What Makes a Credible and Helpful Online Video Review?

Examining the Effects of Reviewer Disclosure

- Master's Thesis –

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Abstract

In the past 20 years, consumer-generated text reviews have become a vital source of information relevant to consumers' purchasing decisions. A more recent phenomenon is the creation of video reviews which can be uploaded to e-commerce websites and video-sharing platforms. Despite their ever-increasing popularity, little research has been dedicated to user-generated video reviews. Moreover, their influence on purchase decisions is dampened by information overload and distrust in review authenticity. I address these problems by investigating the effects of reviewer visibility in a video review on consumers' perceptions of credibility and helpfulness. Additionally, it is proposed that these effects differ depending on the type of product being reviewed and the level of source-receiver similarity. The research questions are explored via an online experiment with a 2 (reviewer visible vs. reviewer not visible) x 2 (search product vs. experience product) between-subjects research design. My findings demonstrate that disclosing a reviewer's identity in a video review significantly increases consumers' perceptions of reviewer credibility and review helpfulness. Further, the magnitude of this effect does not differ depending on whether the reviewed product is a search good or an experience good. When a reviewer is visible, consumers may assess whether they share certain characteristics with the reviewer. The thereupon based degree of source-receiver similarity is shown to positively affect the reviewer's trustworthiness and expertise ratings. This paper represents one of the first contributions to academic literature on video reviews and its insights can be utilized by review platforms, manufacturers, and consumers.

Keywords: *Video Reviews, Online Product Reviews, eWOM, Credibility, Helpfulness, Trust, Expertise, Search/Experience Goods, Homophily, Consumer Behavior, Information Processing*

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1. Introduction

In 1995, when *Amazon.com* introduced a function that grants customers the possibility to publish their own product reviews, the online retailer's vendors protested because they feared the impact of negative evaluations (Stone, 2013). Today, this situation would be inconceivable, as user-generated online reviews have become a standard on countless websites for seemingly every imaginable type of product and service. *Amazon* remains one of, if not the most, well-known sources of user-generated online reviews (also denoted as *electronic word-of-mouth* or *eWOM*), offering several hundred million reviews across numerous product categories. But also other websites including *TripAdvisor* and *Yelp*, on which consumers can evaluate services offered by, for instance, restaurants, hotels, and theatres, attract millions of visitors from all over the world.

The rise of user-created online reviews can be largely explained by the fact that consumers tend to consider reviews created by other consumers to be more reliable and trustworthy than information provided by marketers (Shan, 2016; Utz, Kerkhof, van den Bos, 2012). Furthermore, both their creation and access are fast, simple, and inexpensive (Dellarocas, 2003). As a consequence, they have become an essential element in the purchase decision process of modern consumers and thus one of the most effective marketing tools (Dabholkar, 2006; Jiménez & Mendoza, 2013). For online retailers, this development represents an opportunity to not only enhance their websites' perceived usefulness but also to boost sales - that is, if the reviews lead to positive purchase decisions (Kumar & Benbasat, 2006; Mudambi & Schuff, 2010).

Although the vast majority of online reviews exist in form of text reviews, consumer-generated video reviews have become increasingly popular. In comparison to equivalent text reviews, video

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reviews are perceived to be more credible, helpful, and persuasive because their visual and audible cues are able to convey supplementary information about product experiences (Xu, Chen, & Santhanam, 2015). *Amazon* introduced video reviews in 2007 and since then other websites such as *Yelp* implemented analogous options (Nicole, 2007). The majority of video reviews, however, are uploaded to social media and video platforms, in particular *YouTube*. One of the most renowned *YouTube* review channels is run by Marques Brownlee, a 22-year old student who reviews consumer electronics. His videos have more than 450 million views and his channel has over 3.6 million subscribers - about three times as many as the professional review channel *CNET*. Brownlee attributes this success to his presentation style: "You want a personality to back it up rather than some robot telling you X is better than Y" (Pandell, 2014). Indeed, although it would be possible to exclusively show the product and thus remain anonymous, his videos frequently feature scenes of him using the product or talking into the camera. Naturally, the case of Brownlee is an exception as most video reviewers have a much smaller audience. Nevertheless, this example illustrates that video reviews reach a substantial share of consumers and should therefore be taken seriously by manufacturers and online vendors.

However, both text and video reviews face two major challenges which restrict their impact on consumers' purchase decision processes. First, since more and more reviews are created every day, some products have accumulated thousands of individual customer reviews of varying quality. Website visitors who are interested in buying a product with numerous reviews need to spend a lot of time and effort to seek out the most helpful reviews. This feeling of being overwhelmed by the review quantity is known as *information overload*. Typical results of this problem are frustration, poor decisions, or termination of the purchasing process (Huang, Chen, Yen, & Tran, 2015). E-businesses address this issue by asking users to rate available reviews as

either "Helpful" or "Not helpful". The results of this poll can be used as review sorting criterion so that website users may concentrate solely on the most helpful ones. The second problem is consumers' skepticism towards review accuracy and intentions. Given that online reviews have such great importance in purchasing processes it seems contradictory that 80% of consumers express concerns about review authenticity (Weber Shandwick, 2012). Yet, this fear is justified since cases of online reviews published by profit-motivated manufacturers or manipulative agencies which pretend to be independent customers are constantly reported (Mayzlin, Dover, & Chevalier, 2014). E-businesses hunt fraudulent reviews by establishing dedicated teams or AI machine learning-systems and take legal actions against their individual or organizational authors (Gibbs, 2015; Rubin, 2016). Still, as the anonymous nature of review platforms complicates the detection of fake reviews, users need to decide for themselves whether a given review is credible.

While text reviews and the factors that influence their credibility and helpfulness are discussed thoroughly in academic literature, video reviews remain largely neglected. Although these two review variants ultimately have the same purpose, it would be unreasonable to assume that findings concerning text reviews can be transferred to video reviews. To address this research gap, I seek to answer the following problem statement:

What factors improve the credibility and helpfulness of customer-created online video reviews?

Due to the complex nature of online reviews, a comprehensive answer to this question is not possible within the limitations of this paper. Therefore, I concentrate on a single aspect, namely the visual disclosure of the reviewer. Earlier research on text reviews has shown that revealing a reviewer's identity (e.g. via a profile picture) tends to improve consumers' perceptions (e.g. Forman, Ghose, & Wiesenfeld, 2008; Shan, 2016). The question arises as to whether it is useful

to consumers when reviewers revoke their anonymity by presenting themselves in video reviews. Moreover, I account for the possibly intervening effects of product type and viewer-reviewer similarity. Hence, my research questions are the following:

Main RQ: *Does visual disclosure of the reviewer positively affect the perceived credibility and helpfulness of a video product review?*

Sub-RQ 1: *Do the effects of reviewer disclosure differ depending on the type of product being reviewed?*

Sub-RQ 2: *Do the effects of reviewer disclosure differ depending on the level of similarity between the reviewer and the viewer?*

These questions are examined by analyzing data from an experiment which intends to simulate an online shopping situation. With respect to review theory, I expect to shed light on the largely unexplored topic of video reviews. Further, the theoretical insights are translated into explicit best practice suggestions which may be utilized by review platforms for decisions regarding their own consumer-generated video review options. Likewise, the findings may serve online shoppers as a guideline to create video reviews of higher quality and to better understand their own cognitive processes when judging other users' reviews.

The remainder of this paper is structured as follows: In chapter two, I draw from prior review literature to develop hypotheses and a research framework. Chapter three provides a description of this study's experimental design. Next, the results of the experiment are analyzed in chapter four. In the fifth and final chapter, the outcomes are reflected upon and translated into implications for theory and practice. Moreover, I outline the limitations of my study and suggest topics for future research.

2. Literature Review & Hypotheses Development

The purpose of this chapter is to explicate the basic elements of online video reviews and to point out crucial findings from related literature based on which I construct hypotheses and my research framework. Initially, however, the differences between text and video reviews are clarified. Furthermore, I describe the effects of online reviews on consumers and marketing, as well as two concepts from information processing theory which are fundamental to research on online reviews.

2.1 Text Reviews vs. Video Reviews

To the best of my knowledge, a study by Xu et al. (2015) is currently the only accessible article from an academic journal which contains research involving online video reviews. For this reason, most of the articles cited in this paper are concerned exclusively with text reviews. Since video reviews are basically an advancement of text reviews, it seems reasonable to assume that many of the findings from text review research are applicable to video reviews. Nonetheless, this assumption must be consistently challenged due to the additional audio-visual information carried by the video format. For comparison purposes, screenshots of an *Amazon* text and video review are depicted in Appendix A and Appendix B respectively.

By incorporating "color, visual cues, dynamic movements, and sound", video reviews can impart much more information than text reviews and therefore tend to influence user perceptions in different ways (Xu et al., 2015, p.87). First of all, prior studies express that information mediums with peripheral cues are more likely to grab the attention of potential receivers because they serve as stimuli that activate processing channels of the human mind (Weathers, Sharma, & Wood,

2007). Although it may be inferred that such additional information quickly leads to sensory overload, this is not necessarily the case. In fact, media richness theory suggests that messages with a variety of cues are perceived to be more clear and attention-grabbing (Daft & Lengel, 1986; Xu et al., 2015). Further, product videos are well suited to reduce consumers' uncertainty regarding product performance as they have the ability to illustrate how a product performs in action and thus convey more realistic impressions of product experience. Xu et al. (2015) confirm these benefits by measuring the impact of presentation format on multiple dimensions of consumer perceptions in an experiment. Their results show that videos reviews receive higher ratings on credibility, helpfulness, and persuasiveness than text reviews with identical content.

Another major difference between video and text reviews concerns the platforms to which they are uploaded. A lot of articles name *Amazon* as the prime example of consumer-generated review sources. However, given that a larger quantity of video reviews can be found on *YouTube* than on *Amazon*, it must be emphasized that these two video review platforms differ in terms of their business model, user interface, and functionalities. Unlike *Amazon*, *YouTube* does not sell the products presented in video reviews because they are not an e-retailer but a video-sharing website which generates revenue by displaying advertisements to its users. Furthermore, *YouTube* encourages its users to upload all kinds of video content, with the consequence that product reviews represent only a minor part of all their available videos. For these reasons, the interface of *YouTube* is not designed for online shopping but rather to offer its users a pleasant media consumption experience (see Appendix C for a screenshot of a video review on *YouTube*).

In sum, the following pages state findings from text review studies which are for the greater part assumed to be generalizable to other review formats and hence form the theoretical basis for my

hypotheses on video reviews. Nonetheless, whenever the special characteristics of video reviews may not be relatable to a relationship proposed in a text review study, I will accentuate it.

2.2 The Effects of Online Reviews on Purchasing Behavior and Marketing

The rise of the internet has altered business-consumer relationships and therewith widespread marketing concepts in countless ways. Not only have consumers access to substantially more products via internationally operating retail websites but their options for expressing and obtaining product information have drastically increased as well. Although the opinions of shop assistants and traditional word-of-mouth are still relevant for forming opinions, consumer-created online reviews are nowadays considered one of the most crucial sources in the purchase decision process (Plummer, 2007). In fact, 70% of American consumers state that they seek advice online before making an irregular purchase and on average look at 10.4 sources (Mintel, 2015; Simonson & Rosen, 2014).

The purchase decision process consists of six stages: need recognition, information search, evaluation of alternatives, purchase decision, purchase, and post-purchase evaluation (Mudambi & Schuff, 2010). Since the primary purpose of online reviews is to aid consumers' purchase decisions (i.e. either commit to buy or not), they are particularly relevant when searching for information and evaluating product alternatives. When consumers work through all available reviews for a certain product or product type, they face a tradeoff between accuracy and search costs (Johnson & Payne, 1985). An extensive search for accurate product information decreases purchase uncertainty but simultaneously increases the expenditure of time and cognitive effort (Nelson, 1970). To facilitate a purchase decision with relatively low search cost, a review must be diagnostic. *Review diagnosticity* incorporates not only the reduction of uncertainty but also the

reduction of equivocality which emerges when a review contains ambiguous information (Weathers, Swain, & Grover, 2015). Finally, during the post-purchase evaluation phase, a customer may decide to publish a review about his or her own experience and by doing so increases the pool of available reviews even further. Often, this action is motivated by the need for self-verification, peer recognition from other members of the respective online community, or the altruistic stimulus to aid other consumers with their purchase decision processes (Forman et al., 2008; Hennig-Thurau, Gwinner, Walsh, & Gremler 2004). At the same time, consumers may be reluctant to share their thoughts because of the possibility that their opinion gets criticized by other users, or because the disclosure of personal information through a review creates privacy concerns such as identity theft (Milne, Rohm, & Bahl, 2004; Moon, 2000).

Consumers' universal access to information as well as their ability to express themselves online has shifted the center of power from suppliers and distributors to the customer (Drucker, 2001; Schmidt, Rosenberg, & Eagle, 2014). As people switch to digital channels which provide product information created by (allegedly) independent sources, the effectiveness of classical advertising like TV commercials on brand or product reputation declines (Cheung, Xiao, & Liu, 2014; Hennig-Thurau et al., 2010; Maddox, 2008). A major consequence of this development is that deficient products are unlikely to succeed, regardless of their marketing budget. Likewise, even the smallest company which does not spend any money on advertising can become successful through positive eWOM. These effects are verified in a study by Luca (2011) who discovers that *Yelp* reviews tend to improve the sales of independent restaurants whereas chain restaurants lose customers in areas with a high level of *Yelp* users. The bottom-line is that manufacturers and retailers must consider the impact of customer-created online reviews on their reputation and

sales figures. While providing high-quality goods is paramount, a thorough understanding on how online reviews affect consumer behavior is important as well.

2.3 Information Processing

In general, information processing theory deals with the question how people process received information. More recently, it has been applied to computer-mediated communication to examine how information is processed in digital environments where several conditions differ from those in face-to-face situations.

For the research at hand, *dual-process theories* are of special relevance because they describe how consumers analyze reviews by either spending extensive cognitive effort or applying simple decision rules based on heuristic cues. Two of the most widespread dual-process models are the *elaboration likelihood model* (ELM) and the *heuristic-systematic model* (HSM) (Zhang, Zhao, Cheung, & Lee, 2014). The ELM is a socio-psychological concept which is frequently applied in marketing and media research. In essence, it states that people interpret messages through central or peripheral routes. In the context of online reviews, the central route is defined as the review content and specifically the arguments included by the reviewer. When following the peripheral route, recipients pay attention to external message characteristics such as the message presentation format, review rating, and source attributes (Xu et al., 2015). The HSM implies that consumers tend to reflect on all relevant information contained in a message if they have sufficient cognitive resources and motivation (Zhang et al., 2014). The heuristic part of the HSM refers to the act of analyzing messages through informational cues which requires significantly less effort than processing the systematic part which is analogous to the central route of the ELM. While both models exhibit a similar structure, only the HSM explicitly acknowledges that the

two described processes may occur simultaneously (Xu et al., 2015, Zhang et al., 2014). However, the ELM has received more empirical proof and is applied more often in review literature (Zhang et al., 2014).

2.4 Common Dependent Variables in Online Review Literature

Although there is a wide range of articles on customer reviews, many of them share similar frameworks. With respect to the outcomes, researchers commonly observe the following variables: sales, purchase intention, helpfulness, and credibility.

2.4.1 Sales & Purchase Intention

In cases where the manufacturer's economic impact is of relevance, product sales should be considered as the dependent variable (Ghose & Ipeirotis, 2007). However, since these data are usually strictly confidential and thus not available to scholars, variables such as sales rank often need to serve as a proxy. In experimental studies, sales can be approximated by asking participants for their purchase intention. This variable is also applicable when a review's level of persuasiveness needs to be measured (Jensen, Averbeck, Zhang, & Wright, 2013).

2.4.2 Review Helpfulness

Helpfulness plays a special role in the context of online reviews, as several review websites utilize the *wisdom of the crowd* by providing visitors the option to evaluate whether an individual review was able to support their purchase decision process. Typically, a simple question such as "Was this review helpful to you?" is placed below each review (see Appendix A, B). Many review platforms display the number of helpful votes based on which website visitors can assess whether the review may be valuable to their purchase decision. Moreover, *Amazon* uses this

rating as a default sorting criteria such that the most helpful reviews of a particular product are always presented first. It must be stressed that a review is helpful not only when it convinces a reader to purchase a product but also when it facilitates a decision against a product (Mudambi & Schuff, 2010). Unlike sales and purchase intention, helpfulness is thus a rather consumer-oriented ranking system (Ghose & Ipeirotis, 2007). However, there is empirical evidence that the number of helpfulness votes tends to be positively correlated with sales, signifying that helpfulness carries an economic meaning as well (Chen, 2013). On *YouTube*, a similar rating function is implemented which asks users whether they like or dislike a video by giving them the option to click on a "thumbs up/down" symbol (see Appendix C).

2.4.3 Credibility

Another aspect that is critical for a review's impact on consumer purchase decisions is its perceived credibility. A review – or rather its source – is considered credible when it realizes the two underlying dimensions of credibility: *expertise* and *trustworthiness* (Ohanian, 1990). Expertise is defined as the reviewer's ability to given an accurate and competent assessment of a product due to his or her proficiency with the particular product category (Shan, 2016). In contrast, the level of trust is dependent on a message receiver's presumption regarding a reviewer's motivation for either product endorsement or disapproval. Reviews are generally regarded as trustworthy when they appear to be based on product attributes and actual performance instead of a reviewer's intention to channel readers in a particular direction (due to e.g. commercial interests) (Kelley, 1967). However, the anonymity of online reviews represents a major obstacle in consumers' efforts of assessing a reviewer's competence and motivation (Beldad, de Jong, & Steehouder, 2010).

2.5 Common Independent Variables in Online Review Literature

In comparison to dependent variables, the variety of independent variables in review literature is more diverse. Nonetheless, it is possible to identify multiple encompassing categories. In the following, I will focus on product type, review ratings, review text, and – most relevant to my research questions – the disclosure of information about the reviewer.

2.5.1 Product Type

The influence of an online product review on consumers' purchasing behavior largely depends on the type of product being evaluated. Over the last decades, scholars around the world adhered to a product classification system constructed by Nelson (1970, 1974). According to his research, one can generally differentiate between two types of consumer products: *search goods* and *experience goods*. The distinguishing characteristic of search goods is that a basic description of their attributes is sufficient to judge their quality. For instance, house appliances and most consumer electronics fall into this category. In contrast, to get an adequate understanding of an experience good's performance, one needs to personally experience it through sampling or purchase (Mudambi & Schuff, 2010). Relevant examples include mattresses, movies, wine, and other products whose evaluation largely depends on the consumer's individual preferences (Senecal & Nantel, 2004; Tsao & Hsieh, 2015; Weathers et al., 2007). As a consequence, experience goods require more information than search goods prior to their purchase (Mitra, Reiss, & Capella, 1999). Classifying a product as either a search or an experience product is not always clear since Nelson's product classification runs along a continuum ranging from pure search to pure experience goods, and many products fall somewhere in the middle of this spectrum (Lee & Shin, 2014; Willemsen, Neijens, Bronner, & de Ridder, 2011).

For the sake of completeness, it should be mentioned that researchers sometimes acknowledge a third product type called *credence goods*. For such products, it is difficult or costly to assess their performance even after consumption if the consumer is not an expert in the respective field (Tsao & Hsieh, 2015). Examples include medical treatments and taxicab rides in areas unfamiliar to the customer (Dulleck & Kerschbamer, 2006). However, since credence goods are rarely reviewed (especially in video format) they are disregarded in the remainder of this paper.

2.5.2 Product Rating

Typically, a customer-created online review consists of two components: *star rating* and *review text* (see Appendix A, B). The star rating is the most straightforward way to communicate a reviewer's opinion on a product as they depict a numeric summary of a contributor's product assessment. They are usually presented on a five-point scale where one star represents the worst and five stars the best possible rating. Website visitors who scan through reviews can utilize the star rating as an indication of review content (Poston & Speier, 2005).

When examining the impact of product ratings, researchers consider two related factors: *review valence* and *review extremity*. While valence describes whether a rating is either positive or negative, extremity indicates how positive or negative it is (Weathers et al., 2015). Products with a positive (negative) review valence have a higher (lower) probability of being purchased (Willemsen et al., 2011). Research demonstrates that either extremely positive or extremely negative ratings receive more helpfulness votes (Cao, Duan, & Gan, 2011; Forman et al., 2008). This position is challenged by Mudambi and Schuff (2010) whose study results propose that this inference does not apply to experience goods. The authors argue that the inconsistent findings are caused by the diverse types of products used in different studies. Another reason for these

contradictions may be that no standardized measure of extremity exists (Mudambi, Schuff, & Zhang, 2014). With respect to the rating direction, Chevalier and Mayzlin (2006) find that extremely negative ratings have more pronounced effects on sales than extremely positive ratings. This result can be reasoned by the *negativity bias*, a widely accepted phenomenon which states that negative information generally has a more severe impact on consumers' opinions than equally strong positive information.

In addition to the star ratings given by individual reviewers, many online retailers present an overall product score which is calculated by taking the average of a respective product's ratings. This score indicates the level of agreement among all reviewers and serves readers as another heuristic to product judgment because it can be quickly scanned and processed (Chevalier & Mayzlin, 2006; Jiménez & Mendoza, 2013). Both individual and consolidated product rating functions are available on almost all retail- and review websites (e.g. *Amazon*, *Yelp*) but are missing on *YouTube* and other comparable video platforms.

2.5.3 Review Text

While ratings are useful means for getting a quick idea of a product's quality, research stresses that consumers also pay attention to the accompanying texts which require more effort but provide richer information (Chevalier & Mayzlin, 2006; Petty & Cacioppo, 1984; Willemsen et al., 2011). In fact, misalignment between a star rating and the corresponding review text mitigates persuasiveness and hampers purchase decisions (Mudambi et al., 2014; Schlosser, 2011).

Given the wide variety of persons creating reviews, it comes as no surprise that a lot of diverse content characteristics can be found across different review texts. A reviewer is generally

expected to express his or her opinion on a product and list justifying arguments which not necessarily need to be exclusively positive or negative but may be two-sided (Korfiatis, García-Bariocanal, & Sánchez-Alonso, 2012). Actually, consumers perceive texts with both positive and negative statements to be more persuasive as they imply the author's authenticity and independence from commercial interests (Eisend, 2007; Schindler & Bickart, 2005). Ghose and Ipeirotis (2007) provide evidence that consumers find a mix of objective and subjective statements most useful although the optimal ratio is contingent on product type.

Besides content, readability and linguistics are vital components of review text. *Readability* refers to the educational level and cognitive effort needed to comprehend a text (DuBay, 2004; Zakaluk & Samuels, 1988). Korfiatis et al. (2012) reveal a correlation between review helpfulness ratings and readability measures and thereby clarify that consumers demand straightforward explanations that justify a buyer's verdict. Krishnamoorthy (2015) examines review linguistics by applying the linguistic category model which consists of the factors adjectives (e.g. great), state verbs (e.g. to love), and action verbs (e.g. to infuriate) (Semin & Fiedler, 1991). He detects that compared to readability and subjectivity, the factors of the linguistic category model perform significantly better at predicting the helpfulness of reviews on experience goods and concludes that this is because of the descriptive terms on product usage which aid the imagination of product experience.

One of the more easily observable factors of an open-ended review text is its length, commonly measured in word count. Mudambi and Schuff (2010) observe that longer reviews lead to better helpfulness ratings, and conclude that this is due to the greater quantity of details included in longer reviews which enhance diagnosticity. Moreover, this effect is shown to be stronger for

search goods than for experience goods. The most plausible explanation for this is that consumers' need to sample experience goods cannot be substituted through additional information. Jiménez and Mendoza (2013) find that a positive effect of review length on purchase intention is fully mediated by credibility and hence support the suggestion that more detailed reviews imply that the reviewer has great knowledge of the product (Bansal & Voyer, 2000). Other characteristics associated with longer reviews include a high level of reviewer enthusiasm as well as reviewer's involvement (Chevalier & Mayzlin, 2006; Pan & Zhang, 2011). However, the generally assumed linear relationship between text length and helpfulness is challenged by Huang et al. (2015) who investigate whether there is a threshold at which the helpfulness rating starts to diminish. According to their empirical results, the positive effect of word count becomes statistically insignificant when a review exceeds 144 words.

2.5.4 Reviewer Characteristics

Aside from review characteristics, also information on the characteristics of the persons who create reviews affects consumer perceptions. Unlike traditional WOM which is communicated face-to-face, the eWOM information source and his or her receivers normally do not know each other personally. Subsequently, consumers may raise concerns regarding a reviewer's motivation and therewith doubt the review content (Shan, 2016). Furthermore, social cues including gestures or facial expressions which may help consumers analyze a traditional WOM message, are absent in text reviews but may be visible in video reviews.

Such uncertainties can be reduced when reviewer information is accessible to website users. Several online retailers including *Amazon* showcase a user's rank (e.g. "Top 500 Reviewer") which is computed based on the number of total reviews and the proportion of helpfulness votes.

Research illustrates that content published by reviewers with a good reputation (e.g. percentage of helpful ratings and other system-generated cues) tends to receive better helpfulness ratings and leads to higher sales (Chua & Banerjee, 2014; Forman et al., 2008; Wathen & Burkell, 2002). It can be assumed that these effects are based on the expertise and trustworthiness associated with top reviewers (Shan, 2016). In addition to reviewer status, numerous websites present the reviewer's user name (which may be either the real name or a nickname) next to the review and let it link to the user's profile (see Appendix D for a screenshot of an *Amazon* user profile). On this profile, users can upload a photo and disclose information about their demographics (e.g. age, location, and occupation) or personal interests (Shan, 2016). Literature on reviewer characteristics predominantly focuses on reviewer status instead of identity information (e.g. reviewer name and photo). The reason for this is probably that the latter type of source information is much more difficult to discover, quantify, and analyze (Huang et al., 2015). However, exactly those articles which examine the effects of reviewer identity represent essential groundwork for my research questions on the role of reviewer disclosure in video reviews.

The interplay between user photos and review credibility is investigated by Xu (2014). She confirms that profile pictures positively influence readers' trust and checks whether this effect can be explained by *social presence*, a concept which describes a message's ability to make receivers experience another person as psychologically present (Gefen & Straub, 2003). The outcomes of Xu show that photos trigger feelings of social presence, which in turn serve as an antecedent to trust. The impact of user photos is also included in the research framework of Lee and Shin (2014) who use reviews of different quality to measure the impact on website evaluation. Studying the interaction effect, they find that participants who read high-quality reviews rated the overall website quality higher only when the reviewers' photos were available.

They infer that user photos encourage the systematic processing of messages and assume that this is because photos foster participants' awareness of reviewer characteristics.

Forman et al. (2008) examine the role of reviewer identity disclosure under the aspect of identity motives. The authors find evidence that users feel a need to adapt to community norms and therefore disclose information on themselves if others on the same platform do so as well. This outcome provides further support to prior research which notes that personal information facilitates the creation of relationships and common identity (Ren, Kraut, & Kiesler, 2007). Moreover, their study reveals that identity-descriptive information (the authors inspect name, location, and hobbies) has a positive relationship with review helpfulness and sales. Especially when products have a high review volume, consumers give more weight to heuristic cues, meaning that source characteristics play a greater role under information overload. Other studies indicate that the provision of personal information enhances a sender's trustworthiness (Fogg et al., 2001). Shan (2016) demonstrates that this effect is stronger when the message receiver feels connected to the reviewer (he discloses the reviewers' age, occupation, and picture) and points out the concept of homophily to justify his findings. *Homophily* states that individuals tend to sympathize with those who they have a lot in common with (e.g. attitudes, demographics, and values). The underlying reason is that commonalities establish stronger mutual identification and therewith increase feelings of credibility and decrease risk. This theory also supports the discovery of Forman et al. (2008) that consumers are more likely to buy a product when the associated review was written by a user with similar demographic attributes.

However, there are a few studies which contradict the findings listed above. First, Racherla and Friske (2012) try to replicate the study of Forman et al. (2008) but fail to identify a positive

relationship between the disclosure of reviewer's background information (name, photo, location) and perceived review usefulness. Second, the study of Connors, Mudambi, and Schuff (2011) does not confirm a positive relationship between homophily and review helpfulness. Consequently, they conclude that peripheral reviewer attributes are less important to consumers than indications of the reviewer's knowledge about the product. In conclusion, although there are some inconsistencies, the majority of literature on reviewer characteristics underlines this study's fundamental assumption that consumers pay attention not only to review content but also to heuristic factors related to the reviewer which can reduce feelings of distrust and uncertainty.

2.6 Hypotheses & Research Model

In the following, I define hypotheses which derive from the insights cited up to this point. First, it may be argued that the visual revelation of the reviewer in a video review has effects on consumer perceptions comparable to those found in text review literature. Concerning review credibility (or rather its two underlying concepts: trustworthiness and expertise), I expect to replicate the outcomes of, among others, Shan (2016) and Xu (2014) who attest a positive influence of personal information disclosure due to feelings of social presence. Further, based on the outcomes of prior studies (e.g., Forman et al., 2008; Lee & Shin, 2014; Xu et al., 2015) as well as the notion that a wider variety of cues can aid the understanding of a message and therewith its usefulness, I hypothesize that reviewer visibility is positively related to review helpfulness (Daft & Lengel, 1986; Kahai & Cooper, 2003; Xu et al., 2015). While these assumptions may be objected by some authors whose research outcomes suggest that the impact of visual disclosure is insignificant (e.g. Racherla & Friske, 2012), it can be argued that their conclusions are not necessarily applicable to my research. This is due to the fact that these studies examine identity factors such as reviewer names or photos which can easily be faked by using a

made-up name or someone else's photo – a risk which is arguably much lower for video reviews (Dellarocas, 2003; Friedman & Resnick, 2001).

H1: *Video reviews which visually disclose the reviewer's identity score higher on consumers' perceptions of reviewer trustworthiness (H1a), reviewer expertise (H1b), and review helpfulness (H1c) than reviews where the reviewer's identity remains concealed.*

Second, product type is expected to have a moderating effect in these relationships. Specifically, I anticipate that the effects described in H1 are stronger for experience goods. This assumption is based on the fact that consumers' information requirements for search goods differ from those of experience goods in several ways. Weathers et al. (2007) recommend e-retailers to make information on experience products more vivid if they want to increase the information's credibility. Especially for experience goods, being able to see the reviewer with the product may foster visions of consumption which reduce equivocality and uncertainty (Weathers et al., 2015; Xu et al., 2015). Moreover, the presence of reviewer information can lead consumers to attribute certain arguments in a review to the reviewer's personal preferences and expertise, instead of interpreting them as objective product facts (Lee & Shin, 2014). Consequently, it can be argued that knowing a reviewer's identity makes consumers perceive a review as more subjective. Given that consumers evaluate rather subjective reviews of experience goods as more helpful than objective reviews, I expect consumers to rank reviews which disclose a reviewer's identity higher in helpfulness for experience goods than for search goods (Ghose & Ipeirotis, 2007).

H2: *Disclosing the reviewer's identity has a stronger effect on consumers' perceptions of reviewer trustworthiness (H2a), reviewer expertise (H2b), and review helpfulness (H2c) for experience goods than for search goods.*

Third, inspired by the findings of Forman et al. (2008) and Shan (2016), I will account for the effects of homophily which may evoke when a viewer identifies with the reviewer based on his or her appearance. It can be expected that similarity between the review source and the receiver serves as a heuristic cue for the message receiver. The risk consumers perceive when relying on information provided by a stranger can be reduced when they notice that the reviewer has a background comparable to their own as this is an indication that their opinions and values are similar as well. Furthermore, it may be argued that a high level of similarity leads consumers to the conclusion that they have needs and interests similar to the ones of the reviewer and thus are likely to also enjoy a product endorsed by the reviewer.

H3: *Video reviews which visually disclose the reviewer's identity receive higher ratings on reviewer trustworthiness (H3a), reviewer expertise (H3b), and review helpfulness (H3c) by consumers with high perceptions of source-receiver similarity than by consumers with low perceptions of source-receiver similarity.*

The proposed research framework is depicted in Figure 1. Although this chapter identified review ratings and text as essential parts of online reviews, they are excluded from my research model for the following reasons. First, the inconsistent outcomes of research on product ratings do not lead to clear assumptions regarding their influence and would complicate this study's interpretability. Furthermore, product ratings play less of a role in the context of video reviews as

YouTube does not have a star-rating function. Aspects related to review text are disregarded due to their complicated measurement requirements which would exceed the restricted scope of this paper. Nonetheless, both topics are considered in later chapters when the experimental design and study limitations are discussed.
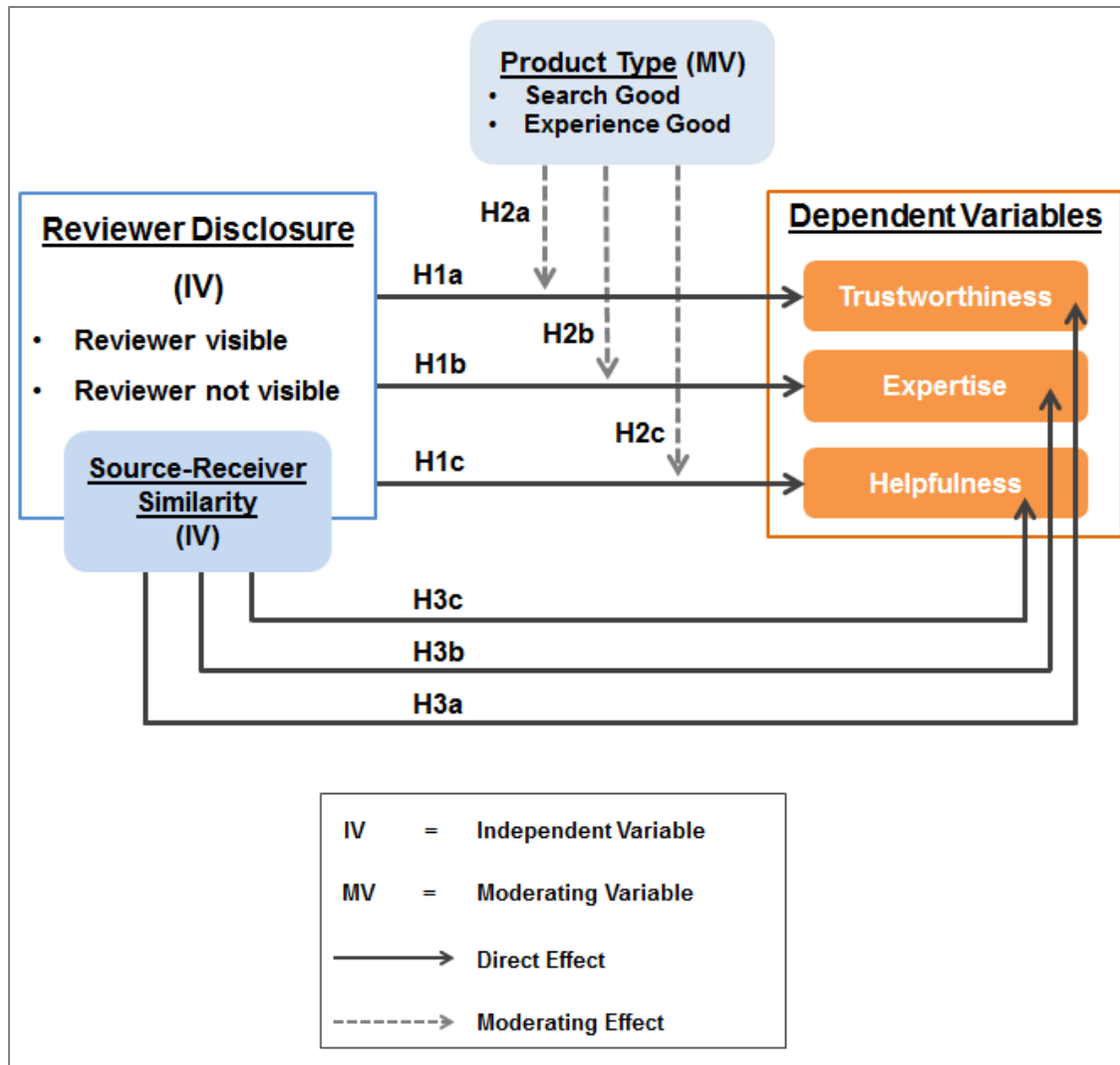
Figure 1 - Research Framework

3. Methodology

3.1 Research Design

The hypotheses were tested by administering an online experiment with a 2 (reviewer: visible vs. not visible) x 2 (product type: search good vs. experience good) between-subjects factorial design. One main advantage of such a web-based experiment is that it achieves an appropriate level of realism by allowing participants to participate from the comfort of their own home and on their own computer where they would also look at reviews in real-life situations. Furthermore, the experiment was administered using *Google Forms* because this tool allows for the integration of videos from *YouTube* which internet users are normally familiar with. Since I had to control for several factors, I decided to film and edit the required videos myself instead of using existing reviews. In total, I created four video reviews: two for each product type, with one of them visually revealing the reviewer and the other one not (see Table 1). The following sections describe the creation and execution of the experiment.

		Product Type	
		Search Good (USB Flash Drive)	Experience Good (Mobile Game)
Reviewer Disclosure	Visible	Version SG_V	Version EG_V
	Not Visible	Version SG_NV	Version EG_NV

Table 1 - Research Design

3.2 Experiment Manipulation

3.2.1 Products

My decision on which products to use as representatives of search and experience goods was mainly influenced by the condition that the selected products should clearly belong to either of

the two product types. Based on the outcomes of a pilot test conducted by Lee and Shin (2014) in which they asked participants to what extent they need to use certain products before being able to evaluate them, I selected a USB flash drive and a video game to represent search and experience goods respectively. Just like most other consumer electronics, USB flash drives can be evaluated without usage because their quality is first and foremost defined by their specifications like storage capacity and reading/writing speed. While video games also contain objective attributes which allow for their judgment (e.g. graphics, expected play time), a proper assessment of their quality is only possible through consumption. Beyond their representativeness, the two chosen products also had the advantage of being used by people of diverse age groups and both genders. The reviewed USB flash drive was a *PetiteKey* by the company *LaCie*, while the video game was a puzzle game called *Framed* developed by the game studio *Loveshack* which is available for smartphones and tablets.

3.2.2 Reviewer

For each product, two versions of video reviews were produced: one with the reviewer visible and one which does not show the reviewer. In order to minimize the influence of factors other than the reviewer's pure presence, the reviewer was dressed in an ordinary outfit (neutral shirt, no glasses), stood in front of a white wall, and presented the review text in a neutral, unexcited manner (Xu, 2014).

3.2.3 Attributes of the Video Reviews

Except for reviewer presence, I attempted to ensure that the two video reviews per product type were identical in terms of their text, duration, position of cuts, and audio-visual quality so that possible differences in consumer attitude could not be attributed to these factors. Furthermore, the

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expectable impact of brand and price effects on product evaluation was inhibited by masking the logo on the USB flash drive, concealing the video game's developer, and not mentioning the retail price of either product (Xu, 2014).

With the aim of maximizing authenticity, the recited review text was composed of actual customer reviews on the two products found on *Amazon* and *YouTube*. Simultaneously, I took into account the findings presented in Section 2.5.3 by paying attention to the review texts' length, wording, and arguments. Due to the threshold defined by Huang et al. (2015) as well as the desire to keep the reviews short, I limited the review text length to about 200 words for both products which also seemed appropriate in light of their relatively low complexities. Moreover, although the reviews expressed some mild criticism towards the products, their overall tone was positive. This restriction was considered acceptable because market research shows that not only reviews in general but particularly fake reviews have a tendency to be positive (Jensen et al., 2013). Finally, to give the video reviews a realistic, customer-created look, they were filmed with a non-professional digital camera (*Canon EOS M*) and edited with a free video editing program (*Windows Movie Maker*). In version SG_V and EG_V, the reviewer appeared at the beginning and the end, where he gave an introduction and conclusion to the product, respectively. In the main part, the reviewer was not visible but commented on the product via voice-over while matching product images were presented. Version SG_NV and EG_NV had the exact same main parts as SG_V and EG_V but showed only the product at the beginning and the end while the introductory and concluding statements were audible. I uploaded the video reviews to *YouTube* and set their privacy settings to "non-listed" so that each video was exclusively accessible through its respective survey. Also, *YouTube*'s comment and rating functions were deactivated

for all four video reviews in order to exclude their possible influence on participants' perceptions. Appendix E contains the texts of the video reviews as well as relevant summary statistics.

3.3 Measures

Source credibility was measured on scales introduced by Ohanian (1990) which are still used by many scholars today (e.g. Shan, 2016; Tsao & Hsieh, 2015). For each of the two credibility dimensions, five items were measured on seven-point Likert scales. The items comprising trustworthiness involved dependability, honesty, reliability, sincerity, and trustworthiness, while expertise was comprised of experience, knowledge, qualification, skill, and expertise.

Review helpfulness was measured by using four seven-point semantic differential items which Connors et al. (2011) identified as crucial aspects of purchase decision processes. The items consider a review's ability to facilitate a buying decision, to indicate whether the consumer would like the product, to provide relevant product information, and its general helpfulness.

For the video versions where the reviewer is visible (SG_V, EG_V), the level of source-receiver similarity was assessed by measuring the similarity between the reviewer (source) and participants (receivers) in two different ways. The first method was to ask participants three questions developed by Connors et al. (2011) which concerned their perception of similarity to the reviewer. The second method was to collect demographic data (based on Shan, 2016). It is normally possible to determine the approximate age, gender, ethnicity, and perhaps nationality of reviewers solely based on their outer appearance. Participants were requested to provide the same information about themselves to enable an analysis on whether their perceived similarity levels are based on these demographic factors.

Additionally, I considered several control variables which were shown to have an influence in previous studies. First, to check for a participant's general attitude towards online reviews, I used the same measures as Jensen et al. (2013). Second, I collected data on participants' attitude towards the presented products in order to get an indication of their involvement with the task (based on Xu, 2014). Third, participants were asked questions related to their experience with online shopping and customer-created reviews. Finally, several demographic factors other than the ones listed in the paragraph above were measured. An overview of all composite factors and their items is depicted in Appendix F.

3.4 Subjects and Procedures

While reviewing the products myself gave me greater control over the content and attributes of the video reviews, it had the disadvantage that I could not ask people who personally know me to fill out the survey as this would have biased the results. Instead, I asked friends and family to forward the survey link to people who do not know me and posted it anonymously on *samplesize.reddit.com*, a forum where members can post academic surveys. In total, 120 participants were randomly assigned to one of the four experimental conditions and submitted their answers.

In the introduction, participants were informed about the purpose, topic, and outline of the survey. Next, they were questioned regarding their online shopping behavior and opinion on online reviews. Then, the actual experiment started by asking the participants to imagine that they had won a voucher for a USB flash drive (SG_V, SG_NV) or a mobile game (EG_V, EG_NV) of their choice. After some questions on their general attitude towards the respective product type, the scenario description was continued by showing them a short official product description and

photographs of either the USB flash drive *PetiteKey* or the mobile game *Framed*. Next, a video review of the particular product was presented, in which the reviewer was either visible or not visible. In order to ensure that participants are able to properly understand the review, they were allowed to switch on subtitles and to pause or rewind the video. Afterwards, they were questioned on their perceptions of the review's helpfulness as well as the reviewer's credibility and similarity to them. The survey ended with a set of demographic questions. Appendix G shows and explains the full surveys.

4. Data Analysis

4.1 Sample Profile

During the data cleaning process, the final sample was reduced to 91 participants. 29 (24.2%) of the initially collected 120 responses were removed because they stated that they personally know the reviewer or already own the reviewed product, answered at least one control question incorrectly, left parts of the questionnaire unanswered, or gave answers with suspicious patterns (e.g. always providing the same answer or highly contradicting answers). Table 2 shows the number of responses for each condition.

		Product Type		Sums
		Search Good (USB Flash Drive)	Experience Good (Mobile Game)	Sums
Reviewer	Visible	**n = 23**	**n = 23**	n = 46
	Not Visible	**n = 21**	**n = 24**	n = 45
	Sums	n = 44	n = 47	n = 91

Table 2 - Valid Responses per Condition

While a detailed overview of the collected data on demographic and psychographic factors is available in Appendix H, the following paragraphs compile the most essential information. The participants' average age was 29.51 years, ranging from 16 to 57 years. Because this variable was quite skewed (skewness = 1.002), I decided to collapse it into five groups with similar percentiles (below 21, 21-25, 26-29, 30-39, above 40) (Pallant, 2013). The gender distribution was rather balanced, as 42.9% of participants were female, and 57.2% were male. Most participants were either German (44.0%) or came from an Anglophone country (51.7%), in particular the US (35.2%). With respect to ethnicity, the vast majority of participants indicated that they are

Caucasian (89.0%). When asked for their highest level of education, most participants selected 'Bachelor' (46.2%), 'High School' (31.9%), or 'Master' (15.4%). The educational/professional backgrounds of participants were quite diversified and the most frequently chosen options were 'Other' (20.9%), 'Business' (18.7%), and 'IT' (14.3%).

In addition, information on participants' relationships with online shopping and reviews was collected. All but two participants (97.8%) indicated that they purchase products online at least once per year. Most participants (34.1%) order products weekly and 13.2% even order more than once per week. By questioning the participants about their consultation of online reviews, I was able to find out that there was a stronger tendency towards text reviews than video reviews: 86.8% stated that they read text reviews in most cases or even always before buying a product, whereas only 25.3% indicated the same about video reviews. Participants' general attitude towards online reviews was rather positive, with an average of 4.88 on a scale from 1 to 7, where 7 represented the most positive attitude. Depending on the survey version, participants were asked about their attitude towards either USB flash drives or mobile games. For USB flash drives, this factor received an average rating of 4.49, indicating an overall medium to positive level of involvement with this product group. In contrast, participants were less involved in mobile games which received an average rating of 3.95, indicating an overall attitude level just below the mid-point.

4.2 Validity, Reliability, and Control Checks

Before testing the hypotheses, it was necessary to check the composite scales for their validity and reliability, as well as to conduct control checks. Altogether, the questionnaires contained seven scales which consisted of multiple items. Their means, standard deviations, skewness,

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kurtosis, and reliability scores (as indicated by Cronbach's alpha coefficient) are shown in Table 3. Principal component analysis was performed for the dependent variables and revealed that all factor loadings are far above the cut-off value of 0.5 whereas all cross-loadings are below 0.3, meaning that both convergent validity and discriminant validity are confirmed (Malhotra, 2010; Pallant, 2013; see Appendix I). For all of the seven composite scales, alpha coefficients above the minimum value of 0.7 can be reported. Hence, these scales have at least acceptable levels of internal consistency. This conclusion is confirmed by the values in the inter-item correlation matrices which are all positive, as well as the corrected item-total correlation values which are above the cut-off point of 0.3. Further, all dependent variables have moderate to high correlation levels which are all significant at the 0.01 level (Cohen, 1988, pp. 79-81).

Composite Variables	Versions	No. of Items	Mean (SD)	Skew-ness	Kurt-osis	Cron-bach's alpha	Correlations		
							Trust-wort.	Exper-tise	Help-fulness
General Online Review Attitude	All	4	4.88 (0.62)	-0.54	0.68	0.736			
Attitude towards USB Drives	SG_V, SG_NV	5	4.49 (0.99)	-0.62	1.44	0.807			
Attitude towards Mobile Games	EG_V, EG_NV	5	3.95 (1.46)	-0.13	-0.66	0.904			
Similarity to Reviewer	SG_V, EG_V	3	4.27 (0.94)	0.25	-0.41	0.835			
Reviewer Trustworthiness	All	5	4.89 (0.76)	0.02	-0.73	0.901	1	0.503	0.613
Reviewer Expertise	All	5	4.62 (0.79)	-0.02	0.36	0.847	0.503	1	0.458
Review Helpfulness	All	4	5.60 (0.81)	-0.63	-0.11	0.884	0.613	0.458	1

Table 3 - Descriptive Statistics of the Composite Variables

Next, I controlled for the possible influence of factors other than the ones included in the hypotheses. After checking that the assumptions underlying the multivariate analysis of variance (ANOVA) were sufficiently satisfied, this test was performed with all non-metric control variables (*age groups*, *gender*, *nationality*, *ethnicity*, *level of education*, *educational/professional background*, *online shopping frequency*, and *tendency to read/watch text/video reviews*). The multivariate tests (Wilks' Lambda, Pillai's Trace) are not significant for all of these control variables which means that there were no statistically significant differences between the items of the individual control variables on the dependent variables. For the remaining control variables, *general review attitude* and *attitude towards USB drives / mobile games*, I conducted simple regression analyses which revealed a significant and positive influence of *general online review attitude* on all of the dependent variables (DV = *trustworthiness* [Sig. = 0.006, R^2 = 0.162], DV = *expertise* [Sig. = 0.013, R^2 = 0.133], DV = *helpfulness* [Sig. = 0.002, R^2 = 0.190]).

4.3 Hypotheses Testing

4.3.1 Hypothesis 1 and Hypothesis 2

H1 and H2 are concerned with the effects of the independent variables *reviewer visibility* and *product type* on the three dependent variables *trustworthiness*, *expertise*, and *helpfulness*. Both independent variables are categorical, whereas all of the three dependent variables are metric. Table 4 depicts the descriptive statistics of the dependent variables across product type and reviewer visibility.

		Product Type							
		Search Good				Experience Good			
	Reviewer Visibility	N	Mean (SD)	Skew-ness	Kurt-osis	N	Mean (SD)	Skew-ness	Kurt-osis
Trust-worthiness	Not Vis.	21	4.71 (0.76)	0.16	-0.34	24	4.68 (0.65)	-0.18	-0.11
	Visible	23	5.20 (0.84)	-0.17	-1.37	23	4.98 (0.68)	-0.30	-0.80
Expertise	Not Vis.	21	4.56 (0.67)	-0.73	0.05	24	4.41 (0.86)	-0.25	0.14
	Visible	23	4.84 (0.88)	0.47	0.22	23	4.69 (0.70)	-0.07	-0.58
Helpfulness	Not Vis.	21	5.39 (0.98)	0.02	-0.68	24	5.27 (0.91)	-0.55	-1.13
	Visible	23	5.76 (0.67)	0.01	-0.97	23	5.98 (0.43)	-0.32	-0.07

Table 4 - Descriptive Statistics of the Dependent Variables

To test the hypotheses, three separate two by two between-groups analyses of covariance (ANCOVAs) were conducted (one for each dependent variable). This statistical model allowed me to not only examine the two independent variables but also to integrate g*eneral review attitude* (metric) as a covariate (Pallant, 2013). Before performing the analysis, I checked for violations of the test's assumptions. While *trustworthiness* and *expertise* did not violate any assumptions, *helpfulness* was not normally distributed and the corresponding Levene's test for homogeneity of variance was significant ($p = 0.000$). However, due to ANCOVA's general robustness against the violation of the normality assumption in the absence of outliers as well as the almost equal group sizes, it was still deemed appropriate to scrutinize the potential influences on *helpfulness* via the suggested test (Leech, Barrett, & Morgan, 2011; Pallant, 2013).

The results of the three ANCOVAs are presented in Table 5. At first, the interaction effect between *reviewer visibility* and *product type* needs to be checked as it influences the interpretation of the main effects. For all of the three dependent variables, the interaction effect is highly insignificant meaning that Hypothesis 2a, 2b, and 2c are rejected. In contrast, the main

effect of *reviewer visibility* is significant for all dependent variables at the 5% (*expertise*) or even 1% significance level (*trustworthiness*, *helpfulness*). Hence, Hypotheses 1a, 1b, and 1c are supported. Based on the partial eta squared values and the interpretation guidelines of Cohen (1988), it can be noted that the effect size of *reviewer visibility* are small to medium for *expertise* ($\eta2 > 0.01$), medium to large for *trustworthiness* ($\eta2 > 0.06$), and large for *helpfulness* ($\eta2 > 0.14$). As expected, there is no significant main effect of product type on either of the dependent variables. Furthermore, the analyses indicate significant relationships between the covariate *general review attitude* and the dependent variables. In fact, it explains 9.7% (*expertise*), 12.9% (*helpfulness*), and 22.4% (*trustworthiness*) of their variance.

	Dependent Variable	F	df	Sig.	Partial Eta Sq.
Reviewer Visibility (H1)	Trustworthiness (H1a)	10.820	1	**0.001**	0.112
	Expertise (H1b)	4.071	1	**0.047**	0.045
	Helpfulness (H1c)	14.441	1	**0.000**	0.144
Product Type	Trustworthiness	0.864	1	0.355	0.010
	Expertise	1.042	1	0.310	0.012
	Helpfulness	0.073	1	0.787	0.001
Reviewer Visibility x Product Type (H2)	Trustworthiness (H2a)	1.290	1	0.259	0.015
	Expertise (H2b)	0.071	1	0.790	0.001
	Helpfulness (H2c)	0.649	1	0.423	0.007
General Review Attitude (Covariate)	Trustworthiness	24.808	1	**0.000**	0.224
	Expertise	9.203	1	**0.003**	0.097
	Helpfulness	12.690	1	**0.001**	0.129

Table 5 - Results for the Two-Way ANCOVAs (H1, H2)

[Note: The bold significance values highlight values which are significant at the 1% or 5% level]

Figure 2 offers three graphical representations (one for each dependent variable) of the interaction effects between product type and reviewer visibility. They incorporate the adjusted means for which the effects of the covariate were statistically removed (Pallant, 2013). As can be

seen from the graphs, in comparison to the conditions where the reviewer was not visible, the average perceptions are higher for both product types in the conditions where the reviewer's identity was disclosed. The increases lie between approximately 6% and 13%.
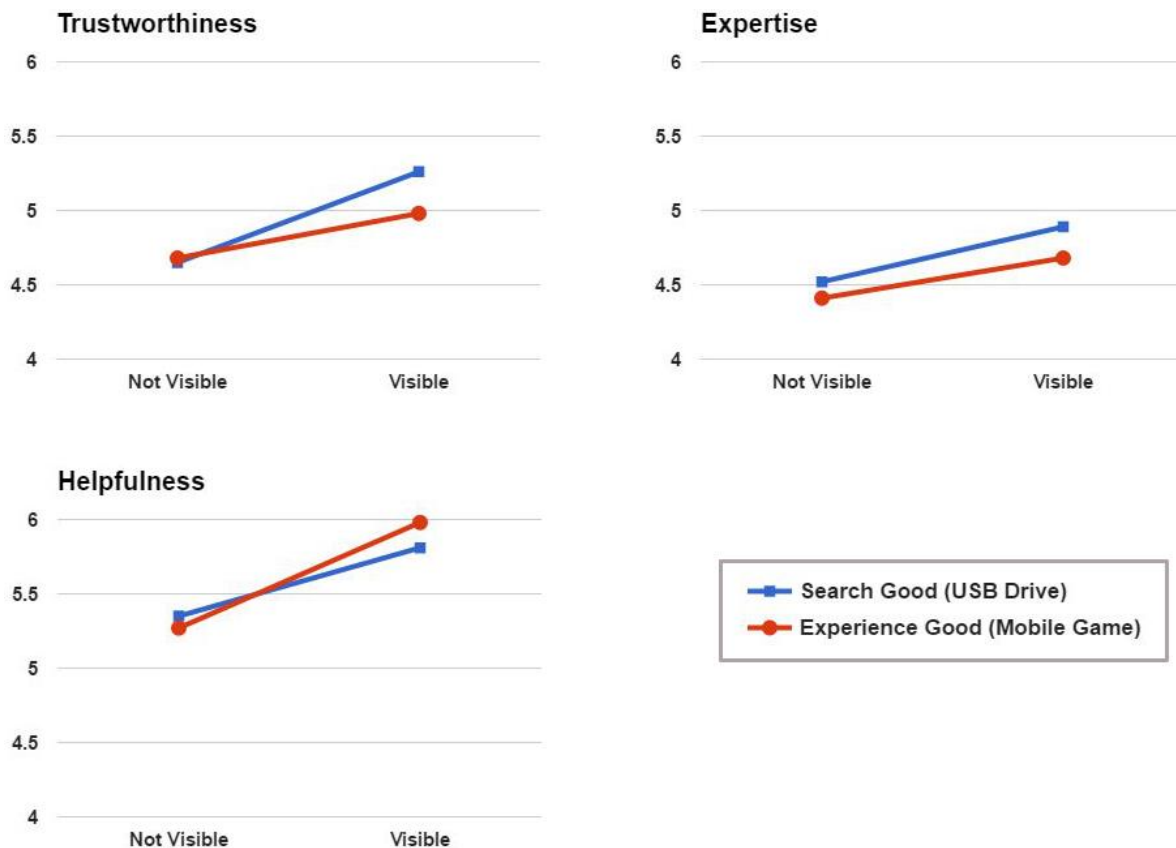
Figure 2 - Interaction Effects of Reviewer Visibility and Product Type (H1, H2)

4.3.2 Hypothesis 3

The third hypothesis proposed that in the conditions where the reviewer was visible (SG_V, EG_V; n = 46; see Table 2), the level of perceived *similarity to the reviewer* (metric; hereafter abbreviated to *similarity*) has a direct effect on all of the dependent variables. I investigated the effect between *similarity* and the three dependent variables while simultaneously checking for *general review attitude* by running three separate hierarchical multiple regressions. The results

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showed that adding *similarity* to the models significantly contributed to the model fit measures only when *trustworthiness* (p of Sig. F change = 0.096) and *expertise* (p of Sig. F change = 0.018) were the dependent variables but not for *helpfulness* (p of Sig. F change = 0.561). Next, I checked the output of the full models which included both *general review attitude* and *similarity* as independent variables (key data are presented in Table 6). As can be seen from the column with the significance values, H3c can be rejected at the 10% level, while H3a and H3b are supported at the 10% and 5% significance level respectively. Further, the corresponding beta coefficients are positive, meaning that *similarity* has a positive influence on *trustworthiness* and *expertise* perceptions. Based on the squared part correlation coefficients it can be stated that the *similarity* measure uniquely explains 5.3% of the variance in *trustworthiness* scores and 10.6% of the variance in *expertise* scores (Pallant, 2013). Moreover, the beta values and squared part coefficients show that the independent variable *general review attitude* provides stronger contributions to the explanation of the dependent variables than *similarity* does.

Dependent Variables	R^2	R^2 Adj.	ANOVA F (Sig.)	Independent Variables	Beta	Sig.	$Part^2$
Trust-worthiness	0.214	0.178	5.869 (0.006)	Similarity (H3a)	0.230	**0.096**	0.053
				Gen. Review Attitude	0.403	**0.005**	0.162
Expertise	0.239	0.204	6.769 (0.003)	Similarity (H3b)	0.326	**0.018**	0.106
				Gen. Review Attitude	0.367	**0.008**	0.135
Helpfulness	0.196	0.159	5.246 (0.009)	Similarity (H3c)	0.080	0.561	0.006
				Gen. Review Attitude	0.436	**0.003**	0.190

Table 6 - Results for the Multiple Regression Analyses (H3)

[Note: The bold significance values highlight values which are significant at the 1%, 5%, or 10% level]

In addition, I scrutinized which factors participants considered when answering the questions regarding source-receiver similarity. In the conditions where the reviewer was visible, it was possible to identify his *gender* (male), approximate *age* (25), *ethnicity* (Caucasian), and – based

on his accent – *nationality* (German). The variables *age*, *ethnicity*, and *nationality* were recoded

into binary variables (*age: 21-29 / other¸ ethnicity: Caucasian / other, nationality: German /*

other) so that one value would conform to the reviewer and the other one not. Using multiple

regression analysis (F = 3.167, p = 0.023), I find that only the gender variable has a statistically

significant impact on the similarity level (p = 0.003, part² = 0.194). An independent samples t-test

(p = 0.001) confirms that there is a difference for gender in assessing the similarity to the

reviewer, as male participants on average had significantly higher similarity scores (M = 4.58,

SD = 0.99) than female participants (M = 3.77, SD = 0.58).

5. Discussion

5.1 Interpretation of the Results

The purpose of the preceding experimental analysis was to examine whether the visual disclosure of a reviewer in a video review affects consumers and how this factor may be used to approach the problems of information overload and skepticism towards review credibility. While prior studies on text reviews suggest that the role of reviewer disclosure is significant, it was deemed necessary to investigate this assumption separately for video reviews. A summary of the results is presented in Table 7.

Hypotheses			Findings
H1 - Reviewer Disclosure: *Video reviews which visually disclose the reviewer's identity score higher on consumers' perceptions of [...] than reviews where the reviewer's identity remains concealed.*	**H1a**	Reviewer Trustworthiness	Supported
	H1b	Reviewer Expertise	Supported
	H1c	Review Helpfulness	Supported
H2 - Product Type: *Disclosing the reviewer's identity has a stronger effect on consumers' perceptions of [...] for experience goods than for search goods.*	**H2a**	Reviewer Trustworthiness	Not supported
	H2b	Reviewer Expertise	Not supported
	H2c	Review Helpfulness	Not supported
H3 - Source-Receiver Similarity: *Video reviews which visually disclose the reviewer's identity receive higher ratings on [...] by consumers with high perceptions of source-receiver similarity than by consumers with low perceptions of source-receiver similarity.*	**H3a**	Reviewer Trustworthiness	(Weakly) Supported
	H3b	Reviewer Expertise	Supported
	H3c	Review Helpfulness	Not supported

Table 7 - Overview of Findings

By interpreting the findings, I am able to derive a number of important insights. First, the fundamental proposition of this research is that visually disclosing a reviewer's identity in a video review may positively affect its viewers' perceptions of review helpfulness and credibility (Hypothesis 1). Indeed, my analysis reveals that compared to otherwise identical video reviews, video reviews in which the reviewer is visible are on average rated significantly higher in terms of their helpfulness as well as the reviewer's trustworthiness and expertise. Hence, these findings support the notion that consumers consider heuristic cues when consulting and judging other users' reviews. With respect to the two dimensions of credibility (H1a, H1b), the outcome may be explained by the idea that being able to see the reviewer evokes emotional responses which in turn lead to trust and confidence in the reviewer's expertise (Shan, 2016; Xu, 2014). In a similar manner, the positive influence on helpfulness (H1c) may derive from the fact that additional cues raise the message receivers' awareness and facilitate systematic processing (Daft & Lengel, 1986; Kahai & Cooper, 2003; Xu et al., 2015). Thus, consumers may be able to better comprehend the reviewer's remarks and consequently are more likely to consider the review useful for their purchase decision.

Second, the expected moderation effect of product type could not be confirmed for either of the dependent variables (Hypothesis 2). While this outcome contradicts the widely established classification system of Nelson (1970), it is in accordance with a newer stream of research which implies that the internet blurs the distinction between search and experience products (Xu et al., 2015). Researchers who advocate this opinion argue that this convergence is caused by consumers' ability to inform themselves about other consumers' product experiences (Huang, Lurie, & Mitra, 2009; Klein, 1998). This kind of information mitigates the need to use an experience product before its purchase because it renders product attributes more graspable and

hence makes experience goods more similar to search goods. Concerning the experience good used in my study, a mobile game, this argumentation certainly makes sense as the video review explained and judged various attributes of the game, and backed these opinions with relevant scenes of actual gameplay. Since the effect strength of reviewer disclosure was not significantly different between the search and experience good conditions, it can be speculated that the statements on the reviewer's experience with the game were already sufficient to satisfy the participants' information requirements.

Third, it was hypothesized that the degree of source-receiver similarity could be used as a predictor to reviewer credibility and review helpfulness (Hypothesis 3). However, the analytical outcomes lead to the conclusion that whether a consumer identifies with a reviewer is only partially relevant as a significant influence was only found on both credibility dimensions (H3a, H3b). The weakly significant relationship between perceived similarity and reviewer trustworthiness (H3a) may be based on participants' assumed commonalities with the reviewer in terms of believes and values. A possible explanation for the positive relationship between similarity and reviewer expertise (H3b) may be that when consumers have the same interests as the reviewer, they may more easily comprehend the review content and thus can better distinguish between superficial and sophisticated statements. Consumers' evaluations of review helpfulness, in contrast, appear to be based on factors other than their similarity to the reviewer (H3c). Moreover, the finding that of all the identity factors that are visually and audibly perceivable via video (age, gender, nationality, and ethnicity) only gender had a significant effect on the similarity measure suggests that participants considered other factors for their similarity assessment. For example, they may have been influenced by the reviewer's way of talking, clothes, or enthusiasm over the reviewed product.

Finally, the data analysis chapter offered a couple of interesting findings which are not deduced from my hypotheses. Comparing the participants' responses regarding their consultation of text and video reviews before making a purchase decision reveals that text reviews are still more frequently used than video reviews. However, as only 6.6% of respondents indicated that they never watch video reviews, it can be inferred that most people are familiar with video reviews and use them as a source of information at least from time to time. Further, the participants' general attitude towards online reviews was identified as a significant predictor of all three dependent variables. This serves as an indication that the perceptions of a review are not only affected by its characteristics but also by individual consumers' prejudice to customer-created online reviews in general.

5.2 Contributions to Theory and Practice

5.2.1 Theoretical Implications

Since prior academic research on online product reviews has almost exclusively observed reviews in written form, my attempt to illuminate the video medium may be deemed as this study's primal contribution to review literature. This paper can serve other scholars as a comprehensive summary on video reviews as it lists their essential components, underlines the differences to text reviews, and demonstrates an experimental procedure that enables their empirical investigation.

Moreover, by analyzing video reviews under consideration of diverse conceptions, I connect a modern method of information procurement with well-established theories. First, my findings provide additional support to the central view hold by the ELM and HSM that information are processed not just through central but also through peripheral routes, as the reviews showing the

reviewer were perceived differently from those disclosing his identity although they were otherwise identical (Zhang et al., 2014). Second, the product classification system of Nelson (1970, 1974) was applied in order to inspect whether the effects of reviewer disclosure differ depending on the type of product being reviewed. Unlike many other review studies (e.g. Krishnamoorthy, 2015; Mudambi & Schuff, 2010, Weathers et al., 2015), this research does not confirm a significant interaction effect of product type. Therefore, my findings provide evidence for the alternative standpoint which states that the search/experience good paradigm does not necessarily apply to information provided by consumers on the internet (Huang et al., 2009; Klein, 1998; Weathers et al., 2007). Third, due to the mixed findings regarding source-receiver similarity, the concept of homophily receives only partial support. Since videos can reveal more details about a reviewer than text reviews and user profiles, it may be appropriate to address the concept of homophily differently for this media format. More specifically, the discovery that solely the gender of participants had an effect on similarity perceptions illustrates that demographic factors - which are predominantly considered in review research on homophily (e.g. Connors et al., 2011; Forman et al. 2008; Shan, 2016) - are not sufficient to explain how consumers determine their level of similarity to the reviewer.

5.2.2 Practical Implications

From a practical standpoint, my findings can be insightful for online retailers, manufacturers, and consumers. The central research questions of this paper were deduced from the much-lamented issues of information overload and disbelief in review authenticity, which decrease customer satisfaction and sales (Kumar & Benbasat, 2006; Mudambi & Schuff, 2010). According to the study's outcomes, these problems can be mitigated through video reviews which reveal the reviewer's identity. Therefore, e-retailers may consider the creation or adaption of guidelines in

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which they point out that being able to see the reviewer can help other users to perceive a message as credible and comprehensive. Also, users may be incentivized by top reviewer initiatives or privacy policies which emphasize the user's control over their submitted content. Simultaneously, e-retailers are advised to respect that the act of identity disclosure represents a hurdle to consumers who are camera-shy or feel that this revokes their anonymity to an uncomfortable degree. Although reviewer disclosure was shown to improve review quality in multiple ways, the differences to video reviews in which the reviewer is not visible are arguably not large enough to justify the deterrence of users who are strictly against revealing their identity.

Further, my findings illustrate that text reviews are more frequently consulted than video reviews which may be due to the fact that video reviews are still rarely found on retail websites. Moreover, consumers may be inclined to look for reviews solely on websites where they expect to make a purchase instead of consulting external sources such as *YouTube*. Combining this conclusion with that of Xu et al. (2015) who attest a general superiority to video reviews evokes the idea that e-retailers should inspect whether they could increase the use of video reviews through, for example, incentives or the option to embed videos from third-party video platforms.

In principle, *YouTube* and other video-sharing websites can also use my data to understand why certain videos or channels outperform others. To them, the sales of reviewed products should be irrelevant but they may be able to enlarge their user base and click counts (and therewith advertising revenues) by promoting channels such as the one of Marques Brownlee, in which the reviewer's presence plays a larger role. Unfortunately, it cannot be ruled out that online retailers and product manufacturers misuse the implications of this paper by, for instance, paying people to recommend a product in front of a camera. However, the comparatively large effort of faking a

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video review may deter many from doing so. Even if videos with feigned statements are uploaded, it is probable that the easier identification of the reviewer – especially when his or her face is shown – should facilitate the detection of fake reviews.

Finally, individuals who consider to purchase or review a product can benefit from my study. Consumers can use the insights to comprehend and control the cognitive processes that occur when looking at different information sources. As a result, they may navigate more confidently through large pools of reviews and hence make better purchase decisions. Reviewers, of course, still have the right to decide for themselves whether and to what extent they want to disclose personal information online. However, if they want to become one of *Amazon*'s top reviewers or a renowned product tester on *YouTube*, standing in front of the camera instead of only behind it may be an advisable strategy.

5.3 Limitations and Directions for Future Research

Given the complex nature of review research and the scarcity of video review literature, it is not surprising that multiple study limitations as well as chances for future research can be identified. First, several limitations arise from my conscious decision to use an experimental procedure. Although I created the video reviews with the intention to make them realistic and provided participants with credible descriptions of shopping scenarios, the experiment may have been perceived as artificial. The reason for this concern is that some factors are extremely difficult or even impossible to simulate without exceeding the participants' reasonable effort or time limits. For example, by provoking real feelings of information overload through the provision of multiple other reviews, participants may have been stimulated to rely stronger on heuristics and therefore the effects of visual disclosure may have been more extensive (Forman et al., 2008).

Second, although the number of participants was sufficient, it was just above the minimum limit. Researchers with greater access to potential test subjects may repeat the experiment among larger participant groups which better represent the diverse audiences of universally accessible video reviews. In particular, socio-cultural variances may receive more attention since prior research observed that text reviews are perceived differently depending on whether the reader lives in a nation advocating either collectivism or individualism (Huang et al., 2015; Koh et al., 2010).

Third, the number of different variables and their value ranges in my experimental setup was rather limited. Each of the two product types was represented by only one product. Previous research shows that no product can be strictly defined as either a pure search or experience good because to some extent every product in existence contains attributes of both types. Consequently, studies which replicate my experimental procedure should use a wider variety of products. Similarly, given that video reviews are also present on websites such as *Yelp*, it may be worthwhile to integrate reviews on service transactions in future video research. Furthermore, in all of my videos, the reviewed products were endorsed. It is reasonable to assume that the results would have been different for negative reviews because they tend to be more influential on consumers' perceptions (Chevalier & Mayzlin, 2006). Moreover, the review content was presented by only one individual. Multiple studies yield evidence that, for example, the physical appearance, voice, or gender of salespersons can affect consumers' purchasing process (e.g. Das, 2016; McColl & Truong, 2013). Hence, my experiment may be repeated with presenters who possess diverse attributes. Other variables, most notably the product star-rating, helpfulness rating, and purchase intention, were deliberately excluded from my research framework but may be considered by researchers who possess the resources to realize a more extensive study design.

In sum, reviews influence consumers in very complex ways. Thus, researchers should carry out studies with holistic setups by including multiple variables and structural variations.

Fourth, I see great potential for research in the area of platform effects. While the video reviews in this study's experiment were exclusively accessible via *YouTube*, future studies may investigate whether one and the same video review is perceived differently depending on whether it is viewed on a retail website (e.g. *Amazon*) compared to a social media or entertainment platform (e.g. *YouTube*). As these websites constantly evolve and integrate new features, researchers may also consider how technological innovations such as 360-degree videos or virtual reality headsets may be utilized for video reviews. Further attention should also be brought to the ways through which users can be encouraged to not only consume but also upload their own video reviews. Moreover, given that a lot of vloggers on *YouTube* and top reviewers on *Amazon* publish video reviews on a regular basis, I propose that longitudinal studies should be conducted.

Fifth and finally, more research is warranted to scrutinize whether the conclusions of specific text review studies hold true for video reviews. Generally stated, the additional audio-visual information carried by video reviews tends to affect consumers' perceptions in ways different from those of text reviews. For example, studies may address whether video reviews differ from text reviews with respect to the effectiveness of product ratings and certain linguistic features, or the time consumers are willing to invest in them.

5.4 Conclusion

As the popularity of online video reviews increases, it becomes vital to understand how they affect consumers. The focus of this paper rests on the influence of a reviewer's visibility in a video review on perceptions of credibility and helpfulness; factors that previous research identified as crucial prerequisites to positive purchase decisions. Insights from studies on conventional text reviews were consulted to develop a research framework which takes into account the classification of different product types as well as the concept of homophily. By testing this framework via an online experiment, I was able to derive several valuable lessons.

First and foremost, this paper's main assumption that reviewer disclosure in a video review improves consumer's perceptions of review helpfulness and reviewer credibility (or rather trustworthiness and expertise) is supported. Second, while this effect appears to occur for both search and experience goods, the expected difference in effect size across these two product categories is not confirmed. Finally, the level of reviewer-viewer similarity showed predictive power for the assessment of reviewer expertise and (albeit only weakly significant) trustworthiness but not for review helpfulness. Based on these results, I outlined implications for theory and practice which are supposed to mitigate the issues of information overload and skepticism against the credibility of online reviews.

However, it should be highlighted that my findings represent only a small step into the still largely unexplored field of online video reviews. I therefore hope that this study serves other scholars as an introductory guideline and encourages further research on this highly topical subject.

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Appendices

Appendix A - Screenshot of a Text Review on Amazon.com

⭐⭐⭐⭐⭐ **I was planning on replacing it with the GoPro Black edition until I read the bad Amazon reviews**
By grantjl47 on October 29, 2014

Color: Black | **Verified Purchase**

I recently lost a GoPro along with my DJI Phantom drone, which flew away. I was planning on replacing it with the GoPro Black edition until I read the bad Amazon reviews. I noticed this while browsing and thought it was one helluva deal so I bought one.

This camera is cool! It comes with a boatload of accessories and, as a bonus, the accessories I bought for my lost GoPro fit this camera, including the windshield mount suction cup.

Picture quality is excellent as are the videos. I bought a yellow one, which came directly from China so it took a little longer to receive. I definitely recommend this, especially for the price.

4 Comments | 171 people found this helpful. Was this review helpful to you? Yes No Report abuse

Appendix B - Screenshot of a Video Review on Amazon.com

⭐⭐⭐⭐⭐ **I have the go pro 3+ and this is a steal of a deal**
By Uma on July 21, 2014

Length: 6:20 Mins

Color: Black

If you're looking for a action camera in this price range, this one's going to be hard to beat. It comes with lots of mounting accessories along with a waterproof case. I'd like to add this does float in the water proof case, at least it did for me. I lost it off a rc boat and assumed it went to the bottom, However a few minutes later we saw it floating! phew. The camera is packed with a ton of features and capabilities. The motion sensor is just one of them. The camera has a removable 3.7 V battery capable of recording up to 70 minutes in 1080p, and I have found it able to sit on "stand-by" for 3-4 hours. It has a built in screen allowing you to set up your shot. It has a built in fuction on the screen to shut off after recording for so long. The camera is still recording but the screen turns off to conserve battery. The audio could sound a little better, but it is usable. I would def. recommend this camera.

20 Comments | 492 people found this helpful. Was this review helpful to you? Yes No Report abuse

Appendix C - Screenshot of a Video Review on YouTube.com

Sports Action Camera For Under $100 - DBPOWER Waterproof Action Camera 12MP 1080P HD

Joshua Bane

▶ Subscribe 25,942

4,975 views

➕ Add to   ↪ Share   ••• More   👍 47   👎 0

Published on Oct 4, 2015
DBPOWER Waterproof Sports Action Camera 12MP 1080P HD with 2 Batteries and Free Accessories Kit

Click "Show More"

BUY IT HERE
http://amzn.to/1Pgxvlv

Appendix D - Screenshot of a User Profile on Amazon.com

Gina B

Chandler, AZ USA

I'm a big PC nerd and Chicago Bears fan who left the Windy City for the Valley of the Sun!

I enjoy reviewing products so that I can share great items I find with others. I can also save other users the mistake of purchasing a poorly designed item. When I get comments that my review helped someone out, that makes my day!

I have been a proud Vine Voice reviewer since 2009.

Helpful votes
4,826

Reviewer ranking
#276

TOP 500 REVIEWER   VINE VOICE

⌃ See less

Helpful votes	Following
4.8k	**0**

Appendix E - Overview of the Survey's Video Reviews

Search Good	
Product Type	USB flash drive
Product Name	(LaCie) PetiteKey - 8 GB USB Flash Drive
Review Text	*[Introduction – Reviewer visible / not visible]*
	I needed a USB flash drive to put on my key ring, so I bought this: The PetiteKey. Let's see what it can do.
	[Main Part – Voice Over]
	As you can see here, it is just like a regular key in terms of size and weight. Furthermore, it has a metal body which according to the manufacturer is scratch-resistant and waterproof up to 100m. To me, it definitely does feel solid. Although I wouldn't suggest running it over with a car or go swimming with it, I still feel save knowing that it won't break when I drop it on concrete or spill a drink on it.
	I got the 8 Gigabyte version but the key is also available with 16 and 32 Gigabytes. All of them work on Windows, Mac, and Unix Systems. The drive is a USB 2.0 model. As you can see, the read speed is 25 Megabytes per second, whereas the write speed is 10 Megabytes per second. In my opinion, these numbers are satisfying given that most people will buy this product for its resistance and portability instead of its speed.
	[Conclusion – Reviewer visible / not visible]
	So overall, the PetiteKey is a great product for everyone who is looking for a robust USB flash drive to carry all the time.
Word count	206 words
Video Duration	01 minute 18 seconds
Video Quality	720p
Links	Reviewer visible: www.youtube.com/watch?v=xfFUJJ99CbA
	Reviewer not visible: www.youtube.com/watch?v=iZBwkS-vfQw

Experience Good	
Product Type	Mobile game
Product Name	FRAMED (Developer: Loveshack)
Review Text	*[Introduction – Reviewer visible / not visible]*
	Framed is a puzzle game available on Android, iOS, and Windows Mobile. The central idea behind framed is to lead a criminal across a digital comic page. The gameplay is simple:
	[Main Part – Voice Over]
	You drag comic frames around and try to put them in the correct order. Then you press play, to check whether your plan works. If your plan fails, it only affects your progress across a single page, so you can jump straight back into figuring out the challenge. Regular challenges are to sneak past guards, balance on roof tops, and escape from your enemies. The deeper you get into the game, the more it plays around with these ideas. There's a real cinematic feel to FRAMED: Trench coats, mysterious briefcases, and glooming cigarettes are found in almost all levels. Furthermore, it is fast-paced like an action movie, because you always need to run out of the shadows to reach your next goal. While the game reuses some of its ideas, it never feels repetitive because it also switches things around constantly and therefore keeps surprising you.
	[Conclusion – Reviewer visible / not visible]
	In my opinion, FRAMED is one of the freshest puzzle games available for your smartphone or tablet. Because of its beautiful animations, innovative gameplay and catchy soundtrack, it provides great entertainment for hours.
Word count	210 words
Video Duration	01 minute 18 seconds
Video Quality	720p
Links	Reviewer visible: www.youtube.com/watch?v=HH5EBm-tAn4
	Reviewer not visible: www.youtube.com/watch?v=KTOSLlkz4u4

Appendix F - Composite Scales

Variables	Role	Items	References
General Attitude towards Online Reviews	Control Variable	In general, online reviews are… 1. trustworthy. 2. believable. 3. accurate. 4. credible.	Jensen et al. (2013)
Attitude towards USB Drives / Mobile Games	Control Variable	1. Need 2. Relevance 3. Importance 4. Interest 5. Involvement	Xu (2014)
Similarity to Reviewer	Independent Variable	The reviewer… 1. has similar tastes to me. 2. likes the same things as me. 3. is like me.	Connors et al. (2011)
Reviewer Trustworthiness	Dependent Variable	The reviewer is… 1. honest. 2. dependable. 3. reliable. 4. sincere. 5. trustworthy.	Ohanian (1990); Shan (2016); Tsao & Hsieh (2015)
Reviewer Expertise	Dependent Variable	The reviewer is… 1. an expert. 2. experienced. 3. knowledgeable. 4. qualified. 5. skilled.	Ohanian (1990); Shan (2016); Tsao & Hsieh (2015)
Review Helpfulness	Dependent Variable	The review… 1. improves my ability to make a decision whether to buy the product. 2. gives me insight into whether or not I would like the product. 3. contains useful information about the product. 4. is helpful.	Connors et al. (2011)

Appendix G - Surveys

[Note: In the following, the questionnaires of all four survey conditions are presented. To safe space, I do not list each questionnaire separately but instead highlight the differences between the USB flash drive condition (a) and the video game condition (b). For the reviewer conditions (visible vs. not visible), there were no differences apart from the embedded video review and the questions on similarity.

All of the questions presented in the following are marked by a "Q" in front of them. Many of them asked for the respondents' level of agreement with a certain statement. In all of these cases, the question started with the words "To which extent do you agree or disagree with the following statement:" and the response options were formed on the basis of a seven-point Likert scale (Strongly Agree, Agree, Somewhat Agree, Neither Agree nor Disagree, Somewhat Disagree, Disagree, Strongly Disagree).]

Introduction

Dear participant,

Thank you for taking the time to take part in this experiment. By doing so, you're helping me finish my Master's thesis at Maastricht University. Furthermore, for each validly filled out survey, I will make a donation of €0.50 to "Doctors without borders".

The topic of this study is "customer-created video reviews" (such as the ones you can find on YouTube or Amazon). Video reviews are created by consumers to express their opinion on a product they bought. Other consumers can watch these video reviews when they make a purchase decision.

This questionnaire consists of three parts:

    1.   Questions on your online/shopping behavior
    2.   Experiment: An online video review of an existing product
    3.   Questions on your demographics

Please follow the instructions, answer all questions sincerely, and do not leave this survey to look up information about the product presented in the experiment. The survey should take between 5 and 10 minutes. All answers will be treated confidential.

1) Questions on Online / Shopping Behavior

- Q1.1: How often do you buy products online? *[More than once per week, About 2-4 times per month, About once per month, About once per quarter (3 months), About once every six months, About once per year, Less than once per year, I never buy products online]*

- Q1.2: How often do you look at online text reviews (for example on Amazon) before buying a product either online or offline? *[Always, In most cases, Sometimes, Rarely, Never]*

- Q1.3: How often do you look at online video reviews (for example on Amazon or YouTube) before buying a product either online or offline? *[Always, In most cases, Sometimes, Rarely, Never]*

- In general, online product reviews are likely to be *[Seven-point Likert scale – Agreement]*
    - Q1.4.: trustworthy
    - Q1.5: believable
    - Q1.6: accurate
    - Q1.7: credible

2) Experiment

2.1a Introduction: USB Flash Drive Condition

Please imagine the following scenario: You just won a €20 (or $25) voucher for a USB flash drive (also known as USB stick) of your choice. Please answer the following questions according to your real personal preferences:

- Please indicate the extent to which you agree or disagree with this statement *[Seven-point Likert scale – Agreement]*:
    - Q2.1a.1: I currently need a new USB flash drive
    - Q2.1a.2: USB flash drives are relevant to you
    - Q2.1a.3: USB flash drives are important to you
    - Q2.1a.4: USB flash drives are interesting to you
    - Q2.1a.5: I can become involved in (fascinated with) USB flash drives

2.1b Introduction - Mobile Game Condition

Please imagine the following scenario: You just won a voucher for a free mobile game of your choice (a mobile game is a video game you can play on your smartphone or tablet. Examples: "Angry Birds", "Pokémon Go", "Candy Crush"). Please answer the following questions according to your real personal preferences:

[Note: At this position, I asked the same questions as in condition 2.1a but replaced the words "USB flash drive" with "mobile game".]

2.2a Product Description - USB Flash Drive Condition

Please imagine the following: You want to know what USB flash drives you can get for your voucher, so you visit an online store of your choice (for example Amazon) and start looking for USB flash drives that you might like. You find out about a USB flash drive called "PetiteKey". Please read the official product description and look at the official product pictures.

Official Product Description:

The USB flash drive "PetiteKey", with its key-shaped design, is waterproof, scratch resistant, and compact enough to protect data anywhere.

- Scratch-resistant connector
- 100-meter waterproof
- Compact, metal key design
- Available capacities: 8 GB / 16 GB / 32 GB

Official Product Pictures:

Information: The black bars in the product picture hide the company logo which might   affect your product perception. Please imagine that this product is manufactured by a   company unknown to you.

- Q2.2a.1: Do you already own the "PetiteKey"? *[Yes, No]*

2.2b Product Description - Mobile Game Condition

Please imagine the following: You want to know what mobile games you can get for your voucher, so you visit an app store of your choice (for example iTunes, Google Play, Windows app store) and start looking for a mobile game that you might like. You find out about a mobile game called "FRAMED". Please read the official product description and look at the official screenshots.

> Official Product Description:
>
> FRAMED is a multi-award winning noir-puzzle game where you re-arrange panels of an animated comic book to change the outcome of the story. It is available on Android, iOS, and Windows Mobile.

> Screenshots:
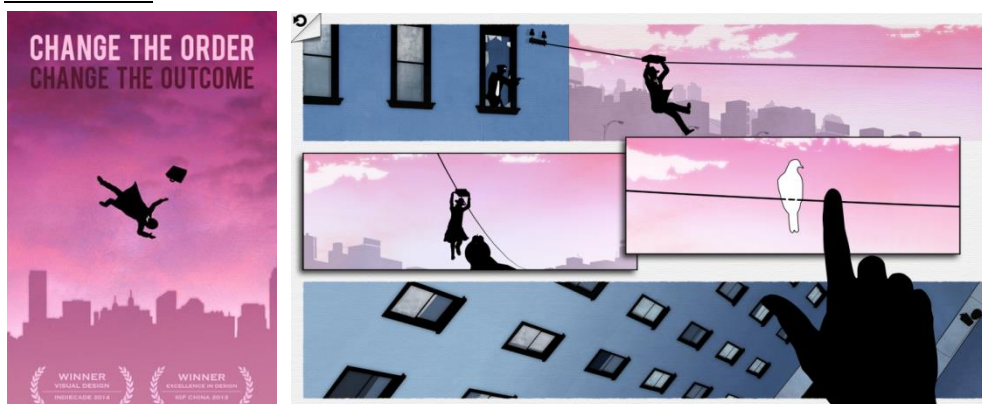
- Q2.2b.1: Have you ever played "FRAMED" before? *[Yes, No]*

2.3a Video Review: USB Flash Drive Condition

After reading the official product description of the "PetiteKey", you decide to get more information about it from online reviews. You go to YouTube and find the video below. Please click the play button and watch the video.

Information: You can switch subtitles on/off by clicking on CC. Also, you can watch the video on YouTube (by clicking on the YouTube icon) to view it in full screen.

[Note: At this position, one of the four video reviews is embedded (See Appendix E).]

2.3b Video Review: Mobile Game Condition

[Note: At this position, I gave the same instructions as in condition 2.3a but replaced the words "USB flash drive" with "mobile game".]

2.4a Questions on Review: USB Flash Drive Condition

Please answer the following questions regarding the video review you just saw:

- General Questions *[Control Questions; True, False]*
    - Q2.4a.1: I was able to see the reviewer in the video.
    - Q2.4a.2: The review was about a USB flash drive called "PetiteKey".
    - Q2.4a.3: The review contains a scene showing the USB key in a water glass.
    - Q2.4a.4: Do you personally know the reviewer? *[Yes, No]*
- Questions about the reviewer *[Seven-point Likert scale: Agreement]*
    - *Similarity* – The reviewer…
        - Q2.4a.5: Has similar tastes to me.
        - Q2.4a.6: Likes the same things as me.
        - Q2.4a.7: Is like me.
    - *Trustworthiness* – The reviewer is…
        - Q2.4a.8: Honest
        - Q2.4a.9: Dependable
        - Q2.4a.10: Reliable
        - Q2.4a.11: Sincere
        - Q2.4a.12: Trustworthy
    - *Expertise* – The reviewer is…
        - Q2.4a.13: An expert
        - Q2.4a.14: Experienced
        - Q2.4a.15: Knowledgeable
        - Q2.4a.16: Qualified
        - Q2.4a.17: Skilled

- Questions about the review *[Seven-point Likert scale: Agreement]*
    - Q2.4a.18: This review improves my ability to make a decision whether to buy the USB flash drive "PetiteKey"

- o Q2.4a.19: This review gives me insight into whether or not I would like the USB flash drive "PetiteKey"
- o Q2.4a.20: This review contains useful information about the USB flash drive "PetiteKey"
- o Q2.4a.21: This review of the "PetiteKey" USB flash drive is helpful

2.4b Mobile Game Condition

[Note: At this position, I asked the same questions as in condition 3.4a) but replaced the words "USB flash drive" with "mobile game".]

3) Questions on Demographics and Online Behavior

- Please indicate your gender *[Female, Male, Other]*
- Please indicate your age
- Please indicate your nationality *[Australian, Austrian, Belgian, British, Canadian, Dutch, French, German, Italian, Polish, Spanish, Swedish, Swiss, Turkish, US American, Other]*
- Please indicate your ethnicity *[African / African American etc., Caucasian / White, Latino / Hispanic, Middle Eastern / Arabic, East Asian, South Asian, Mixed, Other]*
- Please indicate your highest level of education *[No school diploma, Middle school or equivalent, High school or equivalent, Bachelor or equivalent, Master or equivalent, Doctorate or equivalent, Other]*
- Please indicate your professional / educational background *[Arts, Business, Education, Engineering, IT, Law, Mathematics, Natural Sciences, Other]*

Debrief

Thank you for your participation. If you would like to receive the results of this study and/or a confirmation of the donation, please enter your email address: _____

Please click "Submit" to finish this survey.

Attribute	Value	Count (%)	Mean (SD)	Min	Max
Age	(in years)	91 (100)	29.51 (10.08)	16	57
Gender	Male	52 (57.14)			
	Female	39 (42.86)			
Nationality	Australian	3 (3.30)			
	British	4 (4.40)			
	Canadian	8 (8.79)			
	German	40 (43.96)			
	US American	32 (35.16)			
	Other	4 (4.40)			
Ethnicity	African	1 (1.10)			
	Caucasian	81 (89.01)			
	Latino	3 (3.30)			
	East Asian	2 (2.20)			
	South Asian	1 (1.10)			
	Mixed	2 (2.20)			
	Other	1 (1.10)			
Highest Level of Education	Middle School	3 (3.30)			
	High School	29 (31.87)			
	Bachelor	42 (46.15)			
	Master	14 (15.38)			
	Doctorate	2 (2.20)			
	Other	1 (1.10)			
Educational / Professional Background	Arts	5 (5.49)			
	Business	17 (18.68)			
	Education	3 (3.30)			
	Engineering	7 (7.69)			
	IT	14 (14.29)			
	Law	10 (10.99)			
	Medicine	7 (7.69)			
	Natural Sciences	10 (10.99)			
	Other	19 (20.88)			
Online Shopping Frequency	>1 per week	12 (13.19)			
	~ once per week	31 (34.07)			
	~ once per month	25 (27.47)			
	~ once per quarter	15 (16.48)			
	~ 1-2 per year	6 (6.59)			
	< 1 per year	2 (2.20)			
Tendency to read online text reviews	Always	33 (36.26)			
	In most cases	46 (50.55)			
	Sometimes	11 (12.09)			
	Rarely	0 (0.00)			
	Never	1 (1.10)			
Tendency to watch online video reviews	Always	3 (3.30)			
	In most cases	20 (21.98)			
	Sometimes	33 (36.26)			
	Rarely	29 (31.87)			
	Never	6 (6.59)			
Attitude towards online reviews	Four 7-point scale items	91 (100)	4.88 (0.62)	3.00	6.00
Attitude towards USB drives	Five 7-point scale items	44 (100)	4.49 (0.99)	1.40	6.60
Attitude towards mobile games	Five 7-point scale items	47 (100)	3.95 (1.46)	1.00	6.80

Appendix I - Pattern Matrix

	Component		
	1	**2**	**3**
Honest	0.884		
Trustworthy	0.877		
Sincere	0.784		
Reliable	0.747		
Dependable	0.687		
Experienced		0.872	
Knowledgeable		0.871	
Skilled		0.791	
Qualified		0.649	
Expert		0.615	
Whether to buy to product			0.876
Whether I'd like the product			0.874
The review is helpful			0.762
The review contains useful information			0.667

Extraction Method: Principal Component Analysis

Rotation Method: Oblimin with Kaiser Normalization (6 iterations)

Only values above 0.3 are shown.

Components:

- Component 1 = Reviewer Trustworthiness
- Component 2 = Reviewer Expertise
- Component 3 = Review Helpfulness