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Negative Customer Engagement Behavior: The Interplay of Intensity and Valence in Online Networks

Jaylan Azer

*Department of Management, Adam Smith Business School, University of Glasgow,
Glasgow, UK*

&

Matthew Alexander

*Department of Marketing, Strathclyde Business School, University of Strathclyde,
Glasgow, UK*

Abstract

Recent developments in marketing and service research highlight the potentially detrimental impact of negative customer engagement behavior (CEB) on the attitudes and behaviors of other actors in social networks toward service providers. Specifically, in online contexts, negative CEB is contagious and viral in nature, with ensuing implications that may have short and long-term financial and reputational repercussions for service providers. Nevertheless, the extant literature predominantly captures only the negative impact of what customers say about service providers in their negative reviews and fails to provide any understanding of different intensity levels of negative engagement. This article marks the first attempt to provide a more nuanced view of the impact of negative CEB. This paper empirically investigates the impact of six distinct forms of negatively valenced influencing behavior (NVIB) using two experimental studies in an online review setting. Our results provide new insights into different intensity levels of NVIB and how they are moderated by the number of positive reviews. Practically, this paper addresses one of the challenges for service providers in managing NVIBs, centered on understanding the heterogeneity of its forms and, hence, their different intensity levels. The results suggest that service providers use semantic tools to detect the intensity levels of NVIB and to prioritize handling and/or mitigating the more intense NVIBs when they occur.

Statement of contribution: Our study contributes by the first empirical more nuanced view regarding different intensity levels of NVIB and how they are moderated through the number of positive reviews. Accordingly, we encourage managers to use semantic tools to detect these different intensity levels of NVIB and to prioritize handling and/or mitigating the more intense NVIBs when they occur.

Keywords: Customer engagement behavior, digital social networks, E-WoM, experiments, negative influence, number of reviews, online reviews, valence of reviews

Introduction

In today's markets, the explosive growth of technology-enabled interfaces has given customers a dramatic influencing role (Harrigan et al., 2018; Hennig-Thurau et al., 2010; Lemon and Verhoef, 2016). To capture the enhanced influencing role played by customers, recent marketing research has identified influencing behavior as a form of customer engagement behavior (CEB) that captures customer contributions to adjusting other actors' knowledge, perceptions, and preferences toward a focal service provider (Jaakkola and Alexander, 2014). Customers rely on each other for authoritative information about offerings and accept shared influencing behavior to alleviate perceived risks and reduce their reliance on communications provided by firms (Alexander et al., 2018). As hospitality products and services are especially difficult to evaluate prior to actual consumption (Azer and Alexander, 2017; Wei et al., 2013), customers utilize the Internet, particularly online reviews, as a prime source of information about services and products (Azer, 2015; Mathwick and Mosteller, 2017; Wu et al., 2016). Recent market research has revealed that 77% of customers read online reviews before making a purchase decision while 35% adjust their accommodation plans based on online reviews (TripAdvisor.co.uk, 2016). Therefore, customers' influencing behavior – whether positive or negative – has, via online reviews, the potential to impact the attitudes and behaviors of other actors (social actors embedded within networks such as customers, potential customers, or a collection of review readers) toward firms (Bowden et al., 2017; Brodie et al., 2019), ultimately affecting a firm's value, its online reputation, and hence, its revenues (Anderson, 2012; Kumar et al., 2010; Wu et al., 2016).

The pivotal role of influencing behavior is well recognized by marketing and service research, and firms are increasingly devoting their strategic efforts to fostering influencing behaviors that are positive for a focal organization (Harmeling et al., 2017; Kumar et al., 2010). However, the challenge for service providers is to develop appropriate strategies to manage negatively valenced influencing behavior (NVIB) when it occurs, centered on understanding the heterogeneity of its forms and, hence, their different intensity levels (Dolan et al., 2019; Juric et al., 2016). This is because the specific performances that are required from service providers to foster a firm's value or avoid value destruction can be different for each NVIB form based on the relative strength of its negative impact (Dolan et al., 2019). Nevertheless, the extant e-WOM literature has overlooked addressing the impact of how customers engage in different forms of NVIB in online reviews (Azer and Alexander, 2018).

Thus, it predominantly captures the impact of what customers say about service providers in their negative reviews and not the impact of how they say it (Hennig-Thurau et al., 2010), although, according to recent research, the impact of negative reviews may differ, with some messages having a stronger negative impact than others (Dolan et al., 2019; King et al., 2014).

Recent research on online reviews reveals that customers' negative influences are not homogenous but that they either advise other actors in their reviews on what not to do (direct) or just share their negative experience without offering explicit advice (indirect) using six discrete forms of NVIB (Azer and Alexander, 2018). To illustrate, customers engage in indirect NVIB by *discrediting* a service provider, *expressing regret* for choosing a focal provider or *deriding* service providers based on their experiences. In engaging in direct NVIB, customers explicitly address other actors by *dissuading* or *warning* them to avoid transacting with focal providers based on their unsatisfactory or perilous experiences, respectively, or by *endorsing competitors* thereby, encouraging other actors to transact with over a focal provider.

Although, prior research has shown that customers are influenced by the choices and opinions of other customers on products and services (Blasco-Arcas et al., 2014; Lee et al., 2011) this research captures customers' influential roles only in terms of recommending, referring, or warning others (Blazevic et al., 2013; Jaakkola and Alexander, 2014; Verhoef et al., 2010). However, these roles typically involve advising others and, to our knowledge, no studies have investigated the impact of indirect NVIB. Crucially, the specific heterogeneity of the forms of NVIB implies difference in their level of intensity. This aspect is new and has been overlooked in the extant literature, which has studied negative reviews as homogenous rather than considering different intensity levels of NVIBs that may result in different negative impacts. This has caused a major limitation in this research stream with inconclusive findings specifically, regarding the impact of negative valence compared to volume of juxtaposed positive reviews (Cheung and Thadani, 2012; Hennig-Thurau et al., 2010; King et al., 2014).

Therefore, to cover the mentioned research gaps, this paper draws on previous research on CEB and e-WOM to investigate the impact of six forms of NVIB on other actors' attitudes and behavioral intentions toward service providers using two experimental studies. It contributes to both literature streams by firstly providing new insights into the intensity levels

of NVIB by showing the significant differences in the impact of how customers engage in discrete forms of NVIB on other actors' attitudes and behaviors toward service providers. Secondly, it extends the extant knowledge of the moderating role of the number of reviews with new findings that provide a view that goes beyond the existing understanding - which presents mixed results - of the aggregate impact of negative reviews when accompanied by positive reviews.

Theoretical Background

Negatively-valenced Influencing Behavior (NVIB)

Recent research focusing on CEB within online contexts has identified influencing behavior as a form of CEB that captures customer contributions of their knowledge, skills, time, and experience to adjust other actors' knowledge, perceptions, and expectations about focal service providers (Jaakkola and Alexander, 2014). Influencing behavior is manifested in a range of communication tools, such as e-WOM (e.g., online reviews), referrals, recommendations, blogging, and mobile apps, which are utilized to spread influence (Jaakkola and Alexander, 2014; Kumar et al., 2010). Influencing behavior has the potential to affect the value and performance of firms in different ways depending on its valence. Specifically, within online contexts, NVIB is contagious and viral in nature, with ensuing implications that may involve potential short and long-term financial and reputational detrimental outcomes for firms, brands, and service providers (Bowden et al., 2017; Wu et al., 2016). This paper concentrates on NVIB manifested using online reviews, which is defined as:

'Customer contributions of resources such as knowledge, skills, experience, and time to negatively affect other actors' knowledge, expectations, and perception about a focal service provider' (Azer and Alexander 2018, p.469).

Customers engaging in NVIB intend to affect how others feel, think, and behave toward service providers (Jaakkola and Alexander, 2014; Zimbardo and Leippe, 1991). Hence, they may negatively influence other actors' attitudes and behavioral intentions about these providers (Bowden et al., 2017; Schaeffers and Schamari, 2016; Wunderlich et al., 2013). To illustrate, social psychologists suggest that individuals' thoughts (cognition) and feelings (affect) form their attitudes toward a focal object (Fishbein and Ajzen, 1975). Prior marketing research has found that customers' attitudes are a global evaluation of a product or service that involve their perceptions, knowledge, and experiences (Bolton and Drew, 1991;

Wünderlich et al., 2013), and in the absence of experiences, expectations define customers' attitudes (Oliver, 1980). Moreover, customers might not only affect how others think or feel but also how they behave toward a focal object. Attitude might affect behavior at a later stage (Maio et al., 2018; Zimbardo and Leippe, 1991). Therefore, NVIB is expected to negatively affect other actors' attitudes and behaviors toward service providers. However, prior research has provided mixed findings even when studies focus on the same empirical context (Babić Rosario et al., 2016), which, according to Hennig-Thurau et al. (2010), has led to a major limitation in e-WOM research.

For instance, prior findings suggest that negative reviews enhance the credibility of online forums (Doh and Hwang, 2009; Hiura et al., 2010), decrease sales (Chevalier and Mayzlin, 2006; Ho et al., 2006; Sun, 2012), and negatively impact other actors' attitudes toward products or brand (Lee et al., 2009). However, other studies suggest that this negative impact occurs only when customers are exposed to a specific volume of negative reviews (Lee et al., 2008) for lesser-known brands (Vermeulen and Seegers, 2009) or utilitarian products (Sen and Lerman, 2007). Although the extant findings suggest a negative impact of negative reviews on customers' behavioral intentions (Qiu et al., 2012; Sen and Lerman, 2007; Zhang et al., 2010), other authors have found a counterintuitive effect of negative reviews in enhancing behavioral intentions of customers who feel a close connection toward a brand (Wilson et al., 2017).

In addition to the mixed findings, the extant e-WOM literature captures the negative impact of what customers say about service providers in their reviews. Building on this, it would be further interesting to understand the negative impact of how they say it. This has been overlooked in the extant literature, although this impact may differ based on the way customers engage in NVIB (King et al., 2014). Customers engage in NVIB by directly addressing other actors in their reviews, advising them what not to do (direct NVIB) or just sharing their negative experience without explicitly advising other actors (Indirect NVIB) (Azer and Alexander, 2018). Prior research has captured only direct roles that encompass an explicit piece of advice (e.g., recommending, referring, and warning) (Blazevic et al., 2013; Jaakkola and Alexander, 2014; Verhoef et al., 2010). However, no existing studies have investigated the impact of indirect NVIB and how this impact may differ from that of direct NVIB. In addition to the overarching difference between direct and indirect NVIB, the specific heterogeneity of the six forms of NVIB (see Table 1) within this indirect

(discrediting, regretting, and deriding behaviors) and direct (dissuading, endorsing competitors, and warning behaviors) classification implies variable impacts, which are relatively new to the literature and worthy of investigation. In this paper, in addition to providing new insights about the impact of six forms of NVIB, we will extend the extant knowledge about the moderating role of the number of reviews.

NVIBs	Definitions	Exemplars
Indirect NVIB		
Discrediting Behavior	Literal report of functional details of substandard service to discredit a service provider without explicitly addressing other actors in online reviews	<i>‘Unfortunately, the facilities haven’t been updated. Peeling paint, noisy, food was awful. None of the staff was able to do anything without the manager’s approval who conveniently was never available. A truly horrible place’</i>
Regretting Behavior	Communication of emotions of regret for choosing a service provider without explicitly addressing other actors in online reviews	<i>‘When I spent my night in this hotel it was my worst experience. I regretted my decision and I will not stay there again’</i>
Deriding Behavior	Usage of sarcasm to deride a service provider without explicitly addressing other actors in online reviews	<i>‘TV seemed to be an Internet stream as it kept buffering and played more like a slide show. Shaving light cover is lying next to bare bulb. This is what I can recall before my brain started to subliminally bury the horror to protect my sanity’</i>
Direct NVIB		
Dissuading Behavior	Explicit advice to convince other actors not to transact with a focal provider stressing on opposition to and the refusal of a focal provider	<i>‘The waiter was way too busy to listen to us and brought us vegetarian food we didn’t want or order. The food was greasy and expensive. No one cared that it wasn’t what we ordered. Do not eat here’</i>
Endorsing Competitors Behavior	Explicit recommendation of one or more competitors to other actors, over service providers	<i>‘If you are up for all you can eat in Port Madero, go to Gourmet Porteno better than this restaurant by far’</i>
Warning Behavior	Warning other actors of a probable risk based on a perilous service experience.	<i>‘WARNING!! BEWARE! Absolutely HORRIFYING!! We originally planned to stay for 2 nights, ended up staying for one only. As we ran away the receptionist then picked up a heavy glass ashtray to throw at us’</i>

Table 1: Forms of NVIB – definitions and exemplars (Azer and Alexander, 2018, pp. 477-479)

Forms of Negatively valenced Influencing Behavior

Indirect NVIB: Discrediting, Deriding and Regretting Behaviors

Customers engage in indirect NVIB using three different forms, namely, discrediting, regretting, and deriding behaviors (Azer and Alexander, 2018). Although customers engage in the three forms of indirect NVIB without explicitly addressing other actors in their reviews, they do that in different ways, literally (discrediting), emotionally (regretting), and sarcastically (deriding). We argue that discrediting behavior has a more negative impact on other actors' attitudes and behavior toward service providers than regretting behavior while deriding behavior should have a stronger negative impact than both types of behavior.

Customers engage in discrediting behavior by sharing their negative service experience without explicitly advising other actors not to transact with this provider. They report in their reviews details of substandard service in a functional way that incorporates detailed evaluation of tangible aspects of a firm or service provider, such as service environment, service quality, and staff (Azer and Alexander, 2018). Similarly, customers engaging in deriding behavior report informative details of substandard service in their reviews, albeit in a sarcastic way. One rational explanation for this, according to social psychologists, is that the reviewer may choose to use sarcasm instead of speaking literally in order to additionally convey a negative attitude toward service providers (Filik et al., 2016). In their reviews, they shift the polarity of positive or negative speech to its opposite (Giora et al., 2000; González-Ibáñez et al., 2011) by writing salient, incompatible meanings, specifically known to be more potent, retainable and memorable than literal comments (Colston, 1997; Giora, 2002). According to social psychology research, sarcasm enhances the critical effect and, hence, the negativity of comments compared to literal ones (Colston, 1997; Toplak and Katz, 2000). This is because sarcasm is perceived as being more condemning than literal comments (Bowes and Katz, 2011). Accordingly, deriding behavior may have a stronger negative impact than discrediting behavior.

Regretting behavior differs from discrediting and deriding behavior as customers focus mainly on communicating emotions of regret for choosing a specific provider. Communicating emotions of regret is known to elicit an avoidance motivation (Strack and Deutsch, 2004). Emotional expressions are very common in the context of service and hospitality (Lee et al., 2017). Although research suggests that embedded emotions in online reviews play a powerful role in changing customers' evaluations (Bagozzi et al., 1999), other

authors argue that emotional negative reviews decrease the degree of helpfulness of these reviews (Stieglitz and Dang-Xuan, 2013). This is because review readers may attribute emotions internally (to the reviewers' personal dispositions) or externally (to the reviewed hotels) (Kim and Gupta, 2012). Thus, they may consider expressed negative emotions in negative reviews as reviewers' dispositions or irrationality, and this is also viewed as bad and unpleasant behavior (Diefendorff and Richard, 2003).

Importantly, other actors tend to consider negative reviews as less informative when negative emotional expressions are embedded (Kim and Gupta, 2012; Lee et al., 2017). This is because emotional negative reviews provide less diagnostic information and, thus, do not assist the readers in understanding and evaluating the quality of the hotel services. This implies that by engaging in regretting behavior, customers may decrease the informativity of their reviews and, hence, decrease their impact compared to the more informative deriding and discrediting behaviors. Moreover, on top of being informative compared to the emotional regretting behavior, deriding behavior is expected to be more negative in its impact on other actors compared to literal discrediting behavior since sarcastic comments are more intense, potent, retainable, and memorable than literal ones (Bowes and Katz, 2011; Colston, 1997; Giora, 2002). Following this theorizing, we hypothesize that:

H1: Discrediting behavior will have a stronger negative impact than regretting behavior while deriding behavior will have a stronger negative impact than both on other actors' (i) attitudes and (ii) behavioral intentions toward service providers.

Direct NVIB: Dissuading, Endorsing Competitors, and Warning Behaviors

Customers engage in direct NVIB by using three forms, dissuading, endorsing competitors, and warning behaviors. Although customers engage in the three forms of direct NVIB by explicitly advising other actors not to transact with service providers, nuances of stressing opposition are different within each form, encompassing literal opposition (dissuading), opposition with alternative (endorsing competitor), and severe alarming (warning). We argue that endorsing competitors will have a stronger negative impact than dissuading behavior on other actors' attitudes and behaviors toward service providers, while warning will have a stronger negative impact compared to both types of behaviors.

Customers engage in NVIB by dissuading other actors from transacting with a focal firm or service provider, stressing opposition to providers based on a service experience (Azer and Alexander, 2018). By engaging in dissuading behavior, customers detail their unfavorable

service experience, explicitly advising other actors not to transact with focal service providers. The extant empirical research shows that injunctive messages are persuasive as they include advice to other actors on what to or not to do and, hence, have a strong impact on changing an individual's behavior (Lee et al., 2008; Schultz et al., 2008). However, customers may not limit their review to stressing opposition to providers; instead, they explicitly endorse competitors (Azer and Alexander, 2018). They recommend alternative competitors over the focal provider, attempting to persuade others to choose competitors by making them attractive to other actors over focal providers. Prior marketing research shows that providing customers with alternatives (competitors) can decrease their post-purchase evaluations, such as satisfaction toward the chosen brand and the decision to continue a service relationship (Jones et al., 2000; Lemon et al., 2002). Specifically, the attractiveness of alternatives influences the commitment to a service relationship (Lemon et al., 2002; Yim et al., 2007). Customers engaging in endorsing competitors behavior provide others with alternatives and compare them with focal providers, making those alternatives attractive, which is not what they do when they engage in dissuading behavior. Accordingly, we expect a stronger negative impact from endorsing competitors than dissuading behaviors on other actors' attitudes and behaviors toward service providers.

Unlike endorsing competitors and dissuading behaviors, customers engage in warning behavior to warn others from a perilous service experience that involves a severe threat or danger assessment (Azer and Alexander, 2018). Prior research shows that customers' feelings of insecurity based on perilous service experiences involving threat assessments exclusively triggers them to engage in warning behavior (Meloy et al., 2012). Customers engage in warning behavior differently; they use capital letters and stress on warning and alarming words (Azer and Alexander, 2018). Capital letters and alarming words play a central role in how others perceive their alerting reviews, as suggested by labeling and advertising research (Godfrey et al., 1983). According to health and safety studies, warning messages most likely induce fear of detrimental consequences and, accordingly, succeed in shifting the behavior of the receivers of these messages (Hammond et al., 2004; Stacy et al., 1993). Crucially, prior research shows that depriving customers of their fundamental human needs (e.g., security) is considered to be a more potent driver of the negative valence of behavior compared to dissatisfying levels of service (Patterson et al., 2006). Accordingly, we argue that customers warning other actors against a service provider to avoid a perilous service experience will have a stronger negative impact on their attitudes and behavioral intentions toward these

providers compared to dissuading and endorsing competitors, which are focused on dissatisfying service experiences.

H2: Endorsing competitors behavior will have a stronger negative impact than dissuading behavior while warning behavior will have a stronger negative impact than both on other actors' (i) attitudes and (ii) behavioral intentions toward service providers.

The Moderating Role of the Number of Reviews

Customers are usually exposed to negative as well as positive influencing information about the same offering, which, for customers, represent part of the information collection process (Sparks and Browning, 2011). According to previous research, customers are likely to look for negative reviews as they are perceived to be diagnostic and informative (Berezina et al., 2015). Consequently, customers are more influenced by negative reviews, especially about service experiences than positive ones (Lee et al., 2017; Park and Lee, 2009; Racherla and Friske, 2012). Such assumptions are justified by psychology literature based on the negativity bias's concept, which claims that negative events are more potent and dominant (Rozin and Royzman, 2001). Additionally, it is argued that customers give more weight and are attracted more to negative than positive information (Fiske et al., 1999); therefore, negative reviews can have more impact than positive reviews (Lee et al., 2008; Papathanassis and Knolle, 2011). Nevertheless, prior research presents mixed results regarding the power of positive over negative messages and their impact, with authors contrasting the relative power of negative messages (Chevalier and Mayzlin, 2006; Heitmann et al., 2007; Hollebeek and Chen, 2014) or positive messages (Adjei et al., 2010; Cheung et al., 2009; East et al., 2008; Kim and Gupta, 2012) for having the stronger impact. Although negative messages shared online are known to have a detrimental effect on a focal offering, service, or brand (Hollebeek and Chen, 2014; Qiu et al., 2012), authors argue that a few negative messages might serve to promote the creditability of a website or a review site (Doh and Hwang, 2009) since it is the number of positive reviews that matters (Babić Rosario et al., 2016; Berger et al., 2010; Wirtz et al., 2013). Importantly, these studies have studied negative reviews as homogenous rather than considering the interplay of different levels of intensity of NVIBs and valence. Accordingly, to approach this gap, we look at the interaction between the six forms of NVIB and higher and an equal number of positive reviews that go along with these forms, and we hypothesize that:

H3: The number of positive reviews will moderate the impact of NVIB, but not equally; the more intense the type of NVIB the weaker the moderation role of the number of positive reviews on its impact on other actors' (i) attitudes and (ii) behavioral intentions toward service providers.

To test these hypotheses, two experiments were conducted. The following section addresses the procedures, scenarios, manipulation checks, measurements, and data analysis of each experiment.

Study 1: Indirect forms of NVIB and number of positive reviews

Design and Procedures

This experiment tests hypotheses H1 and H3 using a 3 (Indirect NVIB: discrediting, regretting, and deriding behaviors) \times 2 (Number of positive reviews: equal & greater than) factorial design resulting in six scenarios (see Appendix A). The stimulant material was developed similarly to a TripAdvisor page, showing positive and negative TripAdvisor hotel reviews to ensure realism and believability. Also, to control for the content of reviews, we kept all scenarios about service staff; the difference is only in the way customers engage in indirect NVIB. The number of positive reviews for the 'greater than' condition was considered to be three reviews alongside one negative review as customers usually check four to twelve reviews before booking a hotel (TripAdvisor.co.uk, 2016). Thus, considering respondent fatigue, this study provided respondents with a maximum of four reviews (three positive reviews and one negative). Following the recommendations of Hair et al. (2010) for sample size requirements (0.05 alpha, 0.8 statistical power, and large effect size), a sample of 330 individuals (cell size=55, females 62.5%, average age = 37.3 years, $SD = 1.30$) was recruited through 'M-TURK', a specialized purchased panel provider. Therefore, the sample was drawn randomly from a subset population of real customers. We asked MTURK to ensure that the participants checked online reviews, especially on TripAdvisor. This was in addition to the screening question of TripAdvisor's usage. Using the randomization facility provided by Qualtrics, blocks of scenarios were designed to randomly capture 55 participants per scenario, assigned randomly (between-subjects) to conditions. The scenario realism was tested using an item adapted from (Gelbrich et al., 2015): '*I think the description of the situation is realistic*' and results show that the participants found the scenarios realistic ($M=6.15$, $SD=1.08$).

Manipulation Check and Measurements

The experimental manipulations were developed using the extant definitions of the three indirect NVIBs (Appendix A). The results of the manipulation checks resulted in dropping five participants from each group (they failed to answer manipulation questions correctly), leaving 300 participants (N=50/group). χ^2 test for the indirect NVIB indicates the different answer patterns between manipulations, $\chi^2(3) = 45.3$, $p < .001$. Similarly, the χ^2 test for number of positive reviews, $\chi^2(2) = 68.4$, $p < .001$.

Based on previous research on e-WOM, credibility of forum, recipient utilitarian value, and homophily were considered to affect the acceptance and persuasiveness of e-WOM (Ayeh et al., 2013; Babić Rosario et al., 2016; Reichelt et al., 2014). Moreover, the reaction to negative reviews might depend not only on the mere knowledge that a service failure occurred but also on the customer's attribution of this failure (Albrecht et al., 2016). Accordingly, four confounding variables were selected: attitude toward checking online reviews (utilitarian value), perceived forum credibility, blame attributions, and attributions of reviewers' motives to avoid the perceived bias of the reviewers. Some of the NVIB forms were more strongly worded than others such as warning behavior; this might have made participants believe there was malicious intent behind these reviews. Additionally, we deliberately hid any factor that reflected the reviewers' age, personal picture, gender, nationality, or social status (Babić Rosario et al., 2016; Steffes and Burgee, 2009).

After reading the scenarios, participants completed a questionnaire that comprised items to measure dependent variables, manipulation checks, and demographic items (age and gender) in this order. Confirmatory factor analysis (CFA) was performed on all the key scales used in this research using AMOS23 with maximum likelihood estimation (Bagozzi and Yi, 1988). The CFA revealed a good fit with the data ($\chi^2/df = 1.95$; CFI = .96; RMSEA = 0.02). Factors loading and reliability of scales were all above the recommended threshold of .7 (Hair et al., 2010) – (see Appendix B). Tests were undertaken to confirm convergent (AVE > .5) and discriminant (the maximum shared variance and the average shared variance were both less than the value of the AVE) validity (Bagozzi and Yi, 1988). As shown in Table 2, the square root of AVE for each construct was greater than the correlations between them and all other constructs. The results suggest an adequate discriminant validity of all measurements (Fornell and Larcker, 1981). Additionally, correlations among the study constructs show no threats of

multicollinearity ($R < .80$) (Hair et al., 2010). We examined common method variance bias with Harman's single factor test. The results from this test show that the most variance explained by one factor was 35%, indicating that common method bias is not a likely contaminant of our results (Harman, 1976; Podsakoff et al., 2003).

Table 2: Correlation Matrix – Study 1

	AT	BE	Conf 1	Conf 2	Conf 3	Conf 4
Attitudes (AT)	.88					
Behavioral Intentions (BE)	.457	.82				
Attitudes toward checking online reviews (Conf1)	.304	.255	.87			
Perceived Credibility of TripAdvisor (Conf2)	.329	.217	.202	.89		
Attributed Motives of Reviewer (Conf3)	.310	.345	.250	.215	.90	
Blame Attributions toward service providers (Conf4)	.290	.281	.120	.170	.201	.92

Note: Italicized diagonal elements are the square root of AVE for each construct. Off-diagonal elements are the correlations between constructs

Results

After satisfying preliminary checks of the assumption of homoscedasticity (Levene's Test $p > .05$) for the two dependent variables (Attitude: $p = .815$, Behavior: $p = .708$), the equality of the entire variance-covariance matrices (Box's Test $p = .251$), MANCOVA was conducted and the results reveal a significant interaction effect between NVIB and the number of positive reviews (Wilk's lambda = .98, $F(4, 544) = 18.23$, $p < .001$). Any effects for the confounding variables were non-significant under both conditions of the positive reviews. The interaction was significant for both attitudes and behaviors ($p < .001$) plotted for each of the dependent variables (see Figure 1), showing different intensity levels of indirect NVIBs. The mean scores show a stronger negative impact of the discrediting than regretting behaviors and a stronger negative impact of deriding behavior compared to both behaviors, which confirms H1. As seen in Table 3, regretting, discrediting and deriding behaviors have negative effects on other actors' attitudes and behavioral intentions. However, in cases where there were more positive than negative reviews, regretting behavior had less negative impact compared to discrediting behavior, while deriding behavior showed a stronger negative impact than both behaviors on other actors' attitudes ($M_{dis} = 3.00$, $M_{reg} = 4.00$, $M_{der} = 1.80$; $p < .001$) and behavioral intentions ($M_{dis} = 2.89$, $M_{reg} = 3.90$, $M_{der} = 1.90$; $p < .001$). Similarly, in cases where there were an equal number of positive and negative reviews, regretting behavior (Attitude: $M_{reg} = 3.25$, Behavior: $M_{reg} = 3.00$) had less negative impact compared to discrediting behavior (Attitude: $M_{dis} = 2.15$, Behavior: $M_{dis} = 2.00$), while deriding behavior (Attitude: $M_{der} = 1.57$, Behavior: $M_{der} = 1.51$) showed a stronger negative impact than both behaviors.

Thus, H3 is confirmed as the number of positive reviews moderates the impact of indirect NVIBs, however differently; the more intense the type of NVIB, as seen in the scores of deriding behavior compared to the other two types of behaviors, the weaker the moderation role of the number of positive reviews on its negative impact.

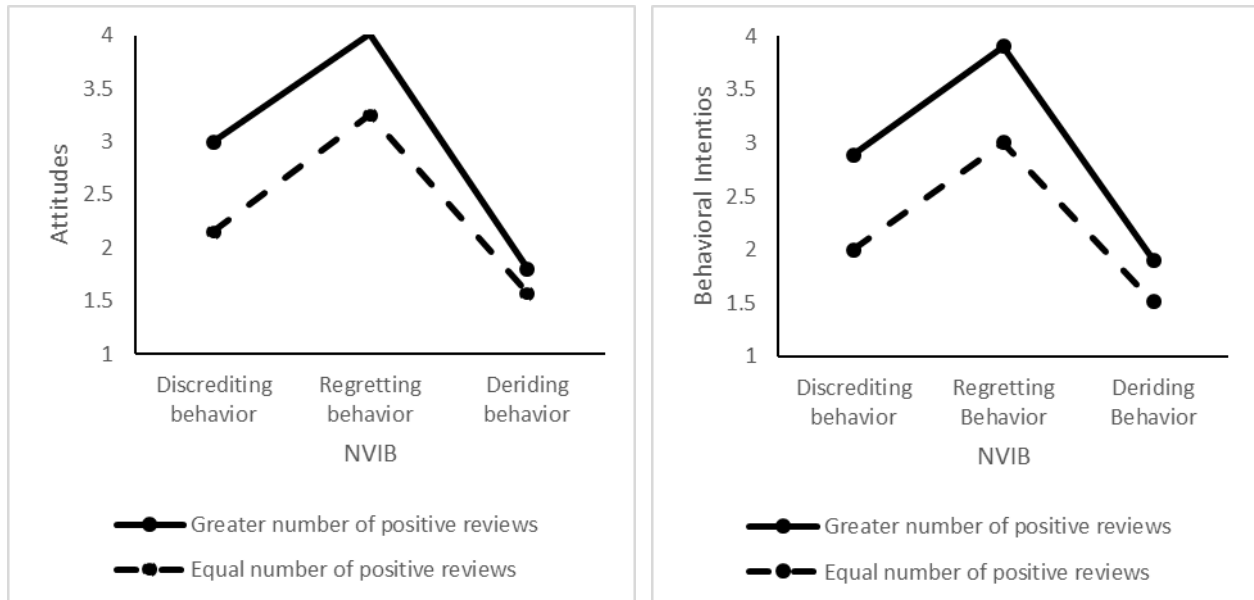


Figure 1: Interaction Effect for Dependent Variables (Study 1)

Table 3: Means of significant interaction effect on dependent variables, $p < .001$

Dependent Variables	Forms of NVIB	Number of Positive Reviews	Means
Attitude	Regretting	Greater	4.01
		Equal	3.25
	Discrediting	Greater	3.00
		Equal	2.15
	Deriding	Greater	1.80
		Equal	1.57
Behavioral Intentions	Regretting	Greater	3.90
		Equal	3.00
	Discrediting	Greater	2.89
		Equal	2.00
	Deriding	Greater	1.90
		Equal	1.51

Study 2: Direct forms of NVIB & Number of positive reviews

Design and Procedures

This experiment tests hypotheses H2 and H3 using a 3 (direct NVIB: dissuading, endorsing competitors and warning behaviors) \times 2 (number of positive reviews: equal &

greater than) factorial design, resulting in six scenarios (see Appendix A). A sample of 330 individuals (cell size=55, females 54.9%, average age = 42.5 years, $SD = 1.21$) was recruited through MTurk. As with Study 1, the scenarios were designed using the same procedures and were tested for their realism. The results show that participants found the scenarios realistic ($M=6.28$, $SD=1.15$).

Manipulation Check and Measurements

The results of the manipulation checks left 312 participants ($N=52/\text{group}$). An χ^2 test for direct NVIB indicates different answer patterns between manipulations, $\chi^2(4) = 105$, $p < .001$; similarly, the χ^2 test for the number of positive reviews $\chi^2(2) = 75.01$, $p < .001$. The same confounding and dependent variables from Study 1 were used in this experiment too. The CFA revealed a good fit with the data ($\chi^2/\text{df} = 1.90$; CFI = .92; RMSEA = 0.03) (Hu and Bentler, 1995). Factors loading and reliability of scales were all above the recommended threshold of .7 (Hair et al., 2010) – (see Appendix B). Additionally, as with Study 1, convergent (AVE > .5) and discriminant validity were satisfied (Bagozzi and Yi, 1988). In addition, the correlations among the study constructs showed no threats of multicollinearity ($R < .80$) (Hair et al., 2010) (see Table 4).

Table 4: Correlation Matrix – Study 2

	AT	BE	Conf 1	Conf 2	Conf 3	Conf 4
Attitudes (AT)	.85					
Behavioral Intentions (BE)	.480	.83				
Attitudes toward checking online reviews (Conf1)	.310	.315	.88			
Perceived Credibility of TripAdvisor (Conf2)	.212	.238	.222	.89		
Attributed Motives of Reviewer (Conf3)	.310	.360	.250	.215	.80	
Blame Attributions toward service providers (Conf4)	.322	.354	.110	.180	.251	.81

Note: Italicized diagonal elements are the square root of AVE for each construct. Off-diagonal elements are the correlations between constructs

Results

The results of a MANCOVA reveal a significant interaction effect between NVIB and the number of positive reviews (Wilk's lambda = .92, $F(4, 200) = 38.47$, $p < .001$), and any effects for the confounding variables were non-significant under both conditions of positive reviews. The interaction was significant for both attitudes and behaviors ($p < .001$) plotted for each of the dependent variables (see Figure 2), showing different levels of intensity of direct NVIBs. The mean scores show a stronger negative impact of endorsing competitors than dissuading behavior, while there was a stronger impact of warning behavior compared to both

behaviors, thus, confirming H2. As seen in Table 5, dissuading, endorsing competitors, and warning behaviors have negative effects on other actors' attitudes and behavioral intentions. However, in cases where there were more positive than negative reviews, dissuading behavior had less negative impact compared to endorsing competitors, while warning behavior showed a stronger negative impact than both behaviors on other actors' attitudes ($M_{diss}=2.9$, $M_{end}=1.98$, $M_{war}=1.12$; $p<.001$) and behavioral intentions ($M_{diss}=3.00$, $M_{end}=1.90$, $M_{war}=1.21$; $p<.001$). Similarly, in cases where there were an equal number of positive and negative reviews, dissuading behavior (Attitude: $M_{diss}=2.15$, Behavioral Intentions: $M_{diss}=2.50$) had less negative impact compared to endorsing competitors (Attitude: $M_{end}=1.43$, Behavior: $M_{end}=1.45$) while warning behavior (Attitude: $M_{war}=1.01$, Behavior: $M_{war}=1.01$) showed a stronger negative impact than both behaviors. The differences in means could be attributed to the relatively extreme tone of wording customers use when engaging in warning behavior. Thus, H3 is confirmed as the number of positive reviews moderates the impact of the direct NVIBs, however differently. Therefore, the more intense the type of NVIB, as seen in the scores of warning behavior compared to the other two types of behaviors, the weaker the moderation role of the number of positive reviews on its negative impact.

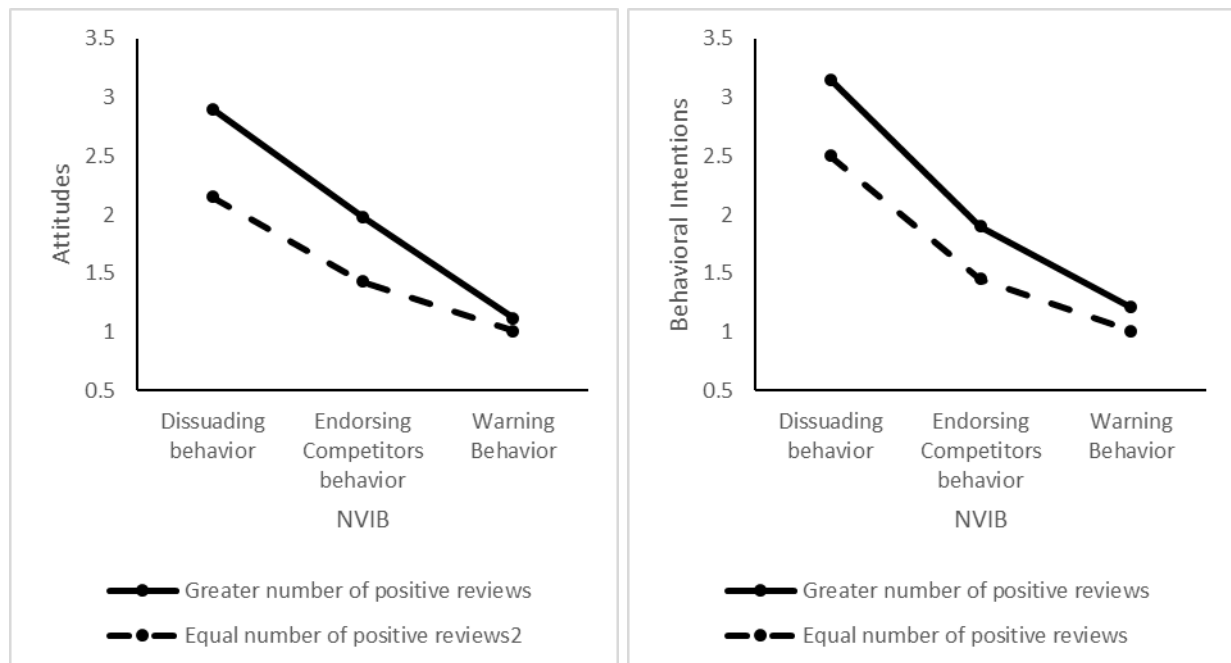


Figure 2: Interaction effect for dependent variables (Study 2)

Table 5: Means of significant interaction effect on dependent variables, $p < .001$

Dependent Variables	Forms of NVIB	Number of Positive Reviews	Means
Attitude	Dissuading	Greater	2.90
		Equal	2.15
	Endorsing Competitors	Greater	1.98
		Equal	1.43
	Warning	Greater	1.12
		Equal	1.01
Behavioral Intentions	Dissuading	Greater	3.00
		Equal	2.50
	Endorsing Competitors	Greater	1.90
		Equal	1.45
	Warning	Greater	1.21
		Equal	1.01

General Discussion

Theoretical Implications

This paper advances the empirical research on negatively valenced CEB and represents one of the first studies to provide a more nuanced view regarding different intensity levels of NVIB and how they are moderated by the number of positive reviews, thereby contributing to both the CEB and e-WOM literature. As opposed to the extant literature, which limits the influence of customers on other actors to the direct recommendation of service providers or warning other actors from transacting with focal providers (Blazevic et al., 2013; Kumar et al., 2010), this paper provides new knowledge about negative influence that includes six indirect (*discrediting, regretting, and deriding* behavior) and direct (*dissuading, endorsing competitors, and warning behaviors*) NVIB. Importantly, this study extends the impact of what customers say in their reviews to provide empirical evidence of the impact of how they say it, thereby responding to recent research calls made in several e-WOM studies (e.g. Balaji et al., 2016; Hennig-Thurau et al., 2010; King et al., 2014).

This paper investigates the impact of three different ways in which customers engage in indirect NVIB that involve different intensity levels: literally (discrediting behavior), emotionally (regretting behavior), and sarcastically (deriding behavior). The empirical results of this paper show a stronger negative impact of deriding behavior on other actors' attitudes and behavioral intentions toward service providers compared to both discrediting and regretting behaviors. Customers engage in deriding behavior, sharing informative details of substandard service in their reviews, although in a sarcastic way. Our results extend on the

results of prior research (e.g. Colston, 1997; Toplak and Katz, 2000), which show the intensity of sarcasm compared to literal comments, by showing the intensity of derision compared not only to literal ones (discrediting) but also to emotional comments (regretting). The results also show a stronger negative impact of discrediting than regretting behavior. Prior research suggests the tendency of other actors to consider negative reviews as less informative when negative emotional expressions are embedded (Kim and Gupta, 2012; Lee et al., 2017). However, these results addressed the impact of emotional negative reviews compared to positive reviews. Our results, therefore, offer new insights into the impact of emotional negative reviews, not only in comparison to positive reviews but also to other types of indirect NVIB.

By explicitly addressing other actors in their reviews, customers advise them not to transact with a service provider; yet, the nuances of stressing opposition to service providers differ to encompass different intensity levels: literal opposition (dissuading), opposition with alternative (endorsing competitor), and severe alarming of a perilous experience (warning). Although prior research shows that injunctive messages are persuasive and have the potential to shift a receiver's behavior as they provide explicit advice (Lee et al., 2008; Schultz et al., 2008), this research did not consider different intensity levels of direct NVIBs. For example, when customers just stress opposition to service providers compared to recommending competitors or more intensely alarming of a perilous experience. Our results show the intensity of warning behavior compared to endorsing competitors and dissuading behaviors. Moreover, we extend the current understanding of the negative valence of behavior by showing the negative impact of warning behavior, which is based on a perilous service experience that involves a danger or threat assessment compared to the impact of endorsing competitors and dissuading behaviors that are based on dissatisfying levels of services. Additionally, we show a stronger negative impact of endorsing competitors than dissuading behavior, which is consistent with prior findings that suggest providing customers with alternatives negatively impacts their decisions to continue a service relationship (Lemon et al., 2002; Yim et al., 2007).

Additionally, this study extends the extant e-WOM research with new findings regarding the interaction effect of the number of positive reviews on the cause-effect relationship between different forms of negative reviews and other actors' attitudes and behavioral intentions toward service providers. These findings provide a view that goes beyond the

existing understanding of the aggregate impact of negative reviews when accompanied by positive reviews, which present mixed results, with authors contrasting the relative power of negative messages (Chevalier and Mayzlin, 2006; Heitmann et al., 2007; Hollebeek and Chen, 2014) or positive messages (Adjei et al., 2010; Cheung et al., 2009; Kim and Gupta, 2012) for having the stronger impact. However, none of these studies considered the interplay of different levels of intensity of NVIBs and positive valence. This study extends previous research findings by revealing that not all negative reviews have the same impact when accompanied by positive reviews. Less intense NVIBs (direct and indirect) can be moderated by positive reviews, especially, if these positive reviews are greater than the negative ones. Prior research shows that a few negative messages might serve to promote the creditability of a website or a review site (Doh and Hwang, 2009) since it is the number of positive reviews that matters (Babić Rosario et al., 2016; Berger et al., 2010; Wirtz et al., 2013). Instead, our results reveal that it is the intensity level of NVIB that matters. Warning, deriding, and endorsing competitors behaviors have a stronger negative impact on other actors' attitudes and behavioral intentions toward service providers than other types of NVIB, even when juxtaposed with a greater number of positive reviews, while a more favorable outcome of greater number of positive reviews is shown when accompanied by regretting, discrediting, and dissuading behaviors in this order (most to least favorable). In other words, there are forms of negative influence that customers enact in their negative reviews; hence, an aggregate view of the negative impact of negative online reviews is no longer useful.

Managerial Implications

This paper enhances the managerial understanding of negative engagement by providing a nuanced view of the different intensity levels of NVIB and how they are moderated by number of positive reviews. Based on the results, less intense NVIBs (regretting, discrediting, and dissuading behaviors) can be moderated by positive reviews, especially, if these positive reviews are greater than the negative ones. Hence, we recommend that review sites may follow/precede them with more positive reviews to soften their negative impact. Importantly, it is highly recommended that managers should not neglect the impact of a single negative review, especially if it shows one of the more intense NVIBs (warning, deriding, and endorsing competitors behaviors) being of strong negative impact, even with the presence of a greater number of positive reviews. Hence, managers are recommended to detect these different intensity levels on review sites using semantic tools (e.g. google alerts, SentiOne, social mention, trackur...etc.) early on. Semantic tools can help managers to pay attention to

what customers say about their products, services or brands. For example, alarming words and capital letters to detect warning behavior, nonliteral language and sarcasm to detect deriding behavior, and for endorsing competitors, the mention of the names of competitors could be detected by text-link or social mention tools.

Importantly, to prevent other actors from drawing their own, negative inferences about this service provider (Wan, 2013; Xie et al., 2016) a response to warning, deriding, and endorsing competitors behaviors is likely to be critical, given their consistent negative impact on other actors' attitudes and behavioral intentions toward service providers. If time is a challenge, it is recommended that managers respond to reviews that demonstrate warning, deriding, endorsing behaviors, preferably in this order, which is based on their level of intensity. The managerial response to warning behavior which is exclusively based on perilous experiences is recommended to show concrete evidence that any insecurity issue has been readdressed. In addition, it is highly recommended that this response should include a managerial promise of future security to reduce potential anxiety (Meloy et al., 2012). In response to deriding behavior, it is recommended that the managerial response include an acknowledgement of the issue reported in the customer's review, an apology, and a highlight of the service provider or firm's values, maybe in a friendly good-humoured way, as friendly and humorous responses are known to counter the negative effects of derision (Collinson, 2002). Endorsing competitors behavior incorporates direct recommendations of competitors; therefore, it is recommended that managers use a text-link analysis to know what customers are saying about specific competitors and their services (Balaji et al., 2016). Importantly, it is recommended that managers in their response to the endorsing competitors form should not refute what customers are saying about the competitors; this is likely to communicate distrust on the part of the service provider, and may discourage other actors from using their services (Sparks et al., 2016). Instead, in their response to this form, managers are recommended to highlight the aspects that encourage customers to choose them over their competitors.

Limitations and Further Research

The limitations of this study offer the potential for future research in this area. TripAdvisor reviews were selected for the reason of appropriateness rather than representativeness (Kozinets, 2010); future research could replicate this study using other online forums. It was advantageous that the reviews in all the experiment's conditions did not show the nationality, age, name, social status, gender, or personal pictures of the reviewers as this eliminated any

confounding of homophily. However, in a real-life setting, these factors are neither anonymous nor the same in all reviews. Future research might consider manipulating these factors and test their impact as moderators or mediators. To ensure scenario realism we designed the scenarios similar to what customers write in real-life reviews using the six forms of NVIB. However, customers use extreme tone of wording when engaging in some forms such as warning behavior, which could attribute to the differences in the mean scores, despite confounding for attributions of reviewers' motives. Customers are exposed to different forms of negative reviews. Managerial responses to these reviews are expected to yield favorable customers' inferences (Sparks et al., 2016). Future research might also measure the impact of each form of NVIB paired with the tailored and standard managerial responses.

Service providers' situations may change (e.g., if a hotel is refurbished) and customer reviews may change over time as well. Future research may replicate this study by including the time factor (e.g., when the reviews were written) in the research design. Additionally, future research could investigate the impact of the six forms moderated by the dynamic prices of hotel rooms or their aggregate ratings. Importantly, this paper provides results about the impact of six types of direct and indirect NVIB and the moderating role of the volume of accompanied positive reviews given the absence of a typology of positively valenced influencing behavior (PVIB). It is recommended that future research provide a typology of PVIB and consider its moderating role on the impact of the six forms of NVIB. Finally, this paper shows the difference in the impact of distinct forms of NVIB within online reviews. It is recommended that future e-WOM research move beyond the aggregate view of negative/positive e-WOM to offer more nuanced views of the typologies of positive and negative e-WOM, which is expected to enrich this research stream.

Appendix A: Scenarios and Manipulation

(The stimulant material shown to participants was developed so as to appear similar in appearance to a TripAdvisor page).

You are planning a vacation and while checking Hotels at your planned destination on TripAdvisor, you came across these reviews:		Manipulation Check
Discrediting	<p><i>“Disgusting”</i></p> <p>We were disgusted at the service of the staff in this hotel, very rude and completely unhelpful. They don’t seem to be bothered about any form of customer service.</p>	<p>In this review, the reviewer is trying to</p> <ol style="list-style-type: none"> Inform other reviewers of a bad experience Advise other reviewers explicitly not to transact with a service provider
Regretting Behavior	<p><i>“Never again”</i></p> <p>A regretful choice, the staff was so rude and completely unhelpful. They didn’t seem to be bothered about any form of customer service. Definitely, won’t be going back there again.</p>	<p>In this review, the reviewer is trying to</p> <ol style="list-style-type: none"> Express their regret for choosing a service provider Advise other reviewers explicitly not to transact with a service provider
Deriding Behavior	<p><i>“Award of the worst service!”</i></p> <p>The staff were running around like headless chickens, no attention whatsoever was given to us. So rude and not bothered to serve! Congratulations! The hotel deserves the award of the worst service.</p>	<p>In this review, the reviewer is trying to</p> <ol style="list-style-type: none"> Deride a service provider based on a bad service experience Advise other reviewers explicitly not to transact with a service provider

Dissuading Behavior	<p><i>“Don’t go there!”</i></p> <p>Terrible Customer Service!! The receptionist was very rude. The attitude of the room service staff was unhelpful too they didn’t seem to be bothered about any form of customer service. Don’t go there!</p>	<p>In this review, the reviewer is trying to</p> <ol style="list-style-type: none"> Inform other reviewers of a bad experience Advise other reviewers explicitly not to transact with a service provider
Endorsing Competitors Behavior	<p><i>“Terrible experience”</i></p> <p>The staff is very rude and not bothered to serve you. Go to Sofitel instead, I’d recommend it over this place. Staff there is very helpful, so responsible and would go the extra mile to provide a better service.</p>	<p>In this review, the reviewer is trying to</p> <ol style="list-style-type: none"> Inform other reviewers of a bad service experience Recommend competitors over a service provider based on a bad experience
Warning Behavior	<p><i>“WARNING!!!!!!”</i></p> <p>BECAREFUL! The staff is so rude and unhelpful, not bothered about service, nor the SAFETY of your LIFE or your possessions. BEWARNED AND AVOID LIKE A PLAGUE!!!!</p>	<p>In this review, the reviewer is trying to</p> <ol style="list-style-type: none"> Inform other reviewers of a bad service experience Warn other reviewers based on a perilous experience.

Equal number of positive reviews	<p><i>“Good Hotel”</i></p> <p>This is a good hotel. We think it is perfect for a few days sightseeing. Staff is good and the service is too. Would book again</p>	<p>The number of positive reviews is the negative reviews</p> <p>a. Greater than</p> <p>b. Equal to</p>
Greater number of positive reviews	<p><i>“Good Hotel”</i></p> <p>This is a good hotel. We think it is perfect for a few days sightseeing. Staff is good and the service is too. Would book again</p> <p><i>“Nice experience”</i></p> <p>The hotel is perfect for a short stay. Good service and kind receptionists. Close to everything, very near to the bus station too.</p> <p><i>“Good stay”</i></p> <p>Had a night stay and we had a great time. Service is good, room service is so helpful and the receptionist too. All in all it was a good stay.</p>	<p>The number of positive reviews is the negative reviews</p> <p>a. Greater than</p> <p>b. Equal to</p>

Appendix B: Items and Reliability

Constructs and Items	Factor Loadings & α /CR			
	Exp.1		Exp.2	
Attitude (Bansal and Taylor, 1999; Cronin and Taylor, 1992; Putrevu and Lord, 1994) My overall feeling about this hotel can be best described as (Very Unfavorable /Very favorable) I think the quality of service of this hotel is (Very Poor / Excellent) The decision to book this hotel is considered a good one (Strongly Disagree / Strongly Agree)	.91 .92 .90	.92/ .95	.90 .91 .89	.91/ .90
Behavioral Intentions^a (Gelbrich, 2010; Park et al., 2004) Would you consider booking this hotel? Would you recommend it to other people? I would tell other people good things about the hotel	.95 .91 .90	.95/ .90	.92 .95 .90	.93/ .96
Attitude toward Checking Online Reviews (Donthu and Gilliland, 1996; Qiu et al., 2012) Online reviews are helpful for my purchase decision making If I do not read online reviews prior to purchase, I will feel worried about my decision I want to be sure about my purchase decisions	.81 .85 .88	.89/ .95	.88 .91 .89	.87/ .92
Perceived TripAdvisor Credibility (Qiu et al., 2012) In general, I think TripAdvisor is trustworthy In general, I think TripAdvisor is reliable In general, I think TripAdvisor is credible	.90 .95 .90	.95/ .92	.95 .92 .97	.98/ .90
Perceived reviewers' motives (Sen and Lerman, 2007) The motive of the reviewers is to inform others about this hotel I feel the reviewers' comments are based on their true experience Other motives might influence the reviewers to post these review	.90 .80 .81	.85/ .95	.90 .89 .83	.87/ .90
Blame Attribution toward service providers (Gelbrich, 2010) The service provider is responsible for the problem The reason for the problem is something the service provider had control over The service provider could have taken action to prevent the problem but has not	.90 .88 .93	.91/ .95	.89 .91 .93	.93/ .90

Note. ^a7-point definitely will not/definitely will Likert scale, with exception of Attitude, which was a 7-point Likert scale labeled as shown. ^bAll confounding items were anchored on 7-point strongly disagree/strongly agree Likert-type scale. ^c Standardized Loadings: all loadings were significant at $p < .001$.

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