the social world (Hannabuss, 1996). He went on to itemise the benefits of interviews as a data-gathering technique:

We want the respondents' own perspective to emerge, explore the ways in which people working together share common understandings, get insight into particular experiences, find out motives behind decisions, get a view of informal procedures, consider apparent contradictions between attitudes and behaviour, and allow respondents time to provide their answers. Interviews seem to answer these challenges well... (p. 23)

Among the dangers of the interview, however, is that the interviewee will give a socially desirable answer to a question, or come up with an opinion that they may not hold in order to avoid appearing ignorant (Hannabuss, 1996.).¹⁸ Equally, an interview can be regarded as a co-construction in which researcher and interviewer between them develop ideas and attitudes (Lee & Roth, 2004). However, rather than seeing this as a problem, for this research it was considered a strength that two people with

¹⁸ These are just two concerns among many. Kvale (1994) identifies 10 common negative reactions to qualitative interviewing as a research method: "it is not scientific, not objective, not trustworthy, nor reliable, not intersubjective, not a formalized method, not hypothesis testing, not quantitative, not generalizable, and not valid" (p. 147). Nonetheless, as long as it is approached with rigour and a systematic approach, and its limitations in terms of objectivity are acknowledged, it has nonetheless proved a research approach that can elicit unique information and opinions.

an interest in a common topic could share and discuss opinions to establish more clearly the attitudes of one towards that topic.

This study followed Schilling's guidelines that suggest a line between overly restrictive protocols and overly flexible but insufficiently rigorous analysis (Schilling, 2006). She proposed a systematic yet flexible spiral of research, with five levels: from tapes to raw data; from raw data to condensed protocols; from condensed protocols to a preliminary category system; from a preliminary category system to coded protocols; and concluding analyses and interpretation. Hence, the first level of analysis used an emergent coding approach to establish themes among the interviewees and derive general principles based on empirical observations, then apply these to the texts (Babbie, 2011; Stemler, 2001). This was subsequently observed to follow the six primary concepts and six research questions, and thus was used those as a framework for describing readers' reactions to and use of TripAdvisor.

4.4.i. Research questions

Content analysis must connect with research questions (Riffe, Lacy & Gico, 2005). The literature suggested six research questions, following the primary concepts in the model for trust in an apomediary site. First is the extent to which risk motivates an information search and affects other variables, so **RQ1** asks: What risks do people overcome by using the site, and what risks do they subsequently encounter on the site? Second is the extent to which social identification was salient in developing trust following studies that showed reports from satisfied and similar peers can increase buying intention (Cox, Burgess, Sellito & Buultjens, 2009; Lim, Sia, Lee & Benbasat,

2006; Soo & Hilligoss, 2008). This led to **RQ2**: Do users of TripAdvisor trust reviewers more if they are similar to them? Third is the meeting of social identification and technological aspects, and how each impacts on the other (Cheskin/Sapient, 1999; Hassanein & Head, 2004). This led to **RQ3**: Do users trust the site *because* it is an apomediated source? Fourth is the individual's site-specific self-efficacy following studies that show that it can affect trust and PU online (Dash & Saji, 2007; Hernández, Jiménez & Martin, 2008). This led to **RQ4**: Do users trust their own efficacy to get what they want from TripAdvisor? Fifth is what was considered trustworthy about the site, following earlier studies of antecedents of trust online (Bart, Shankar, Sultan & Urban, 2005; Yoo, Lee, Gretzel & Fesenmaier, 2009); as well as the relevance of different dimensions of trust (McKnight & Chervany, 2001). This led to **RQ5**: Do users trust TripAdvisor as much as friends and guidebooks? And finally, there is the question of what their desired outcome is, leading to **RQ6**: What is the end goal of using TripAdvisor?

4.4.ii. Sampling strategy

Following Riegelsberger, Sasse and McCarthy's (2003) call for greater qualitative data gathering in research in online trust, the researchers talked talk to 30 TripAdvisor users. The aim was to explore how important the issues of trust and credibility are to them, and to establish the trust-meaning they find on the site.¹⁹ A convenience

¹⁹ Interviewing stopped at 30 subjects as similar responses to the first 20 were being gathered from the latter 10 subjects, suggesting that saturation had been reached. A study of PhD theses using interviews revealed that the mean sample size was 31 respondents (Mason, 2010). The number of respondents was in also keeping with the principle that qualitative methods involve deep detail about a small number of people (Labuschagne, 2003).

sample of subjects for interview was taken from the social circle of the researcher and a research assistant. Twenty-four interviews were conducted by the primary investigator and six by a research assistant who had already transcribed 15 interviews conducted by the main researcher and hence had a good understanding of the procedure and attitude. The student underwent a further one-hour training to reiterate the approach of leading the conversation without biasing the answers, and the overall expectations of the interviews. All the interviews took place in Singapore.

Subjects were selected to achieve a wide range of use of the site as well as demographic balance. All were professionals or business students, which may have brought a bias to the responses. The sexes were evenly represented (male = 14, female = 16), although the slight preponderance of women relates to what appeared to be a common practice among couples that women booked travel more than men. The ages ranged from 22 to 63, with a median of 40; 15 had children, 15 did not; half were Asian, and half were Western, and while an attempt was made to involve a range of races and nationalities, interviewing Asians, Europeans, Americans and Antipodeans, this was done more in the interests of gathering varied opinions than in any attempt to be generalisable or representative of the TripAdvisor community.

4.4.iii. Data collection

Subjects were invited to take part via personal contacts and then by letter (Appendix A). The interviews took place in informal settings between January and March 2012, and were all done face-to-face. The 15- to 20-minute interviews were semi-structured or open-ended, starting with a list of 13 questions (Appendix B), but allowing the

interview to take the form of a conversation around these questions so that the interviewer could follow up with drill-down questions when the subject raised a point that warranted discussion (Roulston, 2006). Such an approach ensures that each interview covered the same ground so that they could be compared; while at the same time allowing the freedom for new ideas to emerge.

The opening questions asked in broad terms what the subject used the site for and what they liked or disliked about it. This was done to encourage the subject to open up and offer ideas unguided by the interviewer, leading to possible avenues of questioning as the first answer was allowed to shape subsequent questions (Babbie, 2011). Three further questions explored trust *in* something rather than generalised trust. Trust starts with risk reduction, and the questions asked how the subject overcomes the following:

- 1). Risk that the site will not be helpful, bearing in mind the mass of content and the amateur status of the writers. Such risk is reduced by the site's declaration of integrity, the user's experience, and the use of a bandwagon heuristic to develop trust; it leads to expectation that the site will have the cues to help, the integrity to protect users and the choice to help them find what they need.

- 2). Risk that the writers will not be helpful. This is reduced by the number of honest reviews outweighing the few fakes, the presence of controls on the number of fraudulent reviews, the user's ability to filter out irrelevant or fraudulent reviews, and the user's social similarity with the writers; it leads to the expectation that writers will

be benevolent, competent and similar enough to the user to help close the uncertainty gap.

3). Risk of not being able to use the information to choose a hotel. This is reduced by self-efficacy and experience; it leads to expectation that the user can trust his or her own competence to judge the information presented, to close the uncertainty gap.

Four further questions were concerned with the sociotechnological Web 2.0 aspects of the site which make TripAdvisor and other OURS so interesting. These include apomediation; information self-reliance; and deception. Each of these questions was phrased in an open-ended way (“What do you make of that?”) to avoid directing the answer. Two questions then explored how TripAdvisor operates in the wider environment of choosing hotels using information from different sources, specifically friends’ recommendations and guide books. The interviews were audio-recorded with permission from interviewees and transcribed recording the exact words as spoken to capture the subjects’ opinions. The resulting 40,000 words of text were subjected to qualitative and quantitative analysis.

4.5. The interviews: Three analytical approaches

“Content analysis has become widely used for evaluating various communication forms relevant to consumer behaviour scholars” (Kolbe & Burnett, 1991).²⁰ Hence it was considered suitable for this study. The initial approach was qualitative, looking at

²⁰ While the term ‘content analysis’ is very broad, it has been used to describe analysis of interviews frequently in health and nursing literature particularly and hence is considered a suitable term here (Downe-Wamboldt, 2009; Graneheim & Lundman, 2004; Hsieh & Shannon, 2005, among many others).

the language used and the intentions behind it: “Qualitative content analysis goes beyond merely counting words to examining language intensely for the purpose of classifying large amounts of text into an efficient number of categories that represent similar meanings” (Hsieh & Shannon, 2005). Hatch states that qualitative analysis: “means organizing and interrogating data in ways that allow researchers to see patterns, identify themes, discover relationships, develop explanations, make interpretations, mount critiques, or generate theories. It often involves synthesis, evaluation, interpretation, categorization, hypothesizing, comparison, and pattern finding” (Hatch, 2002, p. 148, cited in Leech & Onwuegbuzie, 2007).

Qualitative research can yield thick, rich descriptions and has been considered valuable for giving insights into both everyday and more unusual experiences, and the meaning that people attach to these; and it can even inform theory “if it is conducted in a way that leads to insights into particular psychological, social and/or cultural processes and practices” (Leech & Onwuegbuzie, 2007). Hence it was considered valid for ascertaining the meaning that travellers find in their experience using TripAdvisor. As an aid to triangulation that bolsters trustworthiness of research, this study uses three methods, two qualitative and one quantitative, “in order to understand phenomenon more fully” of the seven suggested by Leech and Onwuegbuzie (2007, p. 557).

4.5.i. Constant comparison

The first is constant comparison, in which two researchers read through the interviews and each suggested a list of 30 repeated types of statement before agreeing on a

common list of around 20. The most frequent statements concerned using TripAdvisor to get other people's opinions to choose a hotel; reviews are valued for balanced opinions and showing good and bad; an awareness of fraudulent reviews; and trusting themselves to navigate and to identify what is valuable. This still presented an unwieldy number of variables, so in the interests of parsimony the statement types were collapsed into six topics that followed the rubric of the research questions: (1) risk; (2) self-efficacy; (3) social identification; (4) technological features which in this case can also be considered comments or opinions on the value of apomediary sites; (5) trust; and (6) behavioural intention. These were further broken down into eight theme variables. The aim was to identify patterns in the data and "transform a seemingly chaotic mess of raw data into a recognizable conceptual scheme" (Marvasti, 2004, p. 90), in this case following the conceptual scheme suggested by the initial model of trust in an apomediary site (Figure 1).

These formed the basis for a coding book of content, with the unit of analysis being a response from the interviewee – that is, text framed by two questions from the interviewer.²¹ Riffe, Lacy and Gico (2005) used Holsti and Berelson's concept of thematic units to explain this approach. These are considered the best units for this study as they allow for analysis of beliefs, attitudes and opinions of the subjects, and when what an subject says about the object becomes more important than the object

²¹ This unit was chosen as it is a discrete syntactical unit; that is, while it was difficult to ascertain the beginning and end of an assertion or sentence spoken by the interviewee, it was clear where the interviewee began and ended speech. Thus while taking a response as the unit of analysis loses some granularity, it also produces clarity of syntactical definition.

itself; in this case, it is the user's perceptions of TripAdvisor that are more important than the site itself.

However, using constant comparison alone can lead to interpretation of the text that is not necessarily consistent with the underlying themes, so using other analytical approaches to triangulate, complement, augment and clarify. Ultimately, "The ability to 'get more out of the data' by using multiple analytical tools provides the... researcher the opportunity to generate more meaning, thereby enhancing the quality of the inferences" (Leech & Onwuegbuzie, 2007, p. 579).

4.5.ii. Statistical content analysis

Second, statistical content analysis is considered most useful to establish the frequency of themes, to identify which are the most important (Leech & Onwuegbuzie, 2007). This approach is sometimes referred to as quantitative analysis of qualitative data and involves coding data into categories and describing it using statistics (Hsieh & Shannon, 2005). In this study, each response could show more than one of the eight theme variables. Within each, there were three mutually exclusive categorical variables, detailed below (Perreault & Leigh, 1989). Hence the coding book was arranged into the six topics with eight theme variables, each broken down into three or four categorical variables.

Quantitative content analysis involves developing nominal categorical data, based on qualitative judgments that lead to a classification of assertions in the text (Holsti, 1969). The father of content analysis, Berelson (1952), defined it as "a research

technique for the objective, systematic, and quantitative description of the manifest content of communication” (p. 18). Others, however, disagree with Berelson’s use of the word quantitative, and defined it as “a research technique for making replicable and valid inferences from texts (or other meaningful matter) to the contexts of their use” (Krippendorff, 2003). No matter how it is defined, the approach has been consistently used in communication research, primarily for analysing media messages and images. Less commonly it has been applied to interview transcripts, although recently this approach has found supporters in healthcare with studies involving narrative content analysis of interviews with nursing staff and patients (Sandelowski, 2000; and Severinsson, 2003, among others). Krippendorff specifically noted its value for open-ended interviews, as a way of exploring manifest concepts that arise during the conversation (Krippendorff, 2003). For this study, each of the theme variables was classified into three or four categorical variables, presented in Table 6.

Table 6: Content analysis topics and theme variables, by frequency

Topic/Theme variable	Code	Frequency
Risk		
Positive reaction to identifying fakes	FAK1	47
Negative reaction to identifying fakes	FAK2	3
Neutral about fakes	FAK0	10
Social identification		
Concern with similarity between writer and user	SIM1	42
Concern with dissimilarity between writer and user	SIM2	45
Neutral about similarity or dissimilarity	SIM0	9
Values friends more than other sources	FR1	34
Values some friends more than others	FR2	10
Values other sources more than friends	FR0	10
Technological features		
Positive about apomediated information source	APO1	46
Negative about apomediated information source	APO2	5
Neutral about apomediated information source	APO0	23
Positive about amateurs	AM1	32
Negative about amateurs	AM2	9
Neutral about amateurs	AM0	3
Self-efficacy		
Positive about personal judgment using site	EFF1	101
Positive about proficiency using site	EFF2	22
Neutral about self-efficacy using site	EFF0	25
Trust		
Trusts certain aspects of the site	TR1	59
Trusts certain aspects of the site, with reservations	TR2	47
Shows distrust in certain aspects of the site	TR0	27
Behavioural intention		
I would recommend the site to a friend	BI1	
I would book a hotel after using to the site	BI2	
I would go to another site to compare with TripAdvisor	BI3	
I would use TripAdvisor again in the future	BI4	

The text was then analysed looking for occurrences of statements that corresponded to these categorical variables. Following Berg, at least three examples of each kind of statement were sought in order to substantiate assertions, which are covered more fully in the results chapter (Berg, 1989, cited in Babbie, 2011).

4.5.iii. Inter-coder agreement

Babbie (2011) points out that one potential weakness of this kind of analysis of latent content (as opposed to manifest content) is that the former is open to interpretation. If the aim is to be objective (or at least inter-subjective) about a text then it is essential to establish agreement between coders (Neuendorf, 2002). To overcome this, two researchers discussed what should be included in the coding book over two hours, and subsequently two interview transcripts were randomly selected from the 30 for initial inter-coder agreement testing. This did not deliver an acceptable reliability measurement. The coding book was discussed for a further two hours and refined to remove ambiguities in the classification and make categories more mutually exclusive. A further two interviews were selected and coded, yielding an acceptable inter-coder agreement of $> .80$, where $.00$ is no agreement and 1.00 is perfect agreement (Krippendorff, 2003). While initial coding of four texts may seem few, it represents an acceptable $> 10\%$ of the total texts (Lombard, Snyder-Duch & Bracken, 2002).

There has been little consensus over the best index of inter-coder agreement and much debate over the value of the (admittedly liberal) percentage agreement test, rather than Cohen's kappa or Krippendorff's alpha. In this case, the number of possible coding categories were considered enough to overcome the likelihood that a

small number of coding categories might influence agreement statistics (Perreault & Leigh, 1989), and hence the simple percentage was considered acceptable. Further, Lombard, Snyder-Duch and Bracken (2002) in their analysis of indices, accepted the use of percentage agreement only with nominal or categorical level variables as was the case here.

Following this, the remaining 26 interview transcripts underwent content analysis by one researcher, based on the revised coding book (Appendix C). Taking a multivariable approach, each unit of analysis could be coded as more than one variable; for example, a reference to cross-checking a friend's recommendation would show both positive self-efficacy and also the attitude that friends cannot always be trusted above other sources (Riffe, Lacy & Gico, 2005).

4.5.iv. Key words in context

The third of Leech and Onwuegbuzie's approaches is key words in context which is useful when analysing interview responses. Key words are examined in relation to the words that appear before and after them with a view to identifying underlying connections that the subject may be hinting at.

- 1) To analyse risk, the key words were 'problem', 'difficult' and 'fake.'
- 2) To analyse social identification, the key words chosen were 'similar', 'recommend' and 'friend.'
- 3) To analyse the technological features of the site as an apomediary source, the key words were 'link', 'rating/ranking' and 'amateur.'

- 4) To analyse self-efficacy, the key words were 'search', 'compare', and 'find.'
- 5) To analyse trust, the key words were 'trust', 'credible' and 'honest.'
- 6) Behavioural intention was taken simply as a specific reference to an intention to act, and 'decide', 'choose' and 'book' were taken as key words in context. ²²

These words were selected based first on use of a thesaurus to find synonyms for primary concept words (risk, self-efficacy etc); which were then compared against word frequencies in the text to use those with the greatest frequency; and finally analysed by hand to ensure that the word use corresponded to its desired meaning. Finally, Schilling (2006) suggested that such descriptive, basic measures of frequency can offer insight when used in conjunction with other analyses.

This kind of statistical content analysis has its own weaknesses, however; for example, it can "decontextualize words to the point where it is not understandable," and there is no guarantee that frequent word use indicates the importance of a concept in the mind of the subject. Hence it is best used not alone, but in conjunction with other analytical approaches (Leech & Onwuegbuzie, 2007, p. 568).

²² All these keywords were chosen based on close reading of the text to identify common themes and frequent word use among the interviewees. Simple word counts were rejected as unsuitable as synonyms or multiple meanings can cloud the issue (Stemler, 2001). For example, the word 'like', which occurred 410 times in the interview transcripts, could indicate similarity as an adjective "people like me" or indicate warmth of feeling towards an inanimate object as a verb "I like a good breakfast" or be an interjection, "the hotel was, like, awful".

4.6. Summary

This chapter has presented the methodology and research design, connecting it to the aims and objectives of the research. A series of interviews yielded data to be analysed both qualitatively and quantitatively in their own right as well as being one of the bases for a survey. The survey examined attitudes, opinions and activities of regular TripAdvisor users. These different research methods were used to triangulate analysis for a more confident understanding of the subject than can necessarily be achieved through any one approach. The analysis of the data collected will be detailed in the next chapters.

Chapter 5 – Results and analysis (Survey)

“The central principle behind the success of the giants born in the Web 1.0 era who have survived to lead the Web 2.0 era appears to be this, that they have embraced the power of the web to harness collective intelligence”

Tim O’Reilly, *What is Web 2.0? Design patterns and business models for the next generation of software* (2005)

5.1. Introduction

This study hypothesised relationships among risk using TripAdvisor, self-efficacy, the social identification and technological features of an apomediary site leading to two forms of trust and three dimensions thereof, and thence to behavioural intention. A 75-question survey was completed by 237 respondents to give data. This chapter starts with descriptive analysis of the data and moves on to regression analysis.

5.2. Descriptive analysis

Risk First, respondents were aware of the risk that came with choosing a hotel. Their greatest concern was that the hotel would not give value for money ($M = 3.78$, $SD = .97$)²³ and there was a similar level of worry that it would not satisfy them. They felt less risk when it came to TripAdvisor, however, and this was measured as a second,

²³ Mean scores are out of 5, except for self-efficacy, where they are out of 10.

more salient form of risk. Few agreed that there was too much risk choosing a hotel from the site ($M = 2.68$, $SD = .94$). The greatest perceived risk in the site was shown by their resolution to check it against another source ($M = 3.92$, $SD = .89$), which corroborates the interview data. Respondents agreed more that there was a risk in choosing a hotel ($M = 3.62$, $SD = .92$) than that there was a risk in using TripAdvisor ($M = 3.08$, $SD = .92$), which suggests that the site has a utilitarian value if the risk it overcomes (choosing a bad hotel) is greater than the risk it contains (being tricked, or swamped with data).

Social identification measured how much users felt there was a connection with reviewers, based on similar interests, attitudes and objectives. Here the highest-scoring item was that other site users shared the same objective as the respondents ($M = 3.45$, $SD = .68$), closely followed by agreement with the statement that the most relevant reviews are written by people who are similar to the user ($M = 3.43$, $SD = .86$).

Technological features measured the PU and PEOU of the site, including ease of navigation, personalisation and comparison. Aggregation of reviews was the most valued item ($M = 3.89$, $SD = .77$), followed by it being easy to understand ($M = 3.84$, $SD = .63$) and find information ($M = 3.83$, $SD = .70$). Users were less inclined to personalise it ($M = 3.14$, $SD = .75$).

Self-efficacy measured levels of confidence in using the site. Users felt most confident simply to visit the site ($M = 8.75$, $SD = 1.85$) and to undertake an information search ($M = 8.26$, $SD = 1.78$). They were also confident that they had the self-efficacy to

compare what they read on the site with information from another site, which was a recurring theme in this research ($M = 7.65$, $SD = 2.01$). They were least confident that they could distinguish between real and fake reviews ($M = 6.74$, $SD = 2.20$).

Reviewer trustworthiness measured how much users agreed with statements about the competence, benevolence and integrity of reviewers. The statements that received most agreement were concerned with their benevolence, to have good intentions ($M = 3.62$, $SD = .72$) and to be well-meaning ($M = 3.57$, $SD = .74$). Respondents agreed least with the third statement concerning benevolence, however, that the reviewers had the user's interests at heart ($M = 3.19$, $SD = .87$). This suggests that they perceive reviewers as generally well-meaning but not specifically interested in them.

Site trustworthiness measured how much respondents agreed with statements about the competence, benevolence and integrity of the site. The highest score was for agreement with the statements that the site is a competent information provider ($M = 3.87$, $SD = .63$) and could serve the user well ($M = 3.77$, $SD = .57$). Yet users were cynical about the motives of the site for providing the service, with fewest agreeing with the statement that the site put user's interests before its own ($M = 3.30$, $SD = .80$). Again, there was little perception that the site was interested in them.

Behavioural intention measured what actions the users were likely to do after consulting TripAdvisor. The most common intention was to go to another site to compare ($M = 3.84$, $SD = .85$). This suggests they trust it, but not exclusively. They

were least keen on signing up as a member ($M = 3.09$, $SD = 1.01$), which suggests that they see it as a resource to take from, rather than a community to join.

5.3. Inferential statistical analysis

5.3.i. Antecedents of reviewer trust and site trust

Simple correlations were performed to look for relationships among the variables; then a series of ordinary least squares regressions was done to assess how antecedents of trust were likely to predict different forms of trust. **H1a** proposed that risk would show a negative association with self-efficacy, social identification, technological features, trust and behavioural intentions. In simple correlations, this was supported (see Table 7; for a fuller table of correlations, see Appendix F), and this was corroborated by subsequent OLS regression analysis.

Table 7: Pearson's r correlations between antecedents of trust and two forms of trust.

	RISK	SELFE	SOC	TECH	RTRUST
Risk					
Self-efficacy	-.35				
Social identification	-.28	.39			
Technological features	-.40	.50	.39		
Reviewer trust	-.43	.36	.50	.34	
Site trust	-.53	.44	.40	.47	.66

N = 235. All correlations significant at the .01 level (2- tailed)

H1b proposed that risk would be a better predictor of trust than self-efficacy would, based on the assumption that trust exists to overcome risk. Without this risk or vulnerability, there is no need to trust: "Trust is a psychological state comprising the

intention to accept vulnerability based upon positive expectations of the intentions or behaviour of another” (Rousseau, Sitkin, Burt & Camerer, 1998, p. 395). In this analysis (Tables 8a/b), age, gender and frequency of travel were added as control variables in the baseline model.²⁴ Model 2 added the scale variables of risk using TripAdvisor and self-efficacy, along with social identification and technological features of an apomediary OURS. Risk was negatively associated with reviewer trust ($\beta = -.29$, $p < .001$) and with site trust ($\beta = -.35$, $p < .001$), which reiterates the idea that trust is used to overcome risk. In both cases, the effect of risk was greater than that of self-efficacy, and thus **H1b** is supported for both reviewer and site trust.

Looking at the antecedents of each form of trust, risk was the most significant predictor of site trust, but came second to social identification as a predictor of reviewer trust. This offers support for **H2a** which proposed that social identification would predict both reviewer trust and site trust. Indeed, the regression analysis showed that social identification showed a stronger association with reviewer trust ($\beta = .36$, $p < .001$) than it did with site trust ($\beta = .16$, $p < .01$), suggesting that it is a greater component of the former than of the latter.

²⁴ Yoo, Lee, Gretzel and Fesenmaier (2009) report some effect of gender and age on trust, and cite studies that show men rate personal websites as more credible than women do, while women assess news websites as more credible than men do. Younger people rate the Internet as more trustworthy than older users do. In this study, these variables were controlled for as they have been well explored previously.

Table 8a: Antecedents of reviewer trust.

Reviewer trust (OVERALL)	Model 1	Model 2	
Age	-.11	-.15	**
Gender	.08	.05	
Travel frequency	.10	-.07	
Risk	–	-.29	***
Self-efficacy	–	.11	
Social identification	–	.36	***
Technological features	–	.04	
R-square	.03	.39	
Adjusted R-square	.02	.37	
F-change	2.50	33.37	***

*p<.05, **p<.01, ***p<.001

Table 8b: Antecedents of site trust.

Site trust (OVERALL)	Model 1	Model 2	
Age	.03	-.03	
Gender	.03	.01	
Travel frequency	-.08	-.07	
Risk	–	-.35	***
Self-efficacy	–	.15	**
Social identification	–	.16	**
Technological features	–	.22	**
R-square	.01	.42	
Adjusted R-square	0.0	.40	
F-change	.69	41.06	***

*p<.05, **p<.01, ***p<.001

H2b, meanwhile, proposed that TripAdvisor's technological features would predict both site trust and reviewer trust. The data showed that technological features were non-significant in predicting reviewer trust, but *were* significant for site trust ($\beta = .22$, $p < .01$), so **H2b** is not supported. Finally, **H3a** proposed that self-efficacy would also predict both site trust and reviewer trust. Analysis showed that self-

efficacy did indeed predict site trust ($\beta = .15, p < .01$) but not reviewer trust, so **H3a** is not supported. This suggests that efficacy is more associated with skills using the site than it is with social identification.

Overall, there was a fair goodness of fit for the models. Regression analysis with reviewer trust as the dependent measure showed that risk, self-efficacy, social identification and technological features explained a good portion of variance ($R^2 = .35, F(4, 229) = 30.87, p < .001$); while similar analysis showed that risk, self-efficacy, social identification and technological features explained an even greater portion of variance in site trust ($R^2 = .40, F(4, 229) = 40.40, p < .001$).

As trustworthiness has been broken down into dimensions of integrity, benevolence and competence (Gefen, Benbasat & Pavlou, 2008), the survey also examined how the antecedents of trust affected these dimensions for a secondary level of analysis (Tables 9a/b/c). For reviewer trustworthiness, self-efficacy was associated with benevolence ($\beta = .18, p < .01$) which may suggest that feelings of competence translate into feelings that others mean well, a sort of halo effect. Social identification was associated with benevolence ($\beta = .23, p < .01$), integrity ($\beta = .32, p < .001$) and competence ($\beta = .39, p < .001$). Age was negatively associated with both the integrity ($\beta = -.14, p < .05$) and the competence ($\beta = -.13, p < .05$) of the reviewers, which suggests that older respondents were more likely to mistrust reviewers. This may reflect the fact that younger respondents are more accustomed to the Internet and are more likely to trust the people there.

Table 9a/b/c: Antecedents of reviewer trust, by dimension of trustworthiness

Reviewer trustworthiness (Benevolence)	Model 1	Model 2	
Age	-.08	-.11	
Gender	.11	.09	
Travel frequency	-.09	-.09	
Risk	–	-.19	**
Self-efficacy	–	.18	**
Social identification	–	.23	**
Technological features	–	.01	
R-square	.03	.25	
Adjusted R-square	.02	.22	
F-change	2.46	16.45	***

*p<.05, **p<.01, ***p<.001

Reviewer trustworthiness (Integrity)	Model 1	Model 2	
Age	-.09	-.14	*
Gender	.09	.06	
Travel frequency	-.11	-.07	
Risk	–	-.36	***
Self-efficacy	–	.06	
Social identification	–	.32	***
Technological features	–	.01	
R-square	.03	.36	
Adjusted R-square	.02	.34	
F-change	2.53	28.7	***

*p<.05, **p<.01, ***p<.001

Reviewer trustworthiness (Competence)	Model 1	Model 2	
Age	-.10	-.13	*
Gender	.01	-.02	
Travel frequency	-.05	-.03	
Risk	–	-.19	**
Self-efficacy	–	.04	
Social identification	–	.39	***
Technological features	–	.07	
R-square	.01	.30	
Adjusted R-square	0	.28	
F-change	1.04	23.19	***

*p<.05, **p<.01, ***p<.001

For site trustworthiness (Tables 10a/b/c), social identification was positively associated with both benevolence ($\beta = .17$, $p < .001$) and integrity ($\beta = .16$, $p < .01$), but not competence. Technological features were associated with all dimensions of site trustworthiness: benevolence ($\beta = .18$, $p < .05$), integrity ($\beta = .13$, $p < .05$) and competence ($\beta = .29$, $p < .01$), as might be expected. This suggests that the competence of the site, its pragmatic functionality, is most important in engendering trust. Finally, self-efficacy was positively associated with the integrity dimension ($\beta = .20$, $p < .01$), which may imply that users feel confident of their skills to ascertain when the site is sincere in helping them achieve their goals, rather than feeling cynical that it has another agenda.

Table 10a/b/c: Antecedents of site trust, by dimension of trustworthiness

Site trustworthiness (Benevolence)	Model 1	Model 2	
Age	-.02	-.05	
Gender	.07	.06	
Travel frequency	-.02	-.01	
Risk	–	-.21	**
Self-efficacy	–	.12	
Social identification	–	.17	**
Technological features	–	.18	*
R-square	.01	.25	
Adjusted R-square	-.01	.23	
F-change	.46	18.56	***

*p<.05, **p<.01, ***p<.001

Site trustworthiness (Integrity)	Model 1	Model 2	
Age	.03	-.02	
Gender	.01	.01	
Travel frequency	-.11	-.09	
Risk	–	-.37	***
Self-efficacy	–	.20	**
Social identification	–	.09	
Technological features	–	.13	*
R-square	.01	.36	
Adjusted R-square	0	.34	
F-change	1.0	31.44	***

*p<.05, **p<.01, ***p<.001

Site trustworthiness (Competence)	Model 1	Model 2	
Age	.07	-.01	
Gender	-.02	-.03	
Travel frequency	-.10	-.08	
Risk	–	-.34	***
Self-efficacy	–	.09	
Social identification	–	.16	**
Technological features	–	.29	**
R-square	.01	.44	
Adjusted R-square	0	.42	
F-change	.95	42.94	***

*p<.05, **p<.01, ***p<.001

5.3.ii. Antecedents of behavioural intention

The end goal of using the site is to reduce risk and choose a hotel; and this study also considered the social impact of the site that a user might recommend it to a friend, and the self-efficacy idea of comparing the information against other sources to reach a conclusion. **H1c** proposed that risk would be a worse predictor of behavioural intention than self-efficacy, social identification and technological features, based on the idea that once trust had been established, risk would become less significant. Tables 11a/b/c show that this is not necessarily the case, and as a result, **H1c** is only partially supported. Risk is still the main (negative) predictor of intention to book a hotel ($\beta = -.26, p < .001$) even after trust is taken into consideration, which suggests that the site does not overcome all the risk and users' concerns. However it becomes less significant for the intention to recommend to a friend, in which case social identification ($\beta = .18, p < .01$) and technological features ($\beta = .19, p < .01$) are equally influential. **H3b**, meanwhile, proposed that self-efficacy would be a strong predictor of the behavioural intention to compare TripAdvisor with other sources. This intention,

not surprisingly, was best predicted by self-efficacy ($\beta = .33$, $p < .001$); so **H3b** is supported.

A further hypothesis (**H5**) proposed that behavioural intention would also be predicted by social identification, following research that found that perceived norms of a reference group were related to intention for participants who identified with the group (Terry, Hogg & White, 1999). Regression analysis showed that while it was associated with booking a hotel ($\beta = .17$, $p < .01$) and recommending the site ($\beta = .18$, $p < .01$), it showed no significant association with the intention to compare against other sources, and as a result **H5** is only partially supported.

Examining the effect of trust on behavioural intention was one of the main aims of this study, and **H4a** proposed that trust would be less effective at predicting behavioural intention than self-efficacy and risk would. Tables 11a/b/c show that, when other variables are controlled for, neither form of trust has any effect on behavioural intention apart from an awareness of the competence of the site having a small effect on the intention to compare it against other sources ($\beta = .25$, $p < .05$). Two possible explanations are first that once the antecedents of trust are included, trust itself becomes insignificant; and second that in an information-rich environment, trust is less important than other factors. As self-efficacy was effective only in predicting the intention to compare, and risk is not effective in predicting intention to recommend TripAdvisor to a friend, but trust was insignificant in all intentions, **H4a** is partially supported at best.

Table 11a: The effect of predictive variables on intention to book a hotel.

BI book a hotel	Model 1	Model 2	Model 3
Age	.22 **	.17 **	.18 **
Gender	.03	.01	.02
Travel frequency	.03	.06	.07
Risk		-.31 ***	-.26 ***
Self-efficacy		.02	.02
Social identification		.20 **	.17 **
Technological features		.16 **	.15 *
Reviewer trustworthiness (Integrity)			.13
Reviewer trustworthiness (Benevolence)			-.08
Reviewer trustworthiness (Competence)			.03
Site trustworthiness (Integrity)			.05
Site trustworthiness (Benevolence)			-.11
Site trustworthiness (Competence)			.07
R-square	.05	.32	.33
Adjusted R-square	.04	.30	.29
F-change	4.21 **	22.21 ***	.78

*p<.05, **p<.01, ***p<.001

Table 11b: The effect of predictive variables on intention to recommend site.

BI recommend to friend	Model 1	Model 2	Model 3
Age	.13 *	.1	.09
Gender	-.02	-.04	-.03
Travel frequency	.02	.03	.03
Risk		-.17 **	-.01
Self-efficacy		.11	.12
Social identification		.19 **	.18 **
Technological features		.22 **	.19 **
Reviewer trustworthiness (Benevolence)			-.14
Reviewer trustworthiness (Integrity)			.07
Reviewer trustworthiness (Competence)			0
Site trust (Benevolence)			-.02
Site trust (Integrity)			-.02
Site trust (Competence)			.13
R-square	.02	.28	.30
Adjusted R-square	.01	.25	.25
F-change	1.45	20.25 ***	.75

*p<.05, **p<.01, ***p<.001

Table 11c: The effect of predictive variables on intent to compare with other sources.

BI compare with other sources	Model 1	Model 2	Model 3
Age	-.01	.02	0
Gender	.08	.07	.09
Travel frequency	.03	-.02	-.01
Risk		.24 **	.24 **
Self-efficacy		.33 ***	.33 ***
Social identification		.05	.09
Technological features		.02	-.02
Reviewer trustworthiness (Benevolence)			.04
Reviewer trustworthiness (Integrity)			-.14
Reviewer trustworthiness (Competence)			-.03
Site trustworthiness (Benevolence)			-.14
Site trustworthiness (Integrity)			-.03
Site trustworthiness (Competence)			.25 *
R-square	.01	.13	.17
Adjusted R-square	-.01	.10	.12
F-change	.47	7.96 ***	1.75

*p<.05, **p<.01, ***p<.001

Regression analysis with the behavioural intention to book a hotel as the dependent measure showed that risk, self-efficacy, social identification and technological features explained some variance ($R^2 = .26$, $F(4, 229) = 18.0$, $p < .001$). Again, similar analysis showed that risk, self-efficacy, social identification and technological features explained some variance in behavioural intention to recommend the site to a friend ($R^2 = .25$, $F(4, 229) = 20.25$, $p < .001$). Finally, regression analysis also showed that risk, self-efficacy, social identification and technological features explained only a small variance in the behavioural intention to compare against other sources ($R^2 = .10$, $F(4, 229) = 8.0$, $p < .001$). However, dimensions of trustworthiness as predictors had no statistically significant effect on any of these three dependent variables.

To explore this further, a second regression analysis was done excluding the antecedents of trust, to see the effect that different dimensions of the two different forms of trust had on behavioural intention (Tables 12a/b/c). While the effect of trust on intention was limited, it was anticipated that it would still have some effect. Risk is inherent in the site that even the volume of information on the site cannot counteract, simply because it is *caused* by that volume of information. Removing other antecedents from the model, it was found that trust accounted for a only a very small amount of variance in the behavioural intention to book a hotel ($R^2 = .17$, $F(6, 227) = 4.82$, $p < .001$); for the intention to recommend the site to a friend ($R^2 = .16$, $F(6, 227) = 5.93$, $p < .001$); and was not significant for the intention to compare.

H4b suggested that system trust and reviewer trust would have different effects on intention, and that the latter would be subsidiary to the former, as Lim, Sia, Lee and Benbasat (2006) found that trust in similar persons can be transferred to trust an online store that those similar persons trust. Hence it is proposed that reviewer trust should be considered subsidiary to site trust as it contributes to the latter – users trust the site in part because they trust the reviews on the site. **H4b** proposed that site trustworthiness would be a better predictor than reviewer trustworthiness of behavioural intentions. The data showed that reviewer trustworthiness (integrity) predicted two forms of behavioural intention, to book a hotel ($\beta = .26$, $p < .01$) and a negative association with comparing against other sources ($\beta = -.19$, $p < .05$). Site trustworthiness (competence), on the other hand, showed positive associations with

intention to book ($\beta = .27, p < .01$), to recommend ($\beta = .32, p < .001$) and to compare ($\beta = .24, p < .01$). This gives support for **H4b**, and suggests that, as far as trust is concerned, trust in the site is likelier to make users act. Nevertheless, both forms of trust only accounted for at most 9% of variance in these three intentions, which once again suggests that trust plays only a limited role on intentions to act.

Table 12a: The effect of dimensions of trustworthiness on intention to book hotel.

Trust predictors of BI book	Model 1	Model 2
Age	.22 **	.22 ***
Gender	.03	.03
Travel frequency	.03	.09
Reviewer trustworthiness (Benevolence)		-.12
Reviewer trustworthiness (Integrity)		.26 **
Reviewer trustworthiness (Competence)		.08
Site trustworthiness (Benevolence)		-.15
Site trustworthiness (Integrity)		.12
Site trustworthiness (Competence)		.27 **
R-square	.05	.23
Adjusted R-square	.04	.20
F-change	4.21 **	9.03 ***

* $p < .05$, ** $p < .01$, *** $p < .001$

Table 12b: The effect of dimensions of trustworthiness on intention to recommend to a friend.

Trust predictors of BI friend	Model 1	Model 2
Age	.13	.12
Gender	-.02	-.16
Travel frequency	.02	.07
Reviewer trust (Benevolence)		-.14
Reviewer trust (Integrity)		.17
Reviewer trust (Competence)		.06
Site trust (Benevolence)		-.03
Site trust (Integrity)		.05
Site trust (Competence)		.32 ***
R-square	.02	.18
Adjusted R-square	.01	.15
F-change	1.45	7.37 ***

*p<.05, **p<.01, ***p<.001

Table 12c: The effect of dimensions of trustworthiness on intent to compare.

Trust predictors of BI compare	Model 1	Model 2
Age	-.01	-.03
Gender	.08	.09
Travel frequency	.03	.04
Reviewer trustworthiness (Benevolence)		.11
Reviewer trustworthiness (Integrity)		-.19 *
Reviewer trustworthiness (Competence)		.01
Site trustworthiness (Benevolence)		-.12
Site trustworthiness (Integrity)		-.03
Site trustworthiness (Competence)		.24 **
R-square	.01	.05
Adjusted R-square	-.01	.01
F-change	.47	1.71

*p<.05, **p<.01, ***p<.001

H4c predicted that the social behavioural intention to recommend the site to a friend would be best predicted by the affect-based trustworthiness dimension of reviewer benevolence. The data did not offer any support for this. **H4d** predicted that the functional behavioural intention to book a hotel would be best predicted by the pragmatic trustworthiness dimension of competence, and this was supported. This concurs with Dickinger (2011) who found that competence (which she refers to as ability) was the most significant dimension of personal information sources such as OURS in influencing users engaged in goal-oriented tasks.

Table 13: Summary of hypothesis results

Hypothesis	Supported/Not supported
H1a Risk will show a negative association with self-efficacy, social identification, technological features, trust and behavioural intentions.	Supported
H1b Risk will be a better predictor of trust than self-efficacy will.	Supported
H1c Risk will be a worse predictor of behavioural intention than self-efficacy, social identification and technological features will.	Partially supported
H2a Social identification will predict both reviewer trust and site trust.	Supported
H2b Technological features will predict both reviewer trust and site trust	Not supported
H3a Self-efficacy will predict both reviewer trust and site trust.	Not supported
H3b Self-efficacy will be a strong predictor of the behavioural intention to compare TripAdvisor with other sources.	Supported
H4a Trust will be less effective at predicting behavioural intention than self-efficacy and risk will.	Partially supported
H4b Site trust is a better predictor than reviewer trust of behavioural intentions	Supported
H4c The social behavioural intention to recommend the site to a friend will be best predicted by the affect-based trust dimension of benevolence in reviewer trustworthiness	Not supported
H4d The functional behavioural intention to book a hotel will be best predicted by the pragmatic trustworthiness dimension of competence.	Supported
H5 Social identification on the site will predict all forms of behavioural intention	Partially supported

5.4. Summary

This chapter concerned the analysis used to test the proposed hypotheses. Briefly, the results are as follows: Risk is the primary antecedent of trust, which suggests that trust exists to overcome risk. Self-efficacy predicts users' intention to compare against

other sources. Self-efficacy and risk both affect trust. However, trust itself does not predict behavioural intention, and it is proposed that this is because TripAdvisor is an information-rich environment trust so plays a less important role. Trust in the reviewers and trust in the site appear to work in tandem. The data showed that social identification is at play, concomitant with the apomediated ideals of Web 2.0 OURS and other interactive social media sites. Specifically, it is a factor in reviewer trust, as well as in some behavioural intentions. Hence, for a full understanding of OURS it is recommended to include social identification as well as technological features into a study, as they merge in Web 2.0 sites. The significance of these findings for an understanding of trust online, the impact of UGC on the travel industry, and the future of apomediary sites, are discussed in chapter 7.

Chapter 6 – Results and analysis (Interviews)

“I’d rather have 100 amateurs telling me something than two professionals. You know, what’s that, the game show, *Who Wants to be a Millionaire*? You know you can ask the audience, or you can phone a friend. I’d rather ask the audience”

Interviewee, 2012

6.1 Introduction

Thirty people with varying levels of experience of using TripAdvisor were interviewed to gather data and opinions for thematic content analysis to examine six research questions. They were asked about their perception of the risks the site overcomes and the risks they found on the site, relating to **RQ1**: What risks do people overcome by using the site, and what risks do they encounter while they are there? (RISK). They were asked whether similarity with the reviewer was a major factor in whether they trusted or valued them, relating to **RQ2**: Do users trust reviewers more if they are similar to them? (SOCIAL IDENTIFICATION). They were asked about how they responded to TripAdvisor as an apomediary site (although it was not called by such terms in the interviews, but was referred to as a site where everyone works together for the common good), relating to **RQ3**: Do users trust the site *because* it is an apomediary site which uses technology to aggregate many reviews and reduce them to a usable number? (TECHNOLOGICAL FEATURES). In addition, they were asked how

much they trusted themselves to use the site effectively to achieve their goals, relating to **RQ4**: Do users trust their own efficacy to get what they want from TripAdvisor? (SELF-EFFICACY). They were asked about what they trusted the site to do, and to compare their trust with how they felt about other information sources, relating to **RQ5**: Do users trust TripAdvisor as much as friends and guidebooks? (TRUST). The first question, however, related to the final primary concept, and they were asked what they used the site for and what they trusted it to do for them, answering **RQ6**: What do users hope to achieve after using TripAdvisor? (BEHAVIOURAL INTENTION).

One goal of the thematic content analysis was to gain insight into the role of trust in information-rich apomediary sites. Do users, for example, trust that the site will help them to achieve their goals; or that it will remove fraudulent reviews; or that the reviewers will be reliable, credible and helpful; or that the sheer number of reviews add up to an accurate 'average'; or do they trust themselves to use the site effectively despite its drawbacks and shortcomings?

The 30 subjects were selected for a convenience sample with a range of experience, genders, ages and nationalities. Half were male, half female; half had children, half did not; half were over 40, and half under 40; half were Asian, and half Western. The group does not represent the population of TripAdvisor users, but was selected to offer a wide variety of experiences and opinions. A 15- to 20-minute semi-structured interview with each subject yielded 40,000 words of transcripts for content analysis.

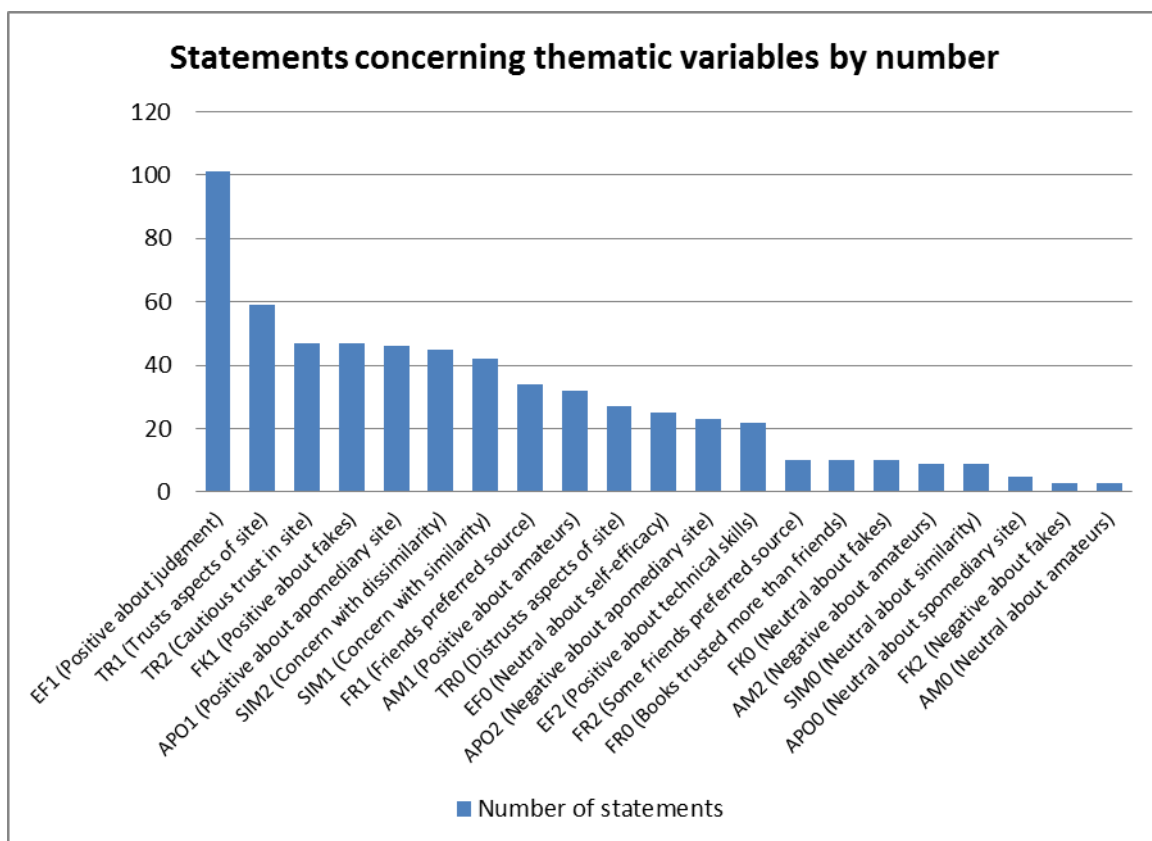
6.2. Frequencies-based overview

In simple frequencies (Figure 6), the most common subject of reference concerned positive feelings of self-efficacy in using the site to achieve their goals (mentioned 101 times), and self-efficacy also showed the widest spread, with some subjects not mentioning it at all and others making nine statements of confidence in their ability. Coming a distant second were statements indicating a general feeling that subjects could identify credible aspects of the site (59). The phrase ‘a pinch of salt’ was used 14 times, and cautious trust was also a common topic (47), as was confidence that subjects could spot fake reviews (47). Positive statements about TripAdvisor as an apomediary site were regular (46), as were the importance of identification with writers of both similar (54) and dissimilar (42) backgrounds to better judge the relevance of their reviews.

Two unexpected themes also emerged: few of the subjects went directly to TripAdvisor, but rather arrived there via a search engine or from a hotel’s website, although none questioned the lack of transparency as to why TripAdvisor appeared so high on the search engine (Machill, Neuberger & Schindler, 2003). These are not people who instinctively turn to TripAdvisor for information, and thus cannot be expected to have an existing relationship of trust with the site. Equally, as they use it as a resource when they are directed there from another site, they do not have a preconceived distrust that makes them reject it. As this result was not expected, it is treated as a notable empirical finding (Bart, Shankar, Sultan & Urban, 2005).

It was standard practice among all subjects to compare data against other sources rather than relying on just one. The implication is that TripAdvisor is not trusted exclusively, nor is it necessarily sought out; rather, it works as an adjunct to other sources and appears to be most strongly associated with self-efficacy in developing confidence to reach a decision. This shows consistency with the idea that vulnerability is disconcerting, so it is practical to hedge one’s bets by finding alternative sources of information (Meyerson, Weick & Kramer, 1996).

Figure 6: Statements concerning thematic variables, by number



As outlined in the Methodology chapter, the six primary concepts and six research questions gave a framework for study, and these six were subdivided into eight theme

variables, each one further divided into three or four categorical variables. The following sections will introduce the categorical variables with illustrative quotations (indicative codes) from the interview subjects, and then explore those further using key words in context.

6.3. Primary concept 1: Risk

The main risk on the site is that fraudulent reviews might cause a user to make a bad choice of hotel; hence subjects were asked if they felt confident about identifying fakes, or whether they are not concerned by fakes because they believe the honest outweigh the fraudulent, or if they dismiss the value of the site once they have identified a fake.

Categorical Variable: Positive reaction to identifying fakes

Indicative Code: “You can see that those aren’t real most of the time. The real ones have a lot of detail, like ‘we arrived late at night, Jenny was at the front desk, he was very nice to us, the first room sort of had a leaking air-conditioner, so we got moved to another place’. The fake ones are going to say, ‘We arrived, it was great. The room was perfect. Everything they did was great’.” (Subject 2: male, 42, USA)

“I know they are not supposed to... but I know that people who own small boutique hotels actually post their own, and I think that then makes you dictated by their opinions about their own place.” (Subject 22: female, 44, Australia)

Categorical Variable: Negative reaction to identifying fakes

Indicative Code: “I know there is a reason for and I think they have to do this, but in a way if it’s meant to make you feel really good about the hotel, the way it works for me is it creates a sense of distrust and I can say that I would distrust the site if there are too many of them.” (Subject 18: male, 56, Australia)

“It does affect the image of the hotel. It becomes less trustworthy.” (Subject 26: female, 22, Indonesia)

Categorical Variable: Neutral about fakes

Indicative Code: “I heard that they were fakes. Would I know? How would I know?” (Subject 14: female, 48, UK)

“If they can fool me by actually putting out something moderately bad but still can disguise, then I guess I can give them credit for it. I’ve never thought about that, I usually assume they are individuals.” (Subject 5: female, 26, Singapore)

Key words in context

In analysing key words in context (shown here in italics), this study took problems and difficulties encountered on the site as indicators of risk, alongside the issue of fraudulent reviews or fakes. Two common *problems* (18) occur before using the site. Travel itself can present problems, as in “Like flying, which I think is just a big hassle finding flights, and similar kinds of problems for me.” The hotels themselves can also present a problem that TripAdvisor exists to deal with (“it’s about service, it’s about attitude, when they encounter problems how was it managed,” and “can they speak

basic English which is a big problem?”). Second, the subject can bring their own problem which the site may or may not be able to help with, as in “my budget is lower than my standard expectation... which is often a problem, and they don’t always meet in the middle.” Equally, the site is set up to deal with problems, as in “a lot of the problems are hotel websites. Can you actually trust those at all?” and “they are doing it to warn people that there are problems, or to say, hey that was really quite a special thing”.

On the site, one risk is that of trust, and whether or not users can trust the reviewers, “the problem with it is that when it comes to reviews, you just can’t trust what people say,” and “anyone can create a fake account and slam a hotel, which is the problem with TripAdvisor now.” Reviewers can be problematic whether they are amateurs, “the only problem I would have is that I may not understand your review properly,” or professionals “if the professionals are paid professionals that’s a problem for me. When there’s money involved, things inevitably change.” Finally, the site’s functionality can also cause problems that need to be overcome: “with TripAdvisor I do find that the navigation is a bit of a problem,” and “it was difficult because I encountered problems getting inside and making the review on their page.”

While few spoke of specific travel risks that the site was used to overcome, the interview subjects found some aspects of the process *difficult* (20). They had difficulty using it to achieve their desired outcome, as in: “It only becomes difficult if the hotel has not been reviewed recently, and there’s only three reviews, then that’s really hard,” and “it’s very difficult to differentiate the standards of the hotels I find on

TripAdvisor.” Some said it was difficult to trust paid reviewers: “It’s very difficult to write a review when you’ve been given £800-worth of free hospitality and a bottle of champagne, to say that this place is ghastly... difficult to have complete integrity when you are being paid,” while others found amateurs difficult because they might not be giving relevant opinions: “some people look for flowers and fields and space, that would be kind of difficult, because not everyone will want what you want.” As ever, the variety of comments brings uncertainty, and the solution is to look at many: “Pretty difficult... but what I do is not only look at one comment.” The site brings technological challenges as well as social ones, as in: “one thing I dislike is it’s difficult to link through,” and “if I see a hotel and like it, it’s difficult to link through from it.”

Fakes (14) were not considered to be a big issue: “It does bother me when I think about it, but I don’t think about it. I’m sure there are some fake ones there.” Often subjects were confident that they would be able to spot them, and discard them: “The fake ones are going to say, ‘we arrived, it was great. The room was perfect. Everything they did was great,’” and “I can usually spot the ones that are fakes.” Fakes can be spotted when they are outliers: “say one out of the five is a fake, usually it’s quite extreme,” or “for the good ones, even if you get three out of five that are really good ones, chances are they are not all fake.” Even if they are not spotted, they do not cause the subjects much worry: “I’ve never really read one that’s fake and I think... I guess what I would be looking out for if I was, would be things like, this place was absolutely wonderful blah blah blah.”

6.4. Primary concept 2: Social identification

RQ2 asked if users trusted reviewers more if they were similar. Subjects showed equal likelihood of valuing a writer perceived as similar (43.7%) as of dismissing a writer's opinion if they were perceived as dissimilar (46.9%).

Categorical Variable: Similarity between reviewer and user

Indicative Code: "I travel with a family, young children and elderly parents, I like to read the experiences of families who have visited the place." (Subject 6: female, 38, Singapore)

"I've gone to places where people have said it wasn't particularly their sort of thing and try to read between the lines and try to see if these people are our sort of people or not, and whether we're following the same kind of ideas of what we want in a holiday." (Subject 4: female, 41, UK)

Categorical Variable: Dissimilarity between reviewer and user

Indicative Code: "When you look at somebody and they look like new Russian money, I assume that they want to do one thing, you can also look at their name and what they have written, what sort of photo they put. I make assumptions about whether it's somebody I think is reliable or who will see things how I do." (Subject 1: female, 48, UK)

"I guess it depends because certain people writing certain reviews are in different socio-economical standards from myself. For example, there might be families

with eight kids, which doesn't reflect on myself and my girlfriend." (Subject 16: male, 30, Canada)

Categorical Variable: Neutral about similarity or dissimilarity

Indicative Code: "I like to analyse it a bit and go into more details and think about the person who wrote this." (Subject 14: female, 48, UK)

"You're going to get a breadth of people what is good and what is bad, so, yeah, I would accept that, which probably means it's going to even itself out over the course of 200-300 reviews." (Subject 20: male, 47, UK)

Key words in context

Similarity (5) is a first moment of social identification or non-identification that acts as a gatekeeper for the subject whether to proceed and value the information being presented, as one said: "I'm actually more focused on whether people are like me or not." It acts as heuristic to filter out useful from non-useful information, and people who are like the subject tend to be more trustworthy. Hence when one subject "found this review written about a beach, and a resort on the beach, by a woman who was similar to myself and had a lot of kids, and she was saying, it was such a great place," she booked it. The value of reading the words of an amateur writer is often that this means a social identification, a similarity of views and needs: "Well, these people are more like I am, you know, these amateur travellers" and "I can look out for whether they have similar needs as I do, and it might be more helpful than professional reviewers."

Similarity means being like friends and with a shared understanding of what is important, so even if a reviewer gives good information it may simply not be relevant to the subject: “people who wrote these reviews may have stayed there, but people are not necessarily 28, with a girlfriend, active, so they write about general similar things. But my friends... they know me.” What is important may not include helping each other, although there is a perception that the group can be supportive and the site is seen as being “for travellers like me, who have certain experiences and want to share it.”

Recommendations (42) are also taken to indicate social identification as users are likelier to listen to recommendations from those with similar backgrounds, objectives and interests to them. A recommendation depends on the personality of the individual receiving it or the number of people making it and the value ascribed to those people by the individual. Recommendations are to be tested, not trusted: “They [friends] might come up with a great recommendation but they can’t compare it to other places that might be even nicer,” said one subject. For example, Lonely Planet’s recommendations were challenged because they tend to be “kooky”; AsiaRooms was considered suspect because of a perception that it sells leftover accommodation that has not been booked or is inconveniently located; subjects were wary of travel agents because they recommend only places on which they get commissions; while even friends may not be reliable, for example when: “you know if a friend is not like you and he recommends, you couldn’t possibly follow their recommendation”.

Another marker of social identification was the relative value ascribed to the site, friends and guidebooks. Qu and Lee (2010) suggested that “an online travel community affects members’ lives by acting as a reference group, akin to family and close friends” (p. 1262), and based on this, subjects were asked how much they trusted friends’ recommendations, as the subject would identify with (some) friends. Friends were more valued for recommendations about hotels (63.0%) than they were treated with caution if their interests were dissimilar (18.5%). The assumption seemed to be that friends were similar and therefore trustworthy sources. It included whether recommendation from a guidebook or a friend is the starting point for a TripAdvisor search, and whether the interviewee draws a distinction between those friends whose interests were similar to their own, and those whose interests were not.

Categorical Variable: Values friends more than other sources

Indicative Code: “You have friends who would holiday a certain way, or they know you would do well enough like this. They might say, ‘Oh you would love that, but you might not like...’ or ‘the food wasn’t brilliant, but I think you would love this...’ and they are usually spot on.” (Subject 14: female, 48, UK)

“They have to work together, I think, and a friend’s recommendation would be much more valued to me and sometimes that’s how I do it also. I ask a friend and then I check against TripAdvisor.” (Subject 3: female, 44, Sweden)

Categorical Variable: Values some friends more than others

Indicative Code: "It depends on the friend, but friends are definitely a good source, I trust my friends but also I assign a certain level of... I know their preferences and I know my own preferences, and if they don't align, then I won't look for them for certain recommendations for certain things." (Subject 17: male, 29, USA)

"A great example would be my cousin who stayed with us recently, and she is single and 50 and the noise of children annoys her incessantly. So for her to say, the hotel was noisy and children were everywhere, it's probably that the hotel was very quiet and kids were just normally playing... and it's perfect for us. So I think you need to know the preferences..." (Subject 21: male, 41, India)

Categorical Variable: Values other sources more than friends

Indicative Code: "Talk to friends? I probably trusted the agent more." (Subject 6: female, 38, Singapore)

"Lonely Planet, then Trip Advisor then the friend." (Subject 26: female, 22, Indonesia)

Key word in context

Friends (90) are a valued source of information because they are judged to understand one's needs and interests, and the subject would also know the friend's personality; but they are not the only source: "we use a combination of a few things, like review sites and you know, suggestions from friends." One aspect of a friend's recommendation that was valued is that it is possible to ask for details and

clarifications. Some subjects started with friends' recommendations and then checked them against other sources; others worked the other way round. One was shocked and hurt to discover that a friend rejected her advice after reading a review of the hotel on TripAdvisor: "I've kind of recommended a place to a friend, and she would look and TripAdvisor and say, it didn't get very good reviews. And I thought that would be something that's quite interesting ... because she's my friend, and we get on really well, but she trusted TripAdvisor more than me."

It is rare for TripAdvisor to be more valued than a friend's recommendation, however, but in such cases the subject cited the limitations of the friend's experience that made their recommendations valid but inadequate: "It depends on the friend... I trust my friends but also I assign a certain level of... I know their preferences and I know my own preferences, and if they don't align then I won't look for them for certain recommendations for certain things." Reviewers can be grouped with friends as people who are similar and therefore worth listening to: "the whole purpose is to get the opinions of your peers or friends who are giving you an experience of what it's like to stay there."

Only one subject mentioned the link between TripAdvisor and Facebook, which now automatically shows which friends have posted hotel reviews, making the link between social identification with friends and reviewers more concrete. He was not, however, impressed: "since when did I allow TripAdvisor to login to my Facebook account? I find that extremely creepy, and because of that it brings up all my friends and their choices, and since it's at the top you are forced to read what they say. And

you tend to trust your friends.” Finally, only one subject cited the social proof that his friends’ used TripAdvisor, which made him more likely to trust it by association.

Identification goes beyond the personal, and some subjects saw similarity as a group or community aspect, saying that on the site “travellers look at each other like family of some sort;” and the strength of the site is that it is a platform for people to share to help others like them: “you are providing people with similar interests a way to connect with each other and for them to either corroborate what somebody already thinks or to find reasons why those assumptions may not be correct” and “a community of like-minded people giving advice to each other.” TripAdvisor was identified to some extent as a community of like-minded people and it was common practice for subjects to look for cues such as age, family and reason for travelling as an indicator of how much weight to give a reviewer’s words, answering **RQ2**. The same approach was applied to other information sources, including guidebooks and friends which might be relevant or not, depending on similarity to the subject.

6.5. Primary concept 3: Technological features

RQ3 asked whether users value TripAdvisor *because* it is an apomediary site, and this was operationalised into questions about how subjects felt about reviewers and the general helpfulness of being able to access, search and rank to find value in a mass of authentic, amateur information – a combination of social identification and technological features. Analysis showed 62% of statements on this subject were positive, and half that number were negative (31.1%). The main criticism for

apomediary sites was that it took a long time to look through the information, leading to information overload.

Categorical Variable: Positive about apomediary information site

Indicative Code: “We live in a society where we are trying to benefit each other, you learn from your own mistakes but nowadays you can also learn from others’ mistakes. We have the Internet and social media, and you know if somebody makes a huge mistake and says this hotel is terrible, and you know purely out of there, there is an altruistic sense of altruistic benefit to society, then they go out and they post.” (Subject 16: male, 30, Canada)

“I put a lot of trust in crowdsourcing because it’s like a fair. You could win a thousand dollars if you can guess how many beans are in there, and nobody can guess how many there are. Nobody can get it right, but if you take the average of what everyone said, then that is going to be the closest guess, because as a group, you have an amazing sense of how things are.” (Subject 17: male, 29, USA)

Categorical Variable: Negative about apomediary information source

Indicative Code: “But that’s true for everything... you’ll get an overload of information, as compared to 15 years ago. Now there is an overload and it is up to the individual to be able to filter it all out.” (Subject 10: male, 63, USA)

“What I dislike about it was that it takes time. I don’t like looking for hotels, I don’t like finding tips because it takes forever to figure out which hotels and it’s very

difficult to differentiate the standards of the hotels I find on TripAdvisor.” (Subject 3: female, 44, Sweden)

Categorical Variable: Neutral about intermediary information source

Indicative Code: “It’s what the Internet has given us the ability to do, hasn’t it? It’s allowed all of us to publish.” (Subject 4: female, 41, UK)

“It’s not a pleasure, it’s not a nuisance, it’s part of the procedure, the process of travelling.” (Subject 7: female, 32, Singapore)

Key words in context

TripAdvisor *rates* and *ranks* (32) hotels, based on the reviews given by guests; it is a quick and easy way to ascertain which are the better hotels without reading all the reviews. They can help the user sort out relevant hotels, as in “You can choose to rank them in different ways. You can go lowest to highest, highest to lowest, so you can look at different aspects in your search.” Ratings can also abbreviate the search time: “I will look at the rankings and see which one is good for you, and then I will sift through the reviews,” and “I skim through, just to see who is saying what, what is the average review score like because they have a rating system, with five stars being excellent and one star being avoid at all cost, you know it’s really straightforward,” as well as “After I have selected the location, I look at lodging, ratings, comments and budget of course.” A popular hotel can be appealing: “the rank, that is very important to me. Who wouldn’t want to stay at a high ranking hotel?” even if it is not right at the top: “I’d look at the reviews, and the ranking... generally I wouldn’t choose the top

one... Usually you think there would be lots of people heading for that one... And you'd reckon two or three's going to be less discovered."

One idea is to consider who the reviewers are and where the hotel is, as that can help evaluate the meaning of the ranking figure given: "when you are in a new area, you tend to get inflated ratings. But when you are in an area with symphonies and ballets, you get a more sophisticated crowd and different ratings. So you'd have to calibrate," and "for example if it's five stars, \$80 would be different from five stars, \$400. You would know it's an apple and orange situation."

Ratings can be seen as a benefit ("I like the ability to compare the ratings, prices and to look at what is behind the ratings,") but can also introduce an element of uncertainty as it is not always clear what the basis for such rankings is: "the things that I don't necessarily like is that there is a rating, and I am not sure... it's interesting that some hotels are always rated higher than others... I found for example the restaurants, the ratings seem to have a lot to do with how expensive they were." Nevertheless, ratings and rankings are simply elements that are considered, rather than deciding factors: "they have the ranking system, but your decision is not based on the website alone, like a lot of times it's based on other factors."

Links (13) were generally considered to be a benefit for the user. They offer access to more information that can be taken or not according to choice, as in: "I don't have to go to a contents page, find the number, go to the page, and normally they have links to maps even," and "if you scroll through their application you can see the links to the hotels." Generally, people use links to gather more information from a wider variety

of sources, and they appear to value the potential this gives: “I would look at these places and the comments and if there are links, I would always go and look at them.”

Links were also offered as a marker of credibility – although not of TripAdvisor, but rather for a competitor site: “TripAdvisor, it could just be anyone who claims they have stayed at the hotel, while for Booking.com its actually linked to your payment.”

Another theme linked to apomediary sites was that the writers were amateurs, whose many opinions were aggregated into an overall opinion. As this apomediary site relies on amateur writers, subjects’ impressions of such writers were also gathered; 72% of comments expressed support for the idea of amateurs, while 20% expressed negative opinions.

Categorical Variable: Positive about amateur status of writers

Indicative Code: “I mean, for a professional it might be better because you would get things like the value of the place in more detail, but sometimes they might have other incentives to do so, whereas if you are an amateur, they might give a very honest account, which might be what you are looking for.” (Subject 27: male, 24, Singapore)

“The experts are being paid to write, and they are being fed rather large lovely meals, and given Tiger Beer, so I am not sure I can trust them, while the ordinary person is just doing it for the hell of it, right?” Subject (14: female, 48, UK)

Categorical Variable: Negative about amateur status of writers

Indicative Code: “Well, these people are more like I am, you know these amateur travellers. It isn’t their job to review hotels.” (Subject 21: male, 41, India)

“The thing about the experts is that they have trained themselves to put down things in words, but amateurs may not be able to express themselves well.”

(Subject 23: male, 24, Singapore)

Categorical Variable: Neutral about amateur status of writers

Indicative Code: “That doesn’t bother me at all, because everyone has different opinions and thoughts on something, and everyone has different expectations.”

(Subject 13: female, 44, UK)

“Professionals would usually go into a place with a checklist of things that they are looking for. As for amateurs, they will look at it differently.” (Subject 10: male, 63, USA)

Key word in context

One indicator of the apomediary nature of the site is how subjects thought of the *amateurs* (27) writing. Subjects considered amateur writers to be honest and well-meaning, if occasionally not as competent as a professional. Hence the main criticism of amateurs was that their writing might not be up to the task of accounting for their experiences; and while a professional might be more balanced, an amateur could get carried away after a bad experience and write only negative comments. Overall, though, subjects showed support for the idea of the amateur information source, with

statements such as “the more amateur the better” and “I would trust the amateurs and their reviews more,” as well as specific reasons for trusting them such as “the amateur will tell me that you can walk out onto the street and find five cuisines on the street, while the professional will rate the hotel.” In addition, having large numbers of amateurs, some writing positive reviews, some writing negative reviews, would balance out in the long run to give a true picture: “I think amateurs in large numbers are probably better than the odd hotel reviewer who could get them on a really good day, or a really bad day.” **RQ3** asked whether users trust TripAdvisor *because* it is an apomediary site (as opposed to *in spite of* it). Subjects said that one benefit of the site is that a large number of reviews by amateurs were more valued than a few reviews by professionals, citing either similarity of interests or the law of large numbers that delivered an accurate impression. Amateurs represented their interests better than professionals, and were more likely to have had experiences that would be comparable; as a result, the apomediary nature of the site was the primary reason to trust it.

6.6. Primary concept 4: Self-efficacy

RQ4 asked whether users trusted their own efficacy to get what they wanted from the site, and self-efficacy, which can include relying on one’s own judgment by checking against other sources rather than relying on one source, was a major factor. The term ‘self-efficacy’ was not used in the interviews as it was considered too academic and not apt for the conversational style used.

Over 68% of statements on this issue showed the subjects had a positive attitude towards their personal judgment, against 17% doubting their efficacy using the site. One measure of self-efficacy for this study was if subjects could identify fake reviews; 78% were confident that they could do so and were therefore not too concerned about them, while just 5% said they would be put off the site if they saw an obviously fraudulent review. This topic also included whether the subject has a clear idea of his/her goals, can navigate and use the site successfully, and there were a few statements that they felt positive about technological efficacy on the site (15.0%). The topic also covered whether the subjects used TripAdvisor either as a seal of approval on information found elsewhere or as a starting point to be corroborated against other sources. The implication is that the interviewee trusts his or her own judgment based on comparing several sources more than the judgment offered by a single source.

Categorical Variable: Positive about personal judgment using site

Indicative Code: "I will look in various places, but I will use this to get an idea of places to stay and get some candid comments on how these places are like and the conscious opinion of people who have stayed there." (Subject 9: female, 41, UK)

"Most of the time I pick pretty good accommodation. I think 90% I'm happy with and maybe 100%, and the one time I wasn't happy it was because I trusted this travel agent in Egypt." (Subject 7: female, 32, Singapore)

Categorical Variable: Positive about technical proficiency using site

Indicative Code: “You can choose to rank them in different ways. You can go lowest to highest, highest to lowest, so you can look at different aspects in your search. You can actually look at it from different perspectives if you wish, so that in a way allows you to actually put at the top of search stuff that are more relevant to you.” (Subject 20: male, 47, UK)

“I find that it’s relatively easy navigation on TripAdvisor, easy to find out which one is good.” (18: male, 56, Australia)

Categorical Variable: Neutral about self-efficacy using site

Indicative Code: “What I dislike about it was that it takes time. I don’t like looking for hotels, I don’t like finding tips because it takes forever to figure out which hotels and it’s very difficult to differentiate the standards of the hotels I find on TripAdvisor.” (Subject 3: female, 44, Sweden)

“I probably would be concerned about my opinion not being as good... there is no reason why but I usually don’t have very steadfast opinions either when I go somewhere.” (Subject 20: male, 47, UK)

Key words in context

To investigate the role of self-efficacy among the interviewees, this study considers first the search – gaining information to overcome risk and achieve a goal; followed by comparison – using different sources to gain control over the information and not be swayed by any one source; and finally the decision – synthesising the information into

a choice. While these could be considered simple descriptors of search behaviour, they are considered markers of self-efficacy for this study as they are indicators of an individual's belief that he or she has the skills necessary to complete a certain task (Bandura, 1977, 1982). 'Search' implies an active undertaking to find information that requires confidence in one's own skill; 'compare' implies an active attempt to make sure the data found is accurate, again relying on one's own judgment; while 'decide' implies that the user will reach an outcome with a degree of confidence.

A review of the word *search* (53) reveals that subjects used it in two ways. The first involves less skill and is therefore less to do with self-efficacy. TripAdvisor itself was not sought, but appeared high on the list of sites after a web search: "I tend to click on TripAdvisor, because it comes up at the top... So in the search, I end up not because I wanted to, but I quite often will end up on TripAdvisor because it's at the top of the list." However, this kind of search is also exploratory, and implies the subject has the skills to use a search engine to look for hotels. This kind of search opened up the web: "they got a lot of places they have identified that you can try to search, like give you more ideas"; but also allowed subjects to start the process of identifying what they need: "I would probably just Google, and maybe search 'hotels in Phuket'."

The second involves subjects using search skills to control the information and to search by price, location, style of hotel etc: "I have to start a few basic rules of thumb that define my scope of search from the cumbersome amount of information and it can really condense it." As before, one hallmark of self-efficacy was that information sources were not trusted, while the subject's ability to synthesise different sources

was: “your information search would start there but it doesn’t stop there,” and “even when TripAdvisor or any of these search engines had information, I would go to the site of the hotel to see what the photos are.”

The primary function of the site is to help users *find* (69) a hotel that suits them, and most subjects said that it was effective at doing so: “it’s straightforward, simple, up to date and it is a good additional asset to finding a group of hotels.” They use the site: “to find recommendations for holiday trips,” “to find out about what other people think about the places,” and “to look for hotels and to find out places of interest in the country.” The site is an asset in finding the right place: “I don’t have to sieve through millions of hotels just to find one I want,” and “I don’t have to find the page, I don’t have to go to a contents page, find the number, go to the page, and normally they have links to maps even... They show me and it’s clear.” It is not always so, however: “TripAdvisor, sometimes you got to wade through a lot of stuff to find out what you want to find out... it’s very difficult to differentiate the standards of the hotels I find on TripAdvisor.”

Finding something also brings control, or a reduction of uncertainty, as in: “being able to find a different perspective allows us to make a more informed decision when we want to travel,” and “The search engine is... you don’t have to find here and there,” as well as “being able to find things in my own time is good.” Often it is about revealing something they are searching for, as in: “it’s set up so that if you want something all boutique-y, you can find the boutique-y things,” or “I look at facilities, the quality of

the service provided... mainly anecdotal... I mean these are the kind of information that I find.”

Finding can also indicate the discovery of something new, as in: “the ability to find... it’s like buying wine. If you’re a wine snob, and you buy five or six at a very high price, but if you are experimental, you look for boutique wineries that have not made their name yet, and you find something good.” Finding is a marker of skill and discernment: “Sometimes you go on holiday and you find the real charm.” This can extend to the reviewers as well as the hotels: “I try to get opinions and find out where they are from,” and “I would like to think I can find out which ones are written by competitors.”

Even so, it is not always possible to be sure: “I guess there is no way to find out if a person created a fake account. So there is no real way to check if a review is genuine.” It can be an indicator of success: “I think finding the right accommodation is the key to a good holiday,” and “Usually I am excited with anticipation of what I can find, so therefore it’s like can I get a good deal? Or sometimes it’s like can I find a great hotel that has everything for the family?” Finally, one subject dreamed of an improved site that would simplify the search even further: “It would be nice to put in some data, and it finds you the best hotel based on what you like.”

The subjects *compared* (19) one review against another and against their own experience and their personal goals in order to be not dependent on any one opinion: “Because when you compare that particular person’s comment with other people, then you realise the discrepancy.” This was one of the most consistent points made,

and it places trust in TripAdvisor in an important perspective: Users do not necessarily trust it to give them the information to choose a hotel. Rather it is one of several sources they will turn to. It fits into a wider search context that includes their friends and the media, of which the former reiterates the importance of studying OURS in a social context.

The site may not be trusted, but the subject's information self-reliance skills (i.e. skills that allow them to effectively sift through large quantities of data from many different sources, fit them into existing mental models, reduce them into useable amount and then act on them) are trusted. TripAdvisor also places each hotel in perspective by comparing it with others, so: "I will have a better sense of what this accommodation has for me, the level of comfort if it's close to town, and if it's cheap compared to another place." On a higher level, it was standard for subjects either to use TripAdvisor to compare information with data from other sources; or to explore on TripAdvisor and then move on to the hotel's own website to compare and contrast – but primarily to confirm – their impression of a hotel: "I try to get from as many sources as possible, information about the same place and then I start comparing, and then I make my decision from there," and "you don't only rely on just one website. You will go to other websites and do a comparison." All of these activities require skills that contribute to self-efficacy, and hence were considered good indicators of such.

While the interview data is far from conclusive, it implies that self-efficacy was an important factor in the subject's experience using the site and their level of enjoyment and success. The site empowered them to make decisions, but did not disempower

them by making that decision for them. Answering **RQ4**, most believed they had the skills to use the site to get what they wanted or to add the site to a mix of information sources. They liked to feel in control and one subject pointed out that people who use TripAdvisor are likely to be independent travellers rather than people who prefer a group or package tour. That brings both a desire for control and a certain flexibility, and Eysenbach hypothesised that people who prefer an autonomous, apomediary approach are likely not to have a binary right/wrong approach, but have a more graded mind-set. In other words, they are not necessarily searching for the perfect hotel, only one that is good enough (Eysenbach, 2008). TripAdvisor users *start* with high efficacy when arranging travel.

6.7. Primary concept 5: Trust

RQ5 asked whether interviewees trusted the site over friends and guidebooks, and interviewees were also asked more generally about what they trusted the site to help them achieve, with the aim of seeing both what their goals were on TripAdvisor and what level of trust they had in it, based on the tenor of their responses.

No one indicated wholehearted, unquestioning trust in the site. Even if they were quite trusting, subjects said that they felt they should be more cautious. At best, subjects were likely to trust only certain aspects (44.4%) than to trust it but with reservations (35.3%). The remaining 20% expressed distrust in it. Trust in TripAdvisor was generally for something specific, such as up-to-date-information, prices, range of hotels, aggregation of comments, or to help differentiate among hotels. There was

less evidence that subjects trusted the reviews or the writers, and more often they only showed guarded support for them: “when it comes to reviews, you just can’t trust what people say.” If they did trust reviewers, it was because they saw similarity. Overall, the aggregation of reviews or the number of reviews made the site trustworthy.

Categorical Variable: Trusts certain aspects of the site

Indicative Code: “I trust they could basically aggregate the comments people have for me, so that I don’t have to go to each of these hotel websites to check their amenities and stuff.” (Subject 5: female, 26, Singapore)

“It has information from other travellers and not just from companies, so I guess from personal experience it is more reliable compared to information just from the companies.” (Subject 28: female, 23, Singapore)

Categorical Variable: Trusts certain aspects of the site but with reservations

Indicative Code: “I just take everything with a pinch of salt, so I mean in general I trust what they say, but I don’t think of it as an individual, I just think of it in totality of what everyone says.” (Subject 7: female, 32, Singapore)

“I’m sceptical about it. I won’t say I trust 100% of it, I won’t read like thousands of reviews, but I will read a large number to get a general flavour, bearing in mind some of them may be written by competitors.” (Subject 11: female, 46, UK)

Categorical Variable: Shows distrust in certain aspects of the site

Indicative Code: “After a while after seeing all these sites, and especially the ones that are really negative, I sort of shift into a different mode and think that they are using it to get back at something or, you know, like one incident pissed them off and they are using the site in an unbalanced manner.” (Subject 3: female, 44, Sweden)

“I think the problem with it is that when it comes to reviews, you just can’t trust what people say. Because even if you find a hotel that is really good, like, there will always be people who will complain something that is, like, really? I mean, I just feel like I can only trust about 50% of those I see.” (Subject 7: female, 32, Singapore)

Key words in Context

Using analysis of key words in context, the word *trust* inevitably occurred frequently, and a computer count showed it was used 138 times, making it the 75th most common word.²⁵ Trust in friends, amateurs and people who are similar to the subject was consistent and clear, with frequent comments such as “I trust a friend above

²⁵ Of these, a manual count showed that 137 uses concerned trust in the site or the reviewers. It was unusual for the computer and the manual counts to be so similar. While software offers a quick and easy count of words, it cannot substitute manual processing to gauge the nuances of the way the words are used. For example, a simple count of the word ‘similar’ which may be an indicator of social identification, yielded 11 uses; but when these were examined to see if they did indeed indicate social identification, that number dropped to just 5. The word ‘honest’ appeared 20 times and might be seen as an indicator of trust, but closer examination of the transcripts showed that many of these were interjections such as “in all honesty, I thought” and “to be honest, I thought...” where the interviewee was using the word to back up their own opinions, rather than ascribing it to anyone else. Manual analysis showed 15 uses of the word to imply trust in someone else. This dissertation shows the number of relevant uses of the word.

everything else.” Some trusted reviewers to be honest about their experiences (with the implicit suggestion that this experience may not be transferable: “I trust them... as much as I would trust strangers to tell me if they liked or disliked food”) as well as distrusting that reviewers might just be angry and criticising the hotel or posting a fraudulent review (“usually I would say that I trust them, unless they say things that I think are just out of anger”).

Honesty (15) was often used as a marker of value, that a professional’s writing depends on its honesty, while one writer was dismissed as dishonest and therefore of little value because she did not declare the fact that a hotel gave her a room for free. Honesty is associated with hope (the opposite of doubt), as in “there is this expectation of honesty,” and “hopefully they are able to write their true and honest feelings” which implies an accepted level of doubt when appraising whether someone is being honest.

Credibility (16) is to do with competence, control and authenticity. So if a subject judges that writers are competent to express an opinion, have control over what they write and hence can report an authentic experience, then they are considered more credible: “I certainly would respect the opinion of a first-time traveller with their family, they are hungry, the kids are noisy, there is a huge mess, everyone is crabby, all you want to do is a have a hot bath and clean sheets, and you find there is something amiss at the front desk. It’s more credible.” Credibility is also associated with numbers of people: “I guess by the law of averages it is more credible because there are more people;” but at the same time it comes down to the strength of a

relationship, which makes a friend more credible than a book, for example: “The most credible is trust word of mouth, friends’ recommendations.”

Subjects trusted the site to help them, but only insofar as they trusted themselves to compare it with other sources. The trust was first in themselves, and second in the aggregated authentic reviews of similar travellers. The site was seen as a benefit, but not an uncompromised one. Subjects were grudging in their acceptance of any trustworthiness in the site, using words such as “*I guess*”, “they could *basically aggregate*” and “*I’m sceptical*”. While some celebrated its existence, that celebration was to do with what it allowed them to do and the fact that it was a common good, not because it was an object of trust. It was not clear that there was any link between trust and achievement; the site helped them achieve their goals and they (often grudgingly) respected it for that, but the issue of trust was never evident. It would help them overcome one form of risk – that of choosing a bad hotel through lack of information; but it brought secondary forms of risk – that of being bewildered by the surfeit of information and choosing at random to save time or effort, or of being tricked by fraudulent reviews. The apomediated information helped them trust enough to overcome the first form of risk, but brought with it the second form; no wonder, then, that their trust in the site was cautious.

6.8. Primary concept 6: Behavioural intention

RQ6 asked: What do users hope to achieve after using TripAdvisor? The majority of subjects used the site to help them choose accommodation, and 18 of them

mentioned this as their primary or secondary aim. Eight others wanted to look at destinations more generally, and five identified looking at attractions in a destination as being a motivation for turning to TripAdvisor, for example “I am interested in a few types of things, one being accommodation, two being what kinds of attractions, and three what kind of fun is there” (Subject 11: female, 46, UK). Four wanted to check out flights, three looked for restaurants and places to eat, and three mentioned that their intention was to book a hotel, rather than just to look. Finally, some looked to the site for everything: “I use it to check out destinations that I plan to go to for my holiday. Usually like, what kind of attractions they have at the place? And places where I can eat when I go there? And sometimes, for accommodation as well” (Subject 27: male, 24, Singapore).

Key words in context

The final goal is to choose a hotel and the site helps people *decide* (40): “being able to find a different perspective allows us to make a more informed decision when we want to travel.” The idea of deciding was frequently used to indicate a goal: “maximum I take less than an hour to decide on a hotel... I know what I want, and if I find a place I like I just decide on it and make a reservation.” One benefit of the site is that it empowered subjects to act and gave them to confidence to trust their own judgment: “I will look at what people say, and the environment of the hotel, then I will decide.” In this, it combined goals, trust and self-efficacy, as making comparisons and deciding on balance was a regular theme: “We have to decide on our own, we can just read but maybe take it with a pinch of salt with whatever we read.”

That is not to say that decisions come easy, and the complexity and variety on the site, as well as the uncertainty of what is true and what is fraudulent, caused some subjects to have second thoughts about making a decision – hence the need for trust: “If I see enough, too many people saying it is lousy, but they are not saying why, it already influences my decision, but I still do not know why it is lousy, and then there is that struggle.”

Decision making is related to *choice*, and an end goal is to *choose* (20), and several subjects mentioned that this was a desired outcome: “I usually use it when I need to choose a hotel,” and “I suppose you want to choose the best place possible.” Choice can mean two things: an opening up of opportunities, as in: “So good, I get more choices with TripAdvisor,” and also a closing down of those opportunities, a decision made, as in: “I know she would stay at an adult-only hotel given the choice.” Choice is often seen as a benefit, as in: “this empowers people to do their own research and make their own choices and take more responsibility for it,” and “so good, I get more choices with TripAdvisor.” Choice can be a marker of control, of uncertainty overcome. This can be using the site itself, as in “You can choose to rank them in different ways,” or in deciding on a hotel with relative confidence “does TripAdvisor give you an absolute true set of data points for you to choose a hotel without any fear that it won’t be the perfect one for your particular trip? No. Does any website? No...” Lack of choice can be an indicator of inadequacy: “I find that it doesn’t give you a range of choices, like I find sometimes it’s the same top 10 companies or places,” but

equally it can be something to be sought, which ties in with the desire for simplicity that comes with the site: “I prefer less choice. I think it does get a bit overwhelming.”

Finally, *booking* (41) is presented in terms of a final decision, as in: “Yeah we booked it.” People turn to the site “Because I want to book the accommodation,” and “we’ll look at TripAdvisor, mainly for the comments, and decide where to book our hotel rooms.” The variety of opinions is important in helping users reach this decisive point: “if the same hotel has generally good reviews across these sites then I would book it,” and sharing experience so that they can in a way help people make better decisions when it comes to buying or booking holidays.”

Like choice, booking implies control gained over an uncertain situation; this is not necessarily connected to self-efficacy, and some subjects were happy to let others make decisions for them: “I would be able to book through them, I would be able to show up, have a hotel ready, if I need transport, I would assume that they would have that ready,” and “his wife would book all the hotels for me, and she picks boutique hotels all based on TripAdvisor.” The decision does not have to be positive, and some have rejected hotels because of what they saw on TripAdvisor: “as a result of looking at some of the reviews I have been influenced not to book a hotel.” Nor does the decision have to follow a visit to the site, which can also be used for post-hoc corroboration and validation: “before then we go ahead and confirm the booking with the hotel that we are interested in, we will check it out on TripAdvisor.”

6.9. Notable absences

Research must consider what is not evident as well as what is evident. It was noticeable that none of the interview subjects mentioned the fact that the site is free, unlike guidebooks which cost money. It could be argued that the cost of using TripAdvisor is in time rather than money. Equally, it could be that the cost-free nature of the site was taken for granted, as all peer-review OURS are without charge to the end user, just as contributors are not paid. However, to ignore the lack of financial cost is also to ignore the real cost, as TripAdvisor is a commercial venture, for all its apomediary ideals, and needs income. None of the interview subjects mentioned any awareness that they themselves were effectively being sold to advertisers and hotels; their use of the site that carried them to a buying decision has value for the hotels they ultimately book.

Few of the interview subjects mentioned the idea of accuracy. One said that they expected reviewers to accurately represent their own experience, but this was offered more as a veiled criticism than a benefit; their experience, after all, might not correspond with anyone else's, therefore accuracy or otherwise is not relevant. Yet accuracy has long been considered one of the main antecedents of trust in a message. It is possible that accuracy was subsumed into authenticity; or that accuracy is not important, as the job of the user is to aggregate a series of possibly-inaccurate subjective texts into an objective (or at least personally applicable) whole. The possibility that individual accuracy is not an important element of OURS, based on the wisdom of the crowd approach, is an intriguing area for future research, as in the past

studies have found that accuracy is an important element in developing trust (Ba, 2001; Friedman, Kahn & Howe, 2000; Shankar, Urban & Sultan, 2002; Wang & Emurian, 2005; Yoon, 2002). On TripAdvisor, the volume of data and the technology that sorts it may be more important than any individual piece of information, which has implications both for the reasons people value information and the way information becomes 'accurate' if enough people agree with it, creating a new form of reality (Litvin, Goldsmith & Pan, 2008).

6.10. Summary

The interviews painted a picture of users who enjoyed the benefits of TripAdvisor and (for the most part) even enjoyed the process of searching on it. They valued the way it offered an insight into reviewers' minds, suggested new kinds of accommodation, helped them make a decision and, in one case, offered a vicarious travel experience: "I might not even be going to Paris, I might just go and see what is good to stay at or what is there to see. I just use it for inspiration or armchair travelling." Subjects were occasionally annoyed by fraudulent reviews, however, but were mostly confident that they could identify them by the way they were written, using a length-is-strength heuristic, or looking for detailed reports that bore the hallmarks of authenticity. They used the number of reviews to gain a balanced overview at the same time as sometimes resenting the time it took to do a search. Some were delighted that the site made a holiday less risky; others bemoaned the fact that it took the adventure out of travelling. But above all the site presented likeminded travellers offering opinions

and experiences to help subjects form a confident judgment about a hotel, in combination with other sources such as friends and guide-books, to overcome risk enough to act. It did not, however, necessarily elicit feelings of trust.

Chapter 7 – Discussion and future research

“Communications tools don’t get socially interesting until they get technologically boring... It's when a technology becomes normal, then ubiquitous, and finally so pervasive as to be invisible, that the really profound changes happen.”

Clay Shirkey, *Here Comes Everybody* (2008) p. 105

7.1. Introduction

This study set out to explore the role of trust in an information-rich intermediary OURS such as TripAdvisor. When users venture on to the site, what do they trust it to do for them? Does the volume of information reduce the need for trust, or demand a different form of trust in its place? As OURS represent a new form of mass communication, as well as having a significant effect on commerce both online and offline, it is timely to examine them. To place it in the bigger perspective, Lankes (2008, p. 101) is quoted again: “Society may soon be at this inflection point in terms of how people... identify credible information, abandoning traditional methods for determining credibility that are based on authority and hierarchy for digital tools and new network approaches.” Information self-reliance is the watch-word. This chapter looks at how the two data sets gathered for this study answer these questions and illuminate these issues.

Qualitative and quantitative data are different approaches with different assumptions and different philosophies, so each should be analysed using the techniques best suited to them, and ultimately, “the results of the qualitative analysis of qualitative

data and of the quantitative analysis of quantitative data are then combined at the interpretive level of research, but each data set remains analytically separate from the other” (Sandelowski, 2000, p. 252). Sandelowski (2000, p. 248) offered three forms of mixing methodologies at the technique level: “(a) triangulation, to achieve or ensure corroboration of data, or convergent validation; (b) complementarity to clarify, explain or otherwise more fully elaborate the results of analyses; and (c) development, to guide the use of additional sampling, and data collection.” This research employs the first two of these, and the following chapter will be arranged at a primary level by predictors of trust and of behavioural intention; and within that, at a secondary level by converging data from both studies, and by complementary data that clarifies inconsistencies.

Combining the two data sets brings its own challenges. In practical terms, Sandelowski suggests five ways to combine qualitative and quantitative data sets at the interpretative level: to prioritise, to use them sequentially, concurrently and iteratively, or in a ‘sandwich pattern’. This dissertation employs the second of these, using the quantitative survey data first and then the qualitative interview data to illustrate it. In some cases interview and survey data support each other; in other cases, they reach different conclusions, and the reasons for this are also discussed. This chapter looks first at the relationships between trust and its antecedents; and second at the relationship between trust and its antecedents, and behavioural intentions.

7.2. Antecedents of trust

7.2.i. Antecedent 1: Risk

Respondents showed awareness of risk and gathered information to overcome it, as predicted by uncertainty reduction theory (Berger & Calabrese, 1975). **RQ1** asked what risks people overcome by using the site, and what risks they encounter while they are there. The survey data showed that risk is the main predictive factor of trust (reviewer trust $\beta = -.29$, $p < .001$; site trust $\beta = -.35$, $p < .001$), and shows a strong negative association with trust, predicting trust better than self-efficacy, social identification or an appreciation of the technological features of the site. Users were uncertain when they logged on, supporting **H1a/b** and confirming the idea that risk is a precondition for trust (de Ruyter, Wetzels & Kleijnen, 2001; Tan & Thoen, 2000).

Respondents were aware of the risk of choosing a hotel that is not value for money or will not satisfy them. They saw travel itself as risky, and choosing a hotel as risky, too. The survey respondents and the interview subjects agreed that the risk of TripAdvisor was less than the risk it overcame – otherwise there would be no reason to turn to the site. Risk was strongly negatively associated with site trust ($\beta = -.35$, $p < .001$) and reviewer trust ($\beta = -.29$, $p < .001$). This suggests that trust is indeed a vital element when dealing with risk (Mudambi & Schuff, 2010); although it could also indicate that individuals with higher levels of trust are more inclined to take greater risks (Meyer, Davis & Schoorman, 1995).

Interview subjects were also aware that using the site brought its own risks. One is that they cannot identify fake reviews, which creates risk because a fake could direct

them towards the wrong hotel. One anomaly between survey and interview data was that survey respondents were *not* confident that they could distinguish between real and fake reviews, and this received the least support of the nine items on the self-efficacy scale ($M = 6.47$, $SD = 2.20$). This found only little support among the interview subjects, who made statements such as “I heard that they were fakes? Would I know? How would I know?” (Subject 14, female, 48, UK) or “I guess there is no way to find out if a person created a fake account. So there is no real way to check if a review is genuine” (Subject 27, male, 24, Singapore). Instead, more interview subjects assumed there *would* be fake reviews, as in “I’m sure there are some fake ones there” (Subject 21, male, 41, India). Some thought that they would be able to identify a fraudulent review, often citing the detailed-information-as-truth heuristic, as in “The real ones have a lot of detail, like ‘we arrived late at night, Jenny was at the front desk, he was very nice to us, the first room sort of had a leaking air-conditioner, so we got moved to another place...’ The fake ones are going to say, ‘we arrived, it was great. The room was perfect. Everything they did was great.’” (Subject 2, male, 42, USA). This anomaly between data sets could be because interviewees are more keen to show their efficacy in a face-to-face interview, in which they want to show themselves to best advantage; with a survey they do not face this.

Equally, the lack of support for the survey statement “I can distinguish between honest and deceptive reviews” may indicate that it is simply not an important issue on an apomedary site. This received some support from the interview data, where some believed it is a numbers game in which the honest outweigh the fraudulent: “I guess

by the law of averages it is more credible because there are more people contributing to it" (Subject 12, male, 44, UK); and they can spot the fakes anyway, so this is not much of a risk: "for the good ones, even if you get three out of five that are really good ones, chances are they are not all fake" (Subject 16, male, 30, Canada); and that honest reviews would outweigh the fraudulent: "that's not sustainable for long, because if you put things like "this place is gorgeous", three or four people go and it's not gorgeous at all and they feel they've been duped, they will then post negative reviews that will weigh that out and it will slide down" (Subject 1, female, 48, UK).

To illustrate the risks that are so prominent in the survey data, interview subjects said that on TripAdvisor the problems are identifying fakes, the risk of being taken in, and the issue of too much information. Old reviews made it hard to know about a hotel, as do a paucity of reviews: "It only becomes difficult if the hotel has not been reviewed recently, and there's only three reviews, then that's really hard. Let's say one is fake and it's gushy, one is mediocre, and one is good, then what do you do?" (Subject 2, male, 42, USA). A wide variety of comments can be a problem as it is time-consuming to sift through them all: "What I dislike about it was that it takes time... it takes forever to figure out which hotels and it's very difficult to differentiate the standards of the hotels I find on TripAdvisor" (Subject 3, female, 44, Sweden) and "when I go to a hotel that is reviewed by like, several hundreds of thousands of people, it can get quite overwhelming" (Subject 6, female, 38, Singapore).²⁶

²⁶ Subjects spent anything between five to 10 minutes, and three to four hours on the site.

In the survey, risk also showed a moderate but significant correlation with technological features ($r = -.40, p < .01$), self-efficacy ($r = -.35, p < .01$) and social identification ($r = -.28, p < .01$), which suggests that all of these may also be used to overcome risk. To illustrate this, one interview subject said that they had faith in technology that the site itself would remove the fakes, as in “you know if the web developers were able to weed out the fakes and guarantee that all reviews were from legitimate customers” (Subject 16, male, 30, Canada), and “I’ve read certain ones that were possibly false, in its early days. But when I was first using it I was more skeptical. But I’ve since become more trusting” (Subject 12, male, 44, UK).

Self-efficacy was a common trope among the interview subjects as a way of dealing with doubt and risk, as in “there is some kind of risk in believing whatever kind of reviews online, but, yes, I feel that I should be able to discern the comments and the pictures” (Subject 5, female, 26, Singapore) and “I read through I don’t know how many comments and I can keep reading the comments. I find one place, compare it with another, compare it again... so I just spend a lot of time there, hanging out, gathering as much as information as possible, and then trying to sort out which parts of it is relevant, trustworthy and if a really good review, I look for signs of authenticity” (Subject 3, female, 44, Sweden).

Finally, social identification was a way of overcoming risk, as in “I can look out for whether they have similar needs as I do, and it might be more helpful than professional reviewers” (Subject 10, male, 63, USA). This is examined in greater detail later in this chapter.

And yet despite the prevalence of risk as a factor in the survey data, it did *not* appear to be a priority concern for the interview subjects. Instead, comments about faith in their own judgment far outweighed comments on fear of risk. This difference between the interview subjects who felt they could spot fakes and hence did not see them as a significant risk, as opposed to the survey respondents who were more aware of risks, may be caused by three things. First, in an interview individuals are likely to want to present themselves to best advantage, as masters of their own destiny and as a result risk and uncertainty was under-reported while self-efficacy was over-reported. Second, the survey specifically asked about risks travelling, while the interviews did not, which might account for the discrepancy in responses. Third, it is likely that users of the site turn a blind eye to fraudulent reviews to avoid the cognitive dissonance that in order to gain the benefits of the site they must downplay the associated concerns. Another aspect of the self-efficacy that counters risk is that of experience, and studies have concluded that newer users rely more on trust while more experienced users have less need to do so will turn to the technological aspect of PEOU when making a decision to transact, and “the importance of trust decreases with experience” (Gefen, Benbasat & Pavlou, 2008, p. 277).

7.2.ii. Antecedent 2: Social identification

RQ2 asked if users trusted people more if they were similar. The survey showed social identification was associated most strongly with reviewer trust ($\beta = .36$, $p < .001$), which might be expected; and the theme of social similarity was also very common among interview subjects. Both survey and interviews offered support for **H2a** that

social identification would predict both reviewer trust and site trust, concurring with earlier research that has shown individuals refer to similar others to gain an idea of what to think and do (Deutsch & Gerrard 1955) and find similar others more trustworthy (Cox, Burgess, Sellito & Buultjens, 2009; Levin, Whitener & Cross, 2006; Lim, Sia, Lee & Benbasat, 2006; Soo & Hilligoss, 2008).

Interviews also gave an idea of how social similarity was connected with reviewer trust. Subjects used social identification as a way of knowing whose opinions to value. In the survey, similarity was most to do with sharing the same objectives ($M = 3.45$, $SD = .68$) and relevance associated with similarity ($M = 3.43$, $SD = .86$), which supports the earlier literature that social identification may be employed to reduce uncertainty (Hogg & Grieve, 1999). In the interviews the focus was also often on similarity, as in “I’m looking for people who at this stage are looking for things generally similar to me” (Subject 1, female, 48, UK) and “For instance, the category is a family, I would think, ‘that’s me!’ It might not suit a couple, but it would suit a family... and they would like it because it is well suited for them” (Subject 22, female, 44, Australia).

However, two subjects also said they were put off by people who were dissimilar: “Well maybe like Bobby Linden from Birmingham or something... I would think maybe they are looking for something different from me” (Subject 14, female, 48, UK); and “When you look at somebody and they look like new Russian money I assume that they want to do one thing... I make assumptions about whether it’s somebody I think is reliable or who will see things how I do” (Subject 1, female, 48, UK). Thus interview subjects said that they want reviews by people like them and they find reviews more

useful if they are by people with similar backgrounds and interests. They judge people on socio-economic grounds, nationalities, status, age, gender and wealth, as well as interests. This corroborates the strong effect of social identification in generating reviewer trust which was observed in the survey data.

Interview subjects also drew a distinction between amateurs and professional travel writers. Each was to be trusted sometimes and not trusted at other times: amateurs can be representatives of the common man: “if you are an amateur, they might give a very honest account, which might be what you are looking for” (Subject 27, male, 24, Singapore) and “It’s fine because I am an amateur myself, and if they are looking for the same things as I am, nice ambience, comfortable bed, nice service, you don’t need an expert to tell you about those things. What a professional might find annoying might be what I am exactly looking for. I don’t necessarily want four-star polished service, perhaps I might like some quirkiness” (Subject 11, female, 46, UK).

Equally amateurs can be incompetent or have unrealistic expectations: “when I read the reviews and when they have ridiculous expectations then I would be like, okay, this person has not travelled” (Subject 7, female, 32, Singapore), and “the fact that its amateurs... the only problem I would have is that I may not understand your review properly, it may not be as well written” (Subject 8, female, 26, Singapore).²⁷ Meanwhile, professionals can be valued, as in “the professionals who have been backpacking for Lonely Planet for like 15 years know what Lonely Planet is looking for,

²⁷ This subject was a professional journalist, who might be expected to be more critical of the writing skills of amateurs.

and what is considered a cool hostel” (Subject 15, male, 32, USA); or they can be corrupt, as in “I always get a little suspicious when people are paid to do something, even though they claim to be totally objective” (Subject 6, female, 38, Singapore); and “if the professionals are paid professionals that’s a problem for me. When there’s money involved, things inevitably change” (Subject 8, female, 26, Singapore).

The implication is that social identification is an essential part of the Web 2.0 experience, and advances the idea that online trust studies should incorporate social context. There is a limit to this, however, and social identification appears to occur on a personal level: while a few users saw TripAdvisor as a community of likeminded people, most did not particularly feel a sense of community with the site.

At a secondary level of analysis, reviewer trust was expressed with three dimensions of trustworthiness: integrity, benevolence and competence (Chen & Dhillon, 2003; McKnight & Chervany, 2001). Of these, social identification was most strongly associated in the survey with benevolence, and the words ‘well meaning’ ‘good intentions’ and ‘my interests at heart’ were markers of this dimension. None of these words appeared among the interviewees’ comments; yet a few subjects did show an awareness that the reviewers meant well, for the most part, and this was either celebrated, as in: “I just think that is a good way to live your life! Well done to these people” (Subject 13, female, 44, UK), or else it was balanced with awareness that not everyone’s motive for posting a review was generous: “some people may go in and try to be nasty about the place because they’ve got a vendetta or some reason. But most people are just being candid and want to share” (Subject 9, female, 41, UK).

In the survey, competence was marked by reviewers being accurate, competent and knowledgeable. Of these, the interview subjects used the word 'accurate' more to refer to the site itself than to the reviewers; the word competent was not used at all; while 'knowledge' was used with reference to the interview subject, a generalised pool of wisdom aggregated online, and only once to a reviewer. While competence was significant for the survey, it seemed less so in the interviews. This may be because the survey asked specific questions concerning competence; and also because the interviewees were more concerned with their own skill at identifying what they valued to build their own knowledge than they were with the knowledge they found on the page. At the same time, they appeared to associate competence more with similarity, so that if someone was socially similar, they might be judged as being more competent. Finally, three words from the survey associated with reviewer integrity were 'reliability', 'honesty' and 'sincerity'. The interviewees applied 'reliable' more to the site itself than to the reviewers; 'honest' more to the reviewers and themselves than to the site; and 'sincere' more to people than the site. So in terms of integrity the site is seen as more reliable, while the people are honest and sincere.

An associated question, **RQ5** asked if users trusted TripAdvisor as much as friends and guidebooks. Some interview subjects said they thought of online travel communities as similar to family or friends. The interviews showed that users trusted friends more than reviewers because there was a longer history of trustworthiness, provided that the friend's travel interests, attitudes and objectives were similar, as in "friends tend to be like you, or you know if a friend is not like you and he recommends you couldn't

possibly follow their recommendation because you know them quite well and you know what they like” (Subject 1, female, 48, UK). Interview subjects considered friends to be a more reliable (if limited) source than TripAdvisor. They made the point that even if a friend did not have an encyclopaedic knowledge of hotels, they knew *them* and would therefore recommend a suitable hotel if they knew of one. With this in mind, it is significant that TripAdvisor has a tie-in with Facebook, leveraging on the ‘friend effect’ to gain trust by association. This also suggests that information self-reliance is not constant: sometimes people were happy to search through the reviews and decide for themselves; at other times they were happy to take a friend’s recommendation. An area for future research would be to establish when an individual chooses each of these options.

Giving some support to Hogg’s (2000) ideas that people reduce uncertainty by assigning themselves (and others) to a prototypical group with a shared identity, interview subjects suggested that the site connects types of likeminded people: “you are providing people with similar interests a way to connect with each other and for them to either corroborate what somebody already thinks or to find reasons why those assumptions may not be correct” (Subject 24, male, 47, UK).

In the interviews, social identification was mentioned more often than technological features. This may be because using technology (rankings, searching by price and star rating) to reduce the data to a manageable quantity is not new and therefore less worthy of comment, while the social side of peer reviews online is new and more engaging, as in Shirkey’s comment at the beginning of this chapter. In the survey, on

the other hand, they showed similar weight in generating site trust, probably because each had a set of questions devoted to it, yielding a more balanced viewpoint. Technological aspects such as PEOU and the design of the site also contributed to trust, consistent with earlier studies (Cheskin/Sapient, 1999; Belanger, Hiller & Smith, 2002), as users valued the ranking and aggregation aspects of the site and found it easy to get information there.

7.2.iii. Antecedent 3: Technological features

RQ3 asked whether users trust the site *because* it is an apomediary site which uses technology to aggregate many reviews and reduce them to a usable number. This was certainly supported by the survey data, which found broad support for this idea, with 74.4% either agreeing or strongly agreeing with the statement that “Aggregating the reviews into rankings makes it easier to choose a hotel” ($M=3.89$, $SD = .77$). This was supported by interview subjects who said: “You can choose to rank them in different ways. You can go lowest to highest, highest to lowest, so you can look at different aspects in your search” (Subject 20, male, 47, UK) and “it’s easy to put in information and see the rankings and maps” (Subject 14, female, 48, UK). However, one also showed vague mistrust of the rankings, without offering specific reasons: “they have this ranking system where they rank like the places, but I find that the ranking system is not very reliable, because based on my other sources it is not very good” (Subject 25, female, 22, Singapore).

The interviews give a clearer idea of how and why aggregation helps the user. Rankings assign each hotel a comparative position against others in the same location,

which is seen as a benefit: “I would firstly look at the budget or the number of stars and what they say... and the rank, that is very important to me? Who wouldn’t want to stay at a high ranking hotel?” (Subject 8, female, 26, Singapore). Ratings, on the other hand, give each hotel a mark out of five. Both are a benefit in terms of speed, of reducing the number of options to a more manageable level: “they categorise it into five stars etc. So I shortlist from there” (Subject 6, female, 38, Singapore) and “I basically skim through, just to see who is saying what, what is the average review score like because they have a rating system, with five stars being excellent and one star being avoid at all cost, you know it’s really straightforward” (Subject 24, male, 47, UK).

Others did the aggregation themselves, perhaps not trusting the simple ranking given by the site: “I only read about 10 reviews, the high ones and what’s important to them, couple of low ones and what was wrong with the hotel” (Subject 10, male, 63, USA) and “So if you have 10 comments, and seven say that it is good, then you can take their word for it and believe that it is reasonably good” (Subject 19, male, 37, Singapore). Either way, the power of numbers, of taking the lead from the crowd, was a significant factor in why users trusted the site, concurring with earlier literature (Cialdini & Goldstein, 2004), as in “Nobody can get it right, but if you take the average of what everyone said, then that is going to be the closest guess, because as a group, you have an amazing sense of how things are” (Subject 17, male, 29, USA).

However, TripAdvisor ranking and rating alone cannot tell the whole story, and the interviewees gave insights into how they impute meaning into these raw numbers:

“when you are in an area with symphonies and ballets, you get a more sophisticated crowd and different ratings. So you’d have to calibrate” (Subject 10, male, 63, USA) and “the things that I don’t necessarily like is that there is a rating, and I am not sure... I found for example the restaurants, the ratings seem to have a lot to do with how expensive they were” (Subject 21, male, 41, India). As a result, they also see the technological features in terms of their own skill in using them, which is corroborated by the survey data which showed a strong significant correlation between self-efficacy and appreciation of the site’s technological features ($r = .50, p < .01$). Again, the interview data illustrates this point: “I suppose I make up my own judgment. But I will definitely look at the rankings, that’s for sure” (Subject 14, female, 48, UK).

In keeping with TAM (Davis, 1986), the survey showed PEOU was a significant element of site use with 79% of respondents agreeing or agreeing strongly with both the statement that “on the site everything is easy to understand” ($M = 3.85, SD = .63$), and “I can find information easily on the site” ($M = 3.83, SD = .70$). The interview subjects also often saw the technological features in terms of PEOU: “I like the structure, the design basically. It’s easy to navigate” (Subject 30, 24, male, Singapore). This also coincides with navigability being a key determinant of trust in a website (Cheskin/Sapient, 1999), which is further supported by the interview data: “It’s quite easy to navigate around. It puts hotels in different types, so you can see whether you would want five-star, whether you want bed and breakfast...” (Subject 1, female, 48, UK).

Other technological benefits which were not included in the survey were, however, mentioned by the interview subjects. The site has an app which was cited as being convenient for its portability and ease of access: "So for the app, it's better because I can look anytime I want, it takes me five minutes to look through myself, I can take the time to look myself. The independence is a plus point for me" (Subject 8, female, 26, Singapore). Finally, TripAdvisor can also offer up-to-date information, as described by Bart, Shankar, Sultan and Urban (2005). The survey found 73.1% either agreed or strongly agreed with the statement that "Regular updates mean the content is fresh" ($M = 3.79$, $SD = .65$). This was supported by the interview data, as in "I liked that it had up-to-date reviews" (Subject 13, female, 44, UK) and "I think one of its strengths is that it is current information, so you know how long ago the reviews were made" (Subject 20, male, 47, UK).

At a secondary level of analysis, site trust was expressed with three dimensions of trustworthiness: integrity, benevolence and competence (Chen & Dhillon, 2003; McKnight & Chervany, 2001). For site trust, technological features were most strongly associated with competence, followed by benevolence and then integrity. For competence, the key words in the survey were 'competent', 'knowledge' and 'service'. For benevolence, the key words were 'good intentions', 'customer's interests' and 'well-meaning'. And for integrity, the key words in the survey were 'sincere', 'integrity' and 'best judgment'. However, none of these words were used by the interview subjects to describe the site; they were all used only with reference to the individuals writing on the site, the subject him or herself, or the hotels. This suggests that the

technological features are not given human characteristics, which raises questions about how effective it is to use words such as competence and benevolence in relation to technology.

Grabner-Kräuter, Kaluscha and Fladnitzer (2006) proposed that both humans and technology can show trustworthiness, which was supported by the survey data but not by the interviews. Riegelsburger, Sasse and McCarthy (2003) proposed that, over time, trust in a technology lessens as it becomes the norm, and conforms to 'situational normality'; they see a site or a computer as an autonomous being, rather than as a conduit for (human) autonomous beings. This received some support from the interview data, where one subject seemed to equate a site with a person: "I go on the site and find things, and I trust that I can find my way through, but that said if there was a particular website... where it was slow or hard to navigate through I would probably go to *somebody* else" (Subject 18, male, 56, Australia, *my italics*). This blurring between technological and social on TripAdvisor has led to the idea of an apomediary effect.

7.2.iv. Apomediary effect

As an antecedent of site trust, technological features were significant ($\beta = .22, p < .01$) while social identification was less so ($\beta = .16, p < .01$). This could imply that social identification is subordinate to technological features in engendering trust in the site as a whole. This is supported by the data showing that for reviewer trust, technological features were non-significant and only social identification played a part. This paints a picture of social identification leading to reviewer trust, which is

subsidiary to site trust which is in turn predicted by technological features and, to a lesser extent, social features. This forms the basis of a proposed 'apomediary effect'.

Subjects felt positive about TripAdvisor as an apomediary site, where many amateur reviews are aggregated, they can both search and limit what they are looking for. They like the way people help each other, contributing for others to take from to create a shared resource: "I think it's absolutely brilliant and a new way of using the Internet for the common good" (Subject 12, male, 44, UK) and "Social media has allowed people to have conversations which were over the garden fence and coffee shops now on a world stage... the power of the platforms is huge, and we are still trying to get to grips with it" (Subject 21, male, 41, India). But it also (although less often) leads to information overload: "it takes forever to figure out which hotels and it's very difficult to differentiate the standards of the hotels I find on TripAdvisor. So I find it really difficult to... I mean, the stars don't really tell you anything, and so you have to go in and look at the comments" (Subject 3, female, 44, Sweden).

The way that social identification and technological features contribute to trust, decision making and behavioural intention is not clear-cut. On one hand, risk was equally associated with both social and technological, and trust in the site came equally from both. And in both forms of trust, either social identification alone or social identification combined with technological features predicted similar levels of variance. However, there is an imbalance: for reviewer trust, this variance was accounted for entirely by social identification ($\beta = .36, p < .001$); while for site trust, it was shared between social identification ($\beta = .16, p < .01$) and technological features

($\beta = .22$, $p < .01$). This is contrary to earlier findings in which each form of trust influenced the other equally, and demands further enquiry as it suggests an unequal relationship where reviewer trust contributes to site trust more than the other way round.

This study proposes that social identification and technological features can combine on an information-rich OURS on an apomediary site so that “Electronic networks make it easier to rely on the collective to assess information” (Flanagin & Metzger, 2008, p. 17). Technology allows for the large number of reviews to be published and aggregated, and while users did not necessarily trust individual reviews, the large number of them counteracted their concerns. This is the essence of the ‘wisdom of the crowd’ (Surowiecki, 2004), in that a large number of potentially inaccurate statements can be aggregated into a single statement that is accurate enough to overcome risk and inspire action. Even if users did not value each individual review (social), they valued the numbers of them (technological aggregation), and would compare reviews against each other and against their own personal experience (self-efficacy), to test for their relevance. This answered **RQ3** which asked whether users value TripAdvisor *because* it is an apomediary site. This study suggests that the objectivity of the expert has been superseded by the massed subjectivity of the crowd, which is transmuted into objectivity by the user using social and technological means. This might be considered a new form of literacy demanded by OURS – a combination of self-efficacy or skill with social identification and technology.

It is proposed that when both variables contribute at a similar level to the dependent variable, then an apomediary effect is most visible; if their contribution is imbalanced, there is no apomediary effect, but rather two variables influencing at different levels. Thus an apomediary effect was observed on site trust between social identification ($\beta = .16, p < .05$) and technological features ($\beta = .22, p < .05$); but not on reviewer trust where social identification was stronger ($\beta = .36, p < .001$) and technological features were non-significant (Tables 8a/b). This may be expected: as the site's *raison d'être* is to combine these two variables, both influence trust in the site. Equally, social identification has a long pedigree in the offline world that may transfer swiftly and effectively to the online world, and does not require the technological side that constitutes half the apomediary effect. Reviewer trust is less requiring of an apomediary effect because it is accounted for primarily by the social, while site trust demands it more as the site itself combines both social and technological in a way that reviewer trust does not.

For behavioural intention, an apomediary effect between social identification ($\beta = .18, p < .01$) and technological features ($\beta = .19, p < .01$) was observed on intention to recommend to a friend; and between social identification ($\beta = .20, p < .01$) and technological features ($\beta = .15, p < .05$) on intention to book (Tables 11a/b/c). This latter could reasonably be expected to be influenced by an apomediary effect as choice of hotel would be influenced by similarity to reviewers as much as by the technological power to compare and contrast many hotels. Intention to recommend

to a friend could involve an apomediary effect as it involves both social similarity and offering a source of pragmatic technological help.

While this study does not offer conclusive evidence for such an apomediary effect, it combines complementary data which suggests that this might be a fruitful area for research. In an analysis of mixed-method research Bryman (2006, pp. 110-111) investigated researchers' motivations for such kinds of study. One proposal was that "qualitative data may explain some relationships uncovered through an analysis of survey data" and this may apply here. Bryman also suggested that different research methods could complement each other so that one gives elaboration, clarification or illustration of the other, as is the case here. The quantitative study hints at an apomediary effect and the elements that constitute it are illustrated by the qualitative interview data. For example, these three comments by interviewees indicate activities that include technical features (search and rankings), social identification, and moving from there to a general appreciation of apomediation:

"You get the results you want, and then you can arrange it according to price or location or stars... for me, that's convenient." (Subject 5, female, 26, Singapore)

"I've gone to places where people have said it wasn't particularly their sort of thing and try to read between the lines and try to see if these people are our sort of people or not, and whether we're following the same kind of ideas of what we want in a holiday." (Subject 4, female, 41, UK)

“We live in a society where we are trying to benefit each other, you learn from your own mistakes but nowadays you can also learn from others’ mistakes... there is an altruistic sense of altruistic benefit to society.” (Subject 16, male, 30, Canada)

It is hoped that these together, while not offering unequivocal evidence of such an effect, might be enough to indicate that such an effect may be present and to prompt further research.

7.2.v. Antecedent 4: Self-efficacy

RQ4 asked whether users trust their own efficacy to get what they want from TripAdvisor. The survey showed that self-efficacy had a statistically significant association with site trust ($\beta = .15, p < .01$). However, self-efficacy showed no statistically significant association with reviewer trust even though the interview subjects did show considerable self-efficacy in assessing the reviewers. This supported **H3a**, and is perhaps to be expected, as the measurements for self-efficacy were more technological than social (Marakas, Yi & Johnson, 1998). This implies that had the survey had more social measures of social self-efficacy, it might have been a more significant factor in the survey data.

It also raises the question of what users *do* that engages their self-efficacy. One indicator which was a common topic in the interviews was that the user compared information gleaned from the site against other sources. In other words they trusted their own skill to gather data and analyse it, more than trusting someone else to provide information. Interview subjects routinely compared TripAdvisor against other

sources, which included other sites, friends and the media: “I am not using it by itself, I am cross-referencing it with any other sources of information that I can get” (Subject 9, female, 41, UK), “I wouldn’t only look at it, I want to do a cross-reference and I want to look at the hotel’s website and I might check like The Lonely Planet or something else or ask friends before I feel totally confident” (Subject 1, female, 48, UK), “I ask a friend and then I check against TripAdvisor” (Subject 3, female, 44, Sweden), and “usually you have to use a combination of a few things, like review sites and you know, suggestions from friends” (Subject 7, female, 32, Singapore). One marker of high-efficacy was if the site caused problems, it was seen as a weakness in the site rather than a lack of personal efficacy: “One thing I dislike is it’s difficult to link through. If I see a hotel and like it, it’s difficult to link through from it. I find that a bit clunky” (Subject 9, female, 41, UK).

They also hedged their bets to overcome vulnerability which included the possibility of not getting the best deal: “I don’t only use TripAdvisor. I would narrow it down to three or four places, then I will start using the booking sites. I usually don’t use TripAdvisor to book, I would use two or three... Agoda, Hotels.com and AsiaRooms. So I would bring those open in three separate windows and then I would try to find the hotel’s original sites. So then I would have four sites, and then I would see who’s got a deal, which one I’m going to get the special deal, which ones has the photos, which ones also has other reviews” (Subject 2, male, 42, USA).

Interviewees also spoke of how their trust in the site was based on its community features: “a lot of these places on the Internet, and search engines... I think they

would provide a platform, and they want everyone else to provide a face to it, and also to provide to provide the content... I find that a lot of them, there is a lot of facelessness, and it's up to the people who are using these platforms to create a face for it" (Subject 18, male, 56, Australia) and "I usually use the stars system as a good starting point, which I assume is based on an honest and involved community" (Subject 17, male, 29, USA).

Experience contributes to self-efficacy (Bandura, 1985) and the interview subjects said that time and practice helped them use the site: "for me to feel like I can get over the distrust I have for this site, I need to spend a lot of time hanging out there" (Subject 3, female, 44, Sweden), and "if you do it a number of times, you'd get better at picking the right place" (Subject 2, male, 42, USA). They also found pleasure in self-efficacy that reinforced itself, creating a benevolent circle: "It's a pleasurable experience, and yes at the end of the day you have to trust your intuition, get a general flavour" (Subject 11, female, 46, UK), and "I do feel happy when I pick the right hotel. When I arrive at the place and I know it's the right one then yes I feel like it's worth it, I spent all this time picking the right place to stay..." (Subject 7, female, 32, Singaporean).

At the secondary level of analysis of the dimensions of trustworthiness, self-efficacy is associated with users judging the benevolence of reviewers ($\beta = .18, p < .01$), but not their integrity or competence; and the integrity of the site ($\beta = .20, p < .01$) but not its benevolence or competence. The first may be because the dimensions of benevolence were expressed in terms of *expectations* about the reviewers, while the other dimensions were expressed in terms of observation; perhaps expectation of others'

intentions and behaviour is associated with personal effectiveness. The interview subjects offered some indications of how they viewed reviewers' benevolence (having good intentions and a well-meaning attitude) as in "they feel that they can contribute to and make a contribution. I think generally people are friendly about that... people want to help other people I think" (Subject 2, male, 42, USA) and "maybe that's where the benevolence can come in actually. Where people want to share a good experience" (Subject 4, female, 41, UK).

Yet there was also doubt about reviewers' motivations: "For some people they feel that they have the obligation to share their experience so that other people won't be victimised as well, and I also see that people have good established relationships with hotels that they have gone to" (Subject 5, female, 26, Singapore) and "when I initially start reading, I do assume that everyone is authentic, everyone wants to... but then I start thinking, who are these people who spend time doing this? Why would you do this?" (Subject 3, female, 44, Sweden). Lack of benevolence was also given as a reason not to trust a reviewer: "Some people would have a really bad experience, and they would just try to hurt the hotel as much as possible in their review, and you can see that" (Subject 2, male, 42, USA). Self-efficacy is also involved as the user needs to identify the reviewer's motivation for writing in order to know how much to trust: "I guess some people may go in and try to be nasty about the place because they've got a vendetta or some reason. But most people are just being candid and want to share" (Subject 9, female, 41, UK).

However, expectations for benevolence of the site did not show any association with self-efficacy, which may imply that high-efficacy respondents expected benevolence from reviewers but not from the site itself, and drew a distinction between a person's ability to be benevolent and a site's ability to do so. Site integrity was also expressed in terms of the respondent's *belief* about integrity, rather than integrity as a statement of fact; this may again have led to high-efficacy respondents showing association with site integrity as an indicator of their own confidence in the site, rather than any intrinsic integrity. The interview subjects offered some indications of how they viewed site's integrity (being sincere in helping, and serving with its best judgment) as in "it is very helpful" and "it might be more helpful than professional reviewers" (Subject 10, male, 63, USA). Self-efficacy was not associated with competence of another party; this implies that competence is external while efficacy is internal, and the two are not dependent on each other.

7.3. Relationship between trust, its antecedents, and behavioural intentions

While it was assumed that users accessed the site to gather information to overcome risk and uncertainty in order to make a decision, it is likely that users themselves did not see it in such terms. Hence **RQ6** asked the more open question of what users employ TripAdvisor to help them achieve. Consistent with the literature which states that people trust a person, process or system to *do* something (Green, 2007), this study provides empirical support for the idea that users had specific goals in mind and TripAdvisor helped them achieve those.

The survey and interview data showed that they trusted the site to give them a choice, good prices and to help them select a hotel, and they were happy with hotels they had chosen using the site. This implies that, generally, people go to the site with a goal and they trust it will help them achieve that goal, even if they do not trust every review. They accessed the site looking for information on a destination, a resort, an attraction, a list of the top 10 attractions in a destination or the top 10 cities to visit, or an airline or a tour operator.

“I usually use it when I need to choose a hotel, especially when I am not a on a package tour” (Subject 5, female, 26, Singapore)

“Primarily to scope out hotels, and to figure out which one is going to be good... I’ve always wanted to get the best place for the cheapest price. So I’m usually winnowing it out. I’m going above the dirt-cheap bottom ones and I’m going below the five-star expensive ones. So there’s usually a happy medium somewhere that’s not too expensive, but is just right, then that’s good” (Subject 2, male, 42, USA).

“For my travel destination, as well as for my hotel booking” (Subject 6, female, 38, Singapore)

“I don’t usually use it for restaurants or anything else, usually just the hotel” (Subject 7, female, 32, Singapore)

“I am interested in a few types of things, one being accommodation, two being what kinds of attractions, and three what kind of fun is there” (Subject 11, female, 46, UK)

“I only use it for the hotels” (Subject 12, male, 44, UK).

“Predominantly flights... I don’t really use it for accommodation, usually I use another website called agoda.com, I use that for my hotels and I use TripAdvisor to check on prices” (Subject 16, male, 30, Canadian)

Information represented choice, and control over their travel. Sometimes interview subjects had time to consider every hotel in a destination, sometimes they wanted to ‘satisfice’ and get a good enough place to stay, concurring with Eysenbach (2008) who suggested there is no binary right or wrong solution for such independent-minded people. Either way, the aim was to gather information to gain control, overcome risk and uncertainty so they could decide with confidence.

7.3.i. Antecedent 1: Risk

Risk was still a significant (negative) predictive variable for the intention to book a hotel ($\beta = -.26, p < .001$), and for the intention to compare it against other sources ($\beta = -.24, p < .001$). This is comparable to the level of risk among antecedents of trust, and this suggests that perceived risk has not necessarily been reduced significantly by using the site. This may also account for the equivocal opinions the interview subjects expressed about trusting the site, that it helps deal with one form of risk but brings an alternative (albeit lesser) one in its place based on information overload and the risk

of fraudulent reviews. No amount of information search and experience using a compromised source such as an OURS can deliver a guaranteed result, so trust, risk and experience always play a part in decision-making using such sites. However, the intention to recommend the site to a friend showed no significant association with risk, once trust had been added to the model. This suggests that there may be less perceived risk in recommending it to friends, perhaps in the belief that their friends will have the skills to use it effectively.

7.3.ii. Antecedent 2: Social identification

In the survey, this showed statistically significant positive associations with both intention to book ($\beta = .17, p < .01$) and intention to recommend the site ($\beta = .18, p < .01$), but once again not with intention to compare against other sources. This suggests that similarity with reviewers on the site contributes to the confidence that allows users to book; while social similarity has a clear connection with friends and hence it is to be expected that they should show such an association. The survey results also showed that after visiting the site, respondents would recommend it to a friend ($M = 3.69, SD = .84$) which places it in a social context. There exists a reciprocal arrangement in that they would use the site to corroborate recommendations given by a friend and would equally recommend to a friend the site that helped them. Hence, cross-referring between different sources might be considered an aspect of social identification as well as of self-efficacy. This also raises the question of self-efficacy and self-image being based on interaction with friends and peers, re-

combining elements of this study into another form that could prove fertile ground for future research.

7.3.iii. Antecedent 3: Technological features

In the survey, these showed positive but weak associations with both intention to book a hotel ($\beta = .15, p < .05$) and with intention to recommend ($\beta = .19, p < .01$), but once again not with intention to compare against other sources. This implies that even the technological features on the site may not be enough to persuade the user that there is no need to compare; or equally, that the user is more concerned with their own self-efficacy in using the site than in any affordances inherent in the site itself.

Few people, furthermore, went straight to TripAdvisor and instead they arrived via a search engine or while searching for a hotel or followed a hyperlink from another site: “I’m not really systematic about my use, I use it when I stumble upon it... I might read some of the reviews on hotels.com, then do a Google search, and very often TripAdvisor will come up at the top of the search results. So I would usually end up on TripAdvisor only because Google recommended it” (Subject 17, 29, male, USA), “I never go straight to TripAdvisor” (Subject 4, female, 41, UK) and “TripAdvisor for me is not like the go-to website” (Subject 5, female, 26, Singapore). This has implications for an understanding of the role of the site, if people do not automatically think of it as a source that gives them what they want. This simple yet unexpected result from the interviews puts OURS in perspective, that people use them when they get there, but do not always go there as a first port-of-call. This implies that OURS must work harder to become more part of people’s lives, and that apomediary sources are not yet the

world-changing influence that some have foreseen (Flanagin & Metzger, 2008; Lankes, 2008).

7.3.iv. Antecedent 4: Self-efficacy

In terms of the third antecedent of behavioural intention in this study, respondents had confidence in their abilities to get what they wanted while on the site. They trusted the site cautiously, based on how much they trusted themselves to do an information search and to compare what they found there with other sites. Most felt they could identify fake reviews; and even if they did not, they believed that the number of good would outweigh the bad. These skills came to the forefront when they were comparing TripAdvisor against other sources. This is corroborated by data from the survey in which only one behavioural intention showed a significant association with self-efficacy: the intention to compare against other sources ($\beta = .33$, $p < .001$). Interview subjects overcame risk by checking against other sources. When they saw a recommendation they tested it rather than trusting it, concurring with Cox, Burgess, Sellitto and Buultjens (2009). They relied on themselves more than on the site and believed they had the skills to use it for their objectives, in keeping with the concept of information self-reliance (Lankes, 2008).

Above all they were confident of their own judgment to get what they wanted. This implies an independent-minded group of travellers who are likely to be very vocal about good or bad service or facilities if they feel they have played a greater role in selecting them. The act of making the choice of hotel (and the effort they put into it) can give them a feeling that they have the right to make their opinions heard. This also

explains why the majority of reviews on TripAdvisor tend to be positive or negative rather than neutral, as: “the impetus for writing a review is most likely to be due to a deviation from the norm resulting in disconfirmation of expectations; that is, the experience is likely to be either good or bad: the reviewers feel they have the right to express a strong opinion” (Sparks & Browning, 2011, p. 1312).

Most felt positive about their self-efficacy, sometimes explicitly: “I consider myself to be knowledgeable, discerning with information... I am very media literate. So while I am able to process information, I am also able to evaluate sources and build or evaluate their credibility” (Subject 17, male, 29, USA), and only very few felt negative. They trusted their own judgment more than that of others, were aware of flaws, limitations and weaknesses in all information sources, and relied instead on themselves to make the best choice by comparing and contrasting.

Self-efficacy was not always cognitive, and one of the skills employed to process information was the use of heuristics. Interview subjects employed the length-implies-strength heuristic (Sundar, 2008) as an indicator of authenticity, arguing that no one would spend a long time writing a fake review; and the bandwagon heuristic, that if so many people visit the site it must be of some use; and the detail-is-truth heuristic, arguing that either vague feel-good or imprecise but critical writing indicated that the writer had not stayed at the hotel. This has implications for anyone writing a review, be it genuine or bogus, for how they can make their words more credible.

This study demonstrates that self-efficacy is important in how users engage with OURS in moving from risk to decision making. Hence it proposes that future online trust

studies include self-efficacy as well as focusing on trust in others and in systems. This seems a neglected area in the communications literature at least, although it may be more fully explored in psychology. Self-efficacy was the factor most commented on in the interviews, answering **RQ4** that most believed they had the skills to use the site to get what they wanted.

Users' aim was to gain control over their choice, and control over the information. When they found what they wanted, it signified skill and personal discernment. TripAdvisor allowed them to make decisions rather than making decisions for them: "this empowers people to do their own research and make their own choices and take more responsibility for it" (Subject 1, female, 48, UK) and "I think it's quite refreshing... because it's self-empowering" (Subject 12, male, 44, UK). In the interviews, self-efficacy was the most common theme of discussion. They trust their own skills above all else. It is the exercise of those skills that remove the need for trust. That is why there is little room for trust in this model of an apomediary site.

7.3.v. Antecedent 5: Trust

The interview subjects showed cautious trust, using the phrase 'pinch of salt' often. This was corroborated to some extent by the survey data where there was almost no association between any form or dimension of trust and any behavioural intention, when antecedents of trust were included in the model. Only a belief in the competence of the site that made it trustworthy showed any association with the intention to compare against other sources ($\beta = .25, p < .05$). This suggests that even competence is not enough, particularly for users who are inclined to depend on their

own skills to gather and judge information. They may trust it for its competence, but they still trust their own judgment more.

The relationship between trust and behavioural intention did not appear to be a clear model in which trust overcomes risk and leads to action. Tables 8a/b showed that trust is best predicted by risk, so trust is indeed involved when risk needs to be overcome. Yet Tables 11a/b/c showed that when it comes to making a decision, trust becomes less important and other variables come to the fore. So the role of trust is uncertain.

Grabner-Kräuter and Kaluscha (2003) offered a round-up of studies of trust which illustrates this uncertainty. On one hand, they cited Gefen (2000) who found that trust was affected by familiarity, and trust in turn affected intention to buy; Gefen and Straub (2000) who found that social presence and PEOU both affected trust and trust affected purchase intention; and Koufaris and Hampton-Sosa (2002) who found that trust significantly affected intention to buy.²⁸ On the other hand, Grabner-Kräuter and Kaluscha also cited Bhattacharjee (2002) who found that trust and familiarity *together* predicted willingness to transact; and Kim and Prabhakar (2002) who found that trust in a bank had *no* impact on use of Internet banking, suggesting that trust was not associated with behavioural intention. Further, Bart, Shankar, Sultan and Urban (2005) found that online trust only partially mediates between consumer characteristics and intention, especially for high-involvement and high-price purchases such as travel.

²⁸ However, they note that this last study did not control for prior experience, which might have had an effect on the association between trust and action.

Lim, Sia, Lee and Benbasat (2006) found that recommendation by similar peers influenced trusting belief, which influenced attitudes towards a store and thence intention to buy. But they did not find a direct positive relationship between trusting belief and intention to buy, and they suggested that future research should examine this inconsistency.

In this current study, trust showed very limited association with any form of behavioural intention when other variables were controlled for. This corresponds to the interview data, in which trust was cautious and grudging at best, while self-efficacy was a primary factor in driving users towards a decision to do something. In the survey data, risk, self-efficacy and social identification/technological features all generated trust, and also predicted behavioural intentions. It is proposed that, in an information-rich environment such as TripAdvisor, there is less need for trust which fills in the gap left when information runs out. This concurs with Metzger, Flanagin and Medders' (2010) suggestion that "The abundance and diversity of such information sources make traditional notions of credibility as originating from a central authority (e.g., a teacher, expert, doctor, or organization) problematic, and traditional credibility assessment strategies and techniques potentially outdated" (p. 414). Most studies of online trust have been in information-poor environments of e-commerce, for example, where an information gap between buyer and seller makes the role of trust that much more central than it appears to be on TripAdvisor, and it is proposed that information-rich apomediary sources do demand an updated approach to understanding trust.

However, this study does not offer empirical evidence that the information-rich nature of the site is responsible for the limited effect of trust on behavioural intention. A future study comparing trust in information-rich compared to information-poor environments would offer more compelling data. But it does suggest that the information-rich environment of an OURS plays some part in the unexpected weakness of trust as a predictor of behavioural intention.

To understand the limited role of trust on TripAdvisor, it is helpful to consider the definition used for this study, 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 truster, irrespective of the ability to monitor or control that other party.” (Mayer, Davis & Schoorman, 1995, p. 712). In this case, the user is vulnerable to the actions of three other parties: the hotel, the reviewer, and the site. Information gathered overcomes the first vulnerability; social identification gives clues that help overcome the second; and the technological features that aggregate, list and rank relevant reviews overcome vulnerability that the site will not help. Given this, the role of trust might be expected to be limited.

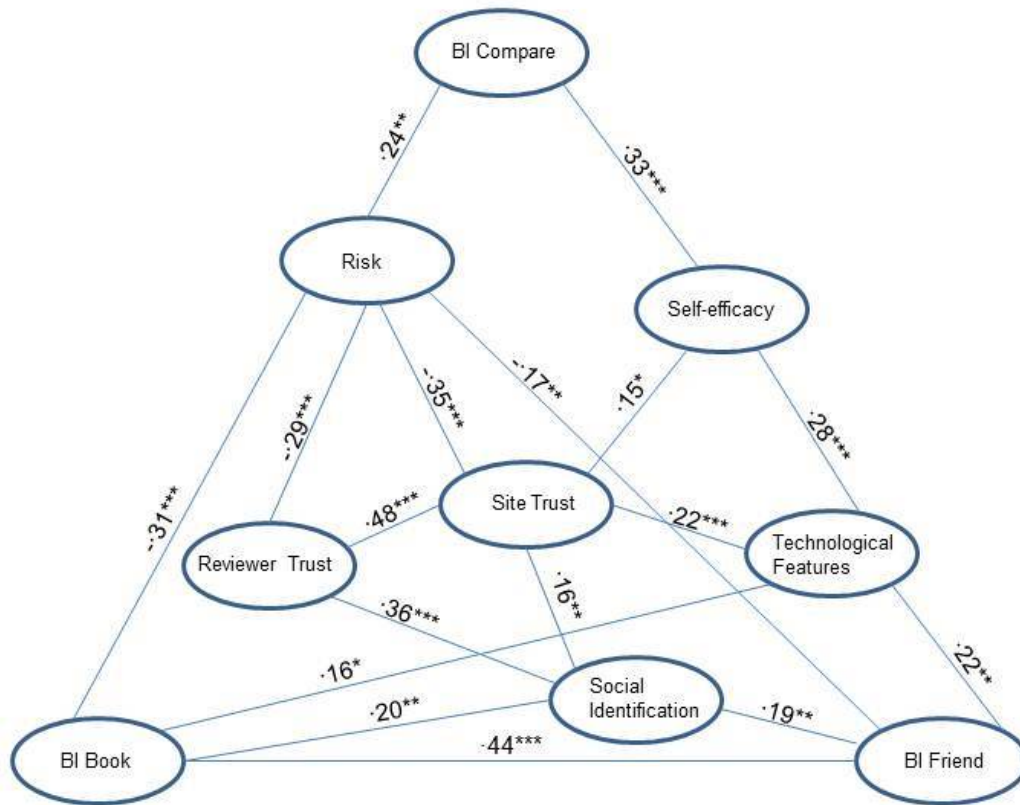
Equally, the parties have given clear evidence as to how they will meet expectations. First, the hotel has been reviewed and the user knows what to expect, so expectation is replaced with something closer to certainty. Second, using a combination of heuristics, social identification and self-efficacy, the user has an idea what to expect of each reviewer and how much value to ascribe to their opinions, which allows them to ascertain how much the reviewer has fulfilled expectations – and agree with or

discard their opinions accordingly. Third, there is evidence that the site has met expectations by aggregating many authentic opinions, by offering guarantees that it removes fraudulent postings and by being seen as a force for good. In each case, what makes a difference is that the user is able to monitor (if not control) the other parties. As a result, expectations are met rather than left as uncertainties, and as a result the need for trust is lessened and trust itself is limited.

Hence, this study proposes that trust takes on a specific form on an apomediary site, while still retaining many elements of trust in other situations. There is still the element of risk or vulnerability, but trust moves from an attitude based on projections onto another party whom the individual cannot control but who is in a position to help or hinder; and instead the attitude is more internalised so that the individual relies on his or her own skills, which can be controlled, to counteract any vulnerability. While the original model placed trust between its antecedents and behavioural intention, it appears that this may not be so; to clarify the role of trust on such sites, a schematic showing the actual associations among variables is shown (Figure 7).

As a result, this study proposes an adaptation of Mayer, Davis & Schoorman's description to better account for trust in this new form of information source: "trust in an apomediary site is the willingness of a party to be vulnerable to uncertainty in another party based on the expectation that this can be reduced to an acceptable level through effective monitoring and controlling of abundant information, to allow for action."

Figure 7: Schematic showing associations among variables in an apomediary site



OLS regression analysis. *p<.05, **p<.01, ***p<.001

7.4. Limitations of this research

From a methodological viewpoint, the interviewees were drawn from a limited pool of contacts and, while efforts were made to achieve a good balance of ages, nationalities, travelling habits and viewpoints, the 30 interviewees cannot be said to be a representative sample of TripAdvisor users. This is even more of a concern for the survey. Closer work with TripAdvisor itself to gain access to their database for future studies might elicit a more representative sample. Interviews are themselves

compromised as subjects may not have full recall of their motivations for using and trusting a site; future research might involve an observational ethnographic study of people using the website and talking through their processes, giving examples of what they trust, what they like and dislike, and what they consider valuable for decision-making. It is also worth noting that any conclusions drawn from a study of TripAdvisor users is not generalisable to all tourists, as TripAdvisor users are likelier to want more control of their travel plans rather than to look for a pre-planned package holiday.

Having said that, while the survey itself is not generalisable, it is believed that the apomediary model is, and it can form the basis of future studies of TripAdvisor and other OURS, as well as of similar information-rich sites where users engage their own skills and judgment in ascertaining the value and salience of information.

Studies have proposed many possible antecedents of trust and this study could not include them all. Equally, purists may express concern that this study borrows from different disciplines, which has led to some variables included and other not included. While justifications have been offered for the selection of each of the six variables, it is always possible to challenge their inclusion and the exclusion of others.

For example, while this study makes use of the concept of self-efficacy which is drawn from the psychology literature, it does not claim to be a psychological study and as such it does not include the well-used psychological concept of personal propensity to trust. It was considered that studying propensity to trust as a predictor of trust might be somewhat redundant, although future studies might include this. Other studies have considered branding as a determinant of trust (Yoo, Lee, Gretzel & Fesenmaier,

2009) and this has also not been included in this study as it was considered more in line with research into marketing and e-commerce, rather than communications from a sociological perspective. In addition, the interview data implied that users do not turn instinctively to TripAdvisor, but rather arrive there via other sites, which suggests that the brand is not a strong influence in their decision-making process.

The contrasting emphasis on self-efficacy observed between the interviews and the survey may be because interviews are social situations more than surveys are, and hence subjects want to present themselves to best advantage and talking about their skills at using the site can help them achieve this (Hannabuss, 1996). Equally, they may perceive their own skills at using the site as the decisive factor when talking about it, but when asked to consider that alongside other variables such as social identification, experience and technological features, it becomes less influential. The distinction between perception and fact, and the power of qualitative research to uncover the former and quantitative to reveal the latter, is made by Bryman (1988). This is the value of a mixed-method approach to data gathering, in which a single method can give a less balanced understanding (Jick, 1979), while Sandelowski (2000) suggests combining data yielded by different methodologies during interpretation. In this case, putting two complementary methods together suggests that there are many antecedents of trust and behavioural intention. But the users tend to think that their own self-efficacy is the most powerful, even if this may not be the case.

Finally, this study proposes two concepts for further study that were hinted at but not proven. Both concern the role of trust on OURS. First was an apomediary effect,

where social identification and technological features of interactive Web 2.0 sites support and influence each other to drive behavioural intention. Post-hoc analysis suggested this effect, in which social identification and technological features (and to a lesser extent self-efficacy) sometimes combined to allow users to process large volumes of information efficiently. Second was the proposal that trust is less important in an information-rich OURS than in other, information-poor environments. As mentioned earlier, more focused study comparing information searches and trust in conditions of high and low information would shed more light on this.

7.5. Implications and future research

One aim of this research was to integrate strands of research and variables that may have an effect on OURS, as they are a new form of communication which demands a broad view. Having identified possible relationships, future research might consider them separately (for example information and trust on OURS, or self-efficacy and social identification) to look specifically for relationships that offer further insights.

As more life moves online and as the Internet becomes an ever-richer source of information, it is important to establish how trust is formed there, and how influential it is. The Internet can imply risk if the information found there is uncertain, so as people go there with the intention to act in some way or another, trust is a consideration. But there is more to behavioural intention than trust, and the interplay between the variables in this study and others will offer grounds for further research.

This study contributes to the debate on the effect of peer-review websites by carrying Walther's hyperpersonal model into a new direction, as users make swift decisions about a reviewer's personality, affiliations, background and social identification based on reduced cues. As such sites are neither communities nor networks nor self-help groups nor commercial sites by any current definition, future research could well identify more clearly what they *are* and propose a taxonomy of OURS. For research into OURS specifically, this study suggests that the incorporation of social identification and technological features into an apomediary effect could be a valuable starting point for understanding of how these sites achieve trust.

This research also has implications for reviewers as it points to identification as something that users value. Writing a review for a specific audience may give it more impact. Another, similar, area for future research would be into self-presentation on OURS (indeed, this was considered as an early approach for this study), for which there has been scant research. Building on Goffman's concepts of self-presentation, MacCannell (1973) offered the idea of staged versus true authenticity which may give insights into an environment where authenticity is the watchword but it is inevitably staged as reviewers attempt to control their image. Will they present the true self (McKenna, 2007) or use the opportunity oriented by the Internet to manage their identity (Whitty & Joinson, 2009)? Content analysis of reviews could provide a taxonomy of reviewer types, while interviews with users could provide a corresponding taxonomy as a starting point for research into how one responds to the other.

This could be extended into hotels' self-presentation on the site. When they respond to a customer's praise or complaints, do they assume an identity of bureaucratic efficiency or amateur authenticity? And which has greater effect on users? This would offer insights into how a hotel can best engage with customers on TripAdvisor. Indeed, apart from theoretical implications, this study has commercial implications for the travel industry: "Understanding how consumers are currently using UGC sites as part of their travel planning process along with the ways these sites are influencing travel behavior is an essential first step to developing a strategic approach towards UGC" (Cox, Burgess, Sellitto & Buultjens, 2009, p. 750). Social identification, self-efficacy, information and technological features such as aggregation and searchability have greater influence on a user's intention to book than trust does; so it behoves hotels to do what they can to influence the latter two of these variables.

As more people are influenced by OURS in their choice of hotel, hotels must have a presence on the site. The choice is to do so openly or by subterfuge. Users trust what they find on TripAdvisor because it is not controlled by commercial activity and is therefore objective and valued. Thus it is either an ideal location for hotels to engage with customers as it finds them in trusting mood, buoyed up by feelings of benevolence for the altruistic ideals of OURS and likely to be receptive to messages. Or it has potential to be swamped by hotels replying to reviewers or, worse, be subverted by bogus reviews to the point where the number of fraudulent reviews reaches a critical mass and the site is no longer credible.

As users cross-refer information from OURS against other sources, this needs to be another area in which a hotel controls its image, and to ensure that a similar brand image is projected across different information platforms that include guide books, government tourism websites and hotel websites. Equally, if hotels are tempted to post a fraudulent review, they might consider that its potential positive effect would be minimal as it would be read by a user among dozens of others and discarded if it does not fit in with the general tenor of reviews. Equally the potential negative effect would be considerable if they were caught. There is also the danger of killing the goose that lays the golden eggs, and if there are enough fraudulent reviews to tip the users from trust into distrust, then the site as a benefit to the hotel will be gone.

Having observed that, there is no evidence that users are able to identify fakes, nor that they particularly care. This would be an intriguing future experiment with real and bogus reviews to see how users reacted to each. One of the merits of OURS is that they are new and are surfing on a wave of excitement that people should contribute time and experience for free; but that wave will break eventually and it will be worthy of research to see how it is subverted for more commercial purposes. Google and Facebook offer object lessons in organisations that started off with good communitarian intentions, and have lost that sheen of altruism.

This study also offers some suggestions for TripAdvisor itself and other OURS. It is not necessarily a go-to site for users looking for information, which suggests the need for more marketing. Attracting more users would have the added effect of making the site more attractive for hoteliers to have a strong presence, which could contribute to

a virtuous circle. The site's current tagline of "Reviews from your community" might not be effectively connecting with users who see reviewers in terms of personal similarity and identification, rather than as part of a wider community.

7.6. Coda

While TripAdvisor reduces some of the risks associated with travel, it can bring other risks of information overload, incompetence or fraud. While it provides information, this is not always of the kind that is wanted or valued. In this way, it is similar to the trusted but occasionally oafish travelling companion who has been a staple in literature for millennia, from Aeneas' faithful Achates, to Don Quixote's Sancho Panza, Phileas Fogg's Passepartout and even Asterix's Obelix. They are occasionally the butt of a joke, they may not always be respected and can occasionally be tiresome, but they are valued nonetheless for their reliability and constancy. TripAdvisor performs the same role.

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Appendix A: Recruitment letter for Interviews

Interview for research

What's OURs is mine: Trust, credibility and confident judgment online.

A case study of TripAdvisor.com

Andrew Duffy (andrewduffy13@gmail.com)

Date: XXX XXX XXX

Dear XXX XXXX,

Re: PhD research on what do you trust on TripAdvisor?

Would you be able to help me in some research I am doing on TripAdvisor? This is for my PhD research at the National University of Singapore, which is about how people trust hotel reviews on TripAdvisor and how they use the opinions there to help them choose a hotel.

I am interested in how people used to trust what the 'experts' said in newspapers, and now they trust the 'amateurs' writing on sites such as TripAdvisor.

So I would like to interview you for my research. We would talk for about 20 minutes. I would like to record the conversation for accuracy, and if you do not wish to be recorded, you may not take part in this research. You would be free to stop the interview at any time, and I would then not use your comments. Participants will not be identified in the dissertation – please see the attached form for details.

My aim is to interview around 30 TripAdvisor users, to build up a picture of what they like and don't like, what they trust and don't trust, and what makes them feel confident to book a hotel.

Let me know if you're willing and available, and let's agree a time to make contact.

Yours sincerely,

Andrew Duffy

TripAdvisor sign-on is oldromantic13

E-mail: oldromantic13@gmail.com

Skype: oldromantic13

(In case you're wondering about the sign-on, I used to be a travel writer for a wedding magazine...)

Appendix B: Interview Questions

1. What do you use TripAdvisor for?
2. What do you like and dislike about it? (Is time an issue?)
3. What do you trust the site to do for you? (and how and why?)
4. Do you trust the writers to be helpful? (and why?)
5. Do you trust yourself to use the site to get what you want? (and why?)
6. The site is a shared resource for the common good; what do you think about that?
7. The site is written by amateurs, not experts; what do you think about that?
8. It's down to you to find what you need on the site; what do you think about that?
9. Some reviews on the site are false; what do you think about that?
10. Is the site as credible as, say, Lonely Planet, or a friend's recommendation?
11. What did you use before TripAdvisor?
12. Have you written a review for the site?
13. If you have, do you think that helped you trust it more?

Appendix C: Coding book for content analysis of interviews

Trust and TripAdvisor
Content Analysis Code Book

We are doing content analysis to look for the following SIX themes in the texts. The unit of enquiry is an answer; a respondent can hold more than one opinions within an answer, so. If the respondent makes a statement on a theme, but does not appear either positive or negative, or judge it as important/not important etc, then you must mark it as neutral. We expect to see *few* neutral statement. Definitions of coding categories. These are some points to look out for when identifying coding categories (a), (b), (c) in the SIX themes:

1) Risk

How subject deals with fakes

- a) Positive reaction to identifying fakes (FK1)
Respondent knows that some reviews are fakes; can identify fakes; believes the number of good outweighs the bad; values the site in spite of fakes
- b) Negative reaction to identifying fakes (FK2)
Respondent has negative feeling about site because of fakes; stops reading if they see a fake
- c) Neutral (FK0)
Respondent is not aware that some reviews are fakes; does not look out for fakes; does not think it is important whether there are fakes or not

2) Social Identification between respondent and writers

Concern with similarity between writer and subject

- a) Similar (SIM1)
Respondent identifies writers with similar background, interests and experience to him; pays more attention to what those people write as being relevant

b) Dissimilar (SIM2)

Respondent identifies writers with dissimilar background, interests and experience to him; likely to dismiss what those people write as being less relevant

c) Neutral (SIM0)

Respondent mentions the issue of similarity, but gives no indication if this is important or not.

The subject's perceived trustworthiness of friends, guidebooks and TripAdvisor

a) Friends more valued (FR1)

Respondent values all friends more than guidebooks or TripAdvisor; uses friends' recommendations as a heuristic for hotel choice; uses friends' recommendations as a starting point for hotel search; mentions friends' understanding of his preferences and interests

b) Some friends more valued than others (FR2)

Respondent values certain friends but not others, depending on friend's experience or similarity; draws distinction between friends' experiences and own interests

c) Other sources more valued (FR0)

Respondent places more value in TripAdvisor or guidebooks than in friends' suggestions; identifies limitations of friends' experience

3) Technological features

The importance of the site as an apomediary source

a) Positive about the site as an apomediary information source (APO1)

Respondent talks about number of reviews as a good thing; mentions concepts such as aggregation as a benefit; likes the choices on the site; comprehensiveness of site; source for the common good; balanced opinions are more realistic; enjoys taking time to read many reviews

b) Negative about the site as an apomediary information source (APO2)

Respondent talks about numbers of reviews as a nuisance or drawback; prefers expert opinion as heuristic for choice; dislikes taking so long to read all the reviews; distressed if reviews say different things

c) Neutral (APOO)

Respondent agrees it is a apomediary and shared resource, but has no strong opinions either way

The value the respondent ascribes to the amateur status of the writers

a) Positive about amateur status of writers (AM1)

Respondent says amateurs are better than professionals; mentions that he himself is an amateur; says amateurs experience hotels as he does; says amateurs may have same expectations as him; says professionals may be less objective because they are paid; that professionals may have more stringent expectations than the average guest

b) Negative about amateur status of writers (AM2)

Respondent prefers professional opinions; says professionals are more experienced; amateurs are not discerning; amateurs do not have relevant expertise

c) Neutral (AMO)

Respondent mentions amateurs, but has no strong opinions either way

4) Self efficacy of respondent using the site

The subject's self-efficacy in using the site

a) Positive about personal judgment of what is written there (EF1)

Respondent has clear idea what they want; analyses what writers say; uses the site as the sole or main source of information for hotel selection; can identify a suitable hotel; corroborates information by looking at other sources; uses TripAdvisor as seal of approval of information found elsewhere; trusts self to compare and draw own conclusions more than trusts others to tell what is good; takes responsibility for judgment

b) Positive about technical proficiency to use site (EF2)

Respondent values Web 2.0 aspects of the site to achieve goals; filter; personalises searches

- c) Neutral (EFO)

Respondent mentions the issue of self-efficacy, but gives no indication of its significance

5) Trust in the site

The level of trust the subject places in certain aspects of the site

- a) Trusts certain aspects of the site (TR1)

Respondent identifies an aspect of the site that they consider credible, or they associate with trust.

- b) Trusts certain aspects, but with reservations (TR2)

Respondent identifies an aspect of the site which they trust under certain circumstances, or with a pinch of salt

- c) Shows distrust in certain aspects of the site (TRO)

Respondent identifies a certain aspect of the site which they consider is not trustworthy, or which diminishes their trust in the site.

6) Behavioural Intention

The subject's motivation for going to the site, and the intended outcome of visiting the site

- a) What is their primary aim in using the site?

To book a hotel, to find out more information, to be inspired, to get ideas.

- b) What do they look for when they arrive there?

Looking for hotels, flights, accommodation, destination information.

Appendix D: Recruitment e-mail for survey

Dear XXXXXX,

Re: Trust and TripAdvisor

I was just reading your review of the XXXX hotel in XXXXXXXX, and I see that you are a regular on TripAdvisor. Would you share your opinions to help me in my PhD on what people trust on the site?

These days, it seems people don't rely on authorities so much and prefer to make up their own minds. But my question is, what exactly makes people trust TripAdvisor?

So please would you help me by filling in an online questionnaire about what you trust on the site? It takes about 10 minutes and your anonymity is assured, as participants will not be identified.

If you're willing to help, please click on this link

<https://www.surveymonkey.com/s/Trustandtripadvisor> to fill in the questionnaire.

Any questions, please email me at my National University of Singapore email address: g0900838@nus.edu.sg

Thanks for your help and time,

Yours sincerely,

Andrew Duffy

TripAdvisor sign-on: oldromantic13 (in case you're wondering, I used to work on a wedding magazine...)

Appendix E: The survey

Trust and TripAdvisor - a survey

Thank you for agreeing to take part in this research. Read the information below and ask questions about anything you don't understand before deciding whether or not to take part. This research aims to explore and describe how people planning to travel react to reviews on the website TripAdvisor.com. If you have not used the website, then you would not be able to complete this questionnaire. The questionnaire should take around 10 minutes of your time. To protect your confidentiality, the questionnaires will be coded. Any link between the code number and your personal details will be kept confidential by the investigators. Identifiable information will never be made public. Your personal details will be discarded once the research is completed. You may also stop filling in the questionnaire at any time, and the data will be discarded. Andrew Duffy (NUS) 9757 1792

1	Personal details	Please place your marks in the grey boxes				
i	Name					
ii	Phone number					
iii	Age range (<i>please circle ONE</i>)	21-30	31-40	41-50	51-60	over 60
iv	Gender (<i>please circle ONE</i>)	M	F			
v	Nationality					
vi	Last year, how often did you travel overseas and stay in a hotel?	1-2 times	3-4 times	5-6 times	7-8 times	more than 8
vii	Who do you usually travel with?	Alone	Partner	Children	Friend	Parents

FELLOW TRAVELLERS: TRUST AND TRIPADVISOR

2	Experience with the Internet					
i	I use the Internet to gather information	Daily	Weekly	Monthly	6-monthly	Annually
ii	I use the Internet to connect with friends	Daily	Weekly	Monthly	6-monthly	Annually
iii	I use the Internet for shopping	Daily	Weekly	Monthly	6-monthly	Annually

	Experience with TripAdvisor in the last 12 months					
iv	How often have you used TripAdvisor?	Never	1-3 times	4-6 times	7-9 times	over 10 times
v	How often have you booked a hotel using TripAdvisor?	Never	1-3 times	4-6 times	7-9 times	over 10 times
vi	How often have you posted a review on TripAdvisor?	Never	1-3 times	4-6 times	7-9 times	over 10 times
vii	How happy are you with your choice of hotels using TripAdvisor?	Extremely unhappy	Slightly unhappy	Neutral	Happy	Extremely happy

3	General risk when travelling	Strongly Disagree	Disagree	Neutral	Agree	Strongly Agree
i	It is possible that the hotel I choose will not be good value for money					
ii	It is possible that the hotel I choose will be a waste of my time					
iii	It is possible that the hotel I choose will not provide personal satisfaction					

	Risk when using TripAdvisor	Strongly Disagree	Disagree	Neutral	Agree	Strongly Agree
iv	There is too much uncertainty in choosing a hotel based on TripAdvisor					
v	Choosing a hotel based on TripAdvisor is risky.					
vi	I feel safe choosing a hotel based on TripAdvisor.					
vii	I always check hotels from TripAdvisor against another website.					

FELLOW TRAVELLERS: TRUST AND TRIPADVISOR

4	Using TripAdvisor	Strongly Disagree	Disagree	Neutral	Agree	Strongly Agree
i	On the site everything is easy to understand					
ii	I can find information easily on the site					
iii	When I navigate round the site, I feel that I am in control					
iv	Regular updates mean the information is fresh					
v	Aggregating the reviews into rankings makes it easier to choose a hotel					
vi	I can personalise the site for my needs					
vii	I can easily compare different hotels using the site					

5	Identifying with people on TripAdvisor	Strongly Disagree	Disagree	Neutral	Agree	Strongly Agree
i	I feel a sense of community with people on the site					
ii	I can interact with people who have successfully used the site					
iii	Other site users and I share the same interests					
iv	Other site users and I behave in a similar way					
v	Other site users and I share the same objectives					
vi	The most relevant reviews are written by people who are similar to me					
vii	The site clearly shows which reviews are most helpful					

6	What would you do after visiting TripAdvisor?	Strongly Disagree	Disagree	Neutral	Agree	Strongly Agree
i	I would book-mark the site					
ii	I would recommend the site to a friend					
iii	I would book a hotel after using to the site					
iv	I would sign up as a member at the site					
v	I would go to another site to compare with TripAdvisor					
vi	I would use TripAdvisor again in the future					

FELLOW TRAVELLERS: TRUST AND TRIPADVISOR

7	Trustworthiness of TripAdvisor REVIEWERS	Strongly Disagree	Disagree	Neutral	Agree	Strongly Agree
i	Reviewers are likely to be reliable					
ii	I do not doubt the honesty of reviewers					
iii	I can count on the reviewers to be sincere					
iv	I expect the reviewers have good intentions					
v	I expect the reviewers are well-meaning					
vi	I expect the reviewers have my interests at heart					
vii	The reviewers are competent information providers					
viii	The reviewers can accurately describe their stay					
ix	The reviewers know about staying in hotels					

8	Trustworthiness of TripAdvisor as a WEBSITE	Strongly Disagree	Disagree	Neutral	Agree	Strongly Agree
i	I believe the site is sincere in helping me					
ii	I do not doubt the integrity of the site					
iii	I believe the service given by the site is done with their best judgment					
iv	I expect that the site has good intentions towards me					
v	I expect that the site puts customers' interests before its own					
vi	I expect that the site is well meaning					
vii	The site is a competent information provider					
viii	The site really knows what travellers want					
ix	The site is able to serve the readers well					

FELLOW TRAVELLERS: TRUST AND TRIPADVISOR

9	Your TRUST in TripAdvisor OVERALL	Strongly Disagree	Disagree	Neutral	Agree	Strongly Agree
i	I am comfortable relying on TripAdvisor to meet its obligations.					
ii	I feel fine looking at TripAdvisor since it generally does as it says.					
iii	I feel confident that I can rely on TripAdvisor to do its part when I go there.					
iv	I feel that TripAdvisor would act in a traveller's best interest.					
v	If a traveller needed help, TripAdvisor would do its best to help.					
vi	Tripadvisor is interested in traveller well-being, not just its own wellbeing.					
vii	In general, TripAdvisor is competent at helping travellers.					
viii	Tripadvisor does a capable job at meeting traveller needs.					
ix	I feel that TripAdvisor is good at what it does.					

10	How confident are you that you can effectively do the following on TripAdvisor?	Not at all confident <i>Please circle one</i> Extremely confident <i>number on each line</i>									
i	Visit the site	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	9	10
ii	Look for information about hotels using the database	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	9	10
iii	Exchange information about hotels with other users	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	9	10
iv	Use the different kinds of information on the site	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	9	10
v	Choose a hotel based on what I see on the site	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	9	10
vi	Compare prices of a hotel on different sites	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	9	10
vii	Compare reviews of a hotel on different sites	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	9	10
viii	Identify if a review on the site is relevant to me	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	9	10
ix	Distinguish between honest and deceptive reviews	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	9	10

Appendix F: Summary table of correlations among major variables.

Correlations	Age	Gender	Freq	Risk	Self- efficacy	Social Identif	Tech features	RTrust Integrity	RTrust Benevolence	RTrust Competence	STrust Integrity	STrust Benevolence	STrust Competence	EI recommend	EI book novel
Gender	.03														
Frequency	.08	-.14*													
Risk	-.13	-.02	.09												
Self-efficacy	.01	0	.08	-.35**											
Social Identification	0	.08	-.03	-.28**	.39**										
Technological features	.04	0	.05	-.40**	.50**	.39**									
RTrust Integrity	-.1	.10	-.13	-.46**	.30**	.45**	.28**								
RTrust Benevolence	-.08	.12	-.12	-.33**	.35**	.37**	.27**	.70**							
RTrust Competence	-.1	.02	-.06	-.33**	.29**	.49**	.30**	.57**	.56**						
STrust Integrity	.02	.03	-.11	-.52**	.42**	.32**	.40**	.56**	.58**	.50**					
STrust Benevolence	-.01	.07	-.03	-.36**	.35**	.34**	.38**	.48**	.60**	.46**	.76**				
STrust Competence	.06	0	-.09	-.53**	.40**	.40**	.52**	.44**	.45**	.48**	.65**	.64**			
EI recommend	.13	-.02	.04	-.36**	.36**	.36**	.42**	.24**	.15*	.23**	.27**	.23**	.38**		
EI book novel	.22**	.03	.05	-.45**	.29**	.35**	.37**	.31**	.19**	.26**	.30**	.21**	.36**	.58**	
EI compare	-0	.07	.02	.10	.27**	.13*	.11	-.07	.01	.01	0	0	.11	.09	0