Destination branding:
Perceived credibility in social media content

Author: Julia Lindqvist
Supervisor: Lisa Källström
Examinator: Christer Ekelund
Abstract

Title: Destination branding: Tourists’ trust in social medias content

Problematisation: Credible information on social media affects potential tourists when choosing where they will travel. Thus, the competition for the attention of potential tourists makes the credibility aspect important to explore further. Perceived credibility in social media online could be more questioned than offline sources since user generated Websites usually do not go through a review. Additionally, the understanding of online credibility is still limited, when it comes to UGC. There has not been much research emphasising the perceived credibility on user generated content. Furthermore, there seems to be a disagreement about perceived credibility existing in social media, which makes it an interesting topic.

Purpose: The aim of this paper is to investigate which dimensions are positively influencing perceived credibility online and if the information on TripAdvisor was seen as credible. The purpose is also to explore if there is a relationship between perceived credibility and the dimensions user generated content, authority, communication, updates and design. The purpose of this dissertation is also to add knowledge about how potential tourists perceive credibility when they view a Website designed for tourists.

Methodology: This study used a paper-based questionnaire, answered by students at Kristianstad University.

Limitations: This dissertation has two main limitations. Firstly, it only examines one social media, TripAdvisor. Secondly, participants in the sample were only chosen from Kristianstad University and under certain circumstances, which made the sample limited.

Conclusion: The result showed that there was a positive relationship between user-generated content, authority, communication, updates and design and perceived credibility. However, the dimension advertisement was rejected. Thus, five of six hypotheses were not rejected and had a statistical significance (P= < 0.01). Only hypothesis four, advertisements, did not have statistical significance and was rejected. The total perceived credibility for TripAdvisor’s Website, in this dissertation, was that it was seen as fairly credible.

Keywords: Credibility, UCG, social media, TripAdvisor & destination branding
Acknowledgment

With this bachelor dissertation my studies will end here at University of Kristianstad. Writing this dissertation has been one of the most difficult things I have ever done. However, it has also been one of the most interesting challenges I have experienced. I would like to thank the University of Kristianstad for this enriching time.

I would like to start with expressing my gratitude to my supervisor, Lisa Källström, for helping and supporting me through the process of writing the dissertation but also for offering her expertise on the topic. Thank you for your commitment and support, without you this dissertation would not have been possible.

I would also like to thank Annika Fjelkner, who probably is the only person that has the stamina to read through my dissertation and helping me with my linguistics. Thank you for making this dissertation readable.

June 2014

________________________________________
Julia Lindqvist
# Table of Contents

1. Introduction .................................................................................................................. 7
   1.1 Background .................................................................................................................. 7
   1.2 Problematisation ......................................................................................................... 8
   1.3 Research question ....................................................................................................... 10
   1.4 Purpose ....................................................................................................................... 10
   1.5 Limitations .................................................................................................................. 10
   1.6 Outline ......................................................................................................................... 11

2. Development of the Internet .......................................................................................... 12
   2.1 Advances of the Internet .............................................................................................. 12
       2.1.1 Social media as channels of marketing communication ..................................... 12
       2.1.2 User generated content (UGC) ............................................................................ 13
       2.1.3 WOM and eWOM ............................................................................................... 14

3. Literature review ........................................................................................................... 16
   3.1 Marketing ..................................................................................................................... 16
       3.1.1 Branding ................................................................................................................ 16
       3.1.2 Place branding ...................................................................................................... 17
       3.1.3 Destination branding ............................................................................................ 17
   3.2 Credibility .................................................................................................................. 19
       3.2.1 Factors that influences credibility ........................................................................ 21
       3.2.2 Theoretical summary of the dimensions .............................................................. 25
       3.2.3 Theoretical framework and hypotheses ............................................................... 27

4. Research Methodology .................................................................................................. 31
   4.1 Research philosophy ................................................................................................. 31
   4.2 Research approach .................................................................................................... 32
   4.3 Choice of theory ........................................................................................................ 33
   4.4 Choice of empirical methodology .............................................................................. 33
4.5 Research design ........................................................................................................................................... 33
4.6 Research strategies ........................................................................................................................................ 34
  4.6.1 Questionnaire .......................................................................................................................................... 34
4.7 Operationalization ......................................................................................................................................... 35
  4.7.1 Dependent variable: Credibility ............................................................................................................. 35
  4.7.2 Independent variables ............................................................................................................................ 35
  4.7.3 Control variables ...................................................................................................................................... 39
  4.7.4 Sample selection ...................................................................................................................................... 39
  4.7.5 Ethical consideration .............................................................................................................................. 40
4.8 Validity ......................................................................................................................................................... 41
4.9 Reliability ..................................................................................................................................................... 42
4.10 Generalizability .......................................................................................................................................... 42
5. Empirical findings and analysis .................................................................................................................... 43
  5.1 Empirical findings ....................................................................................................................................... 43
    5.1.2 Sample .................................................................................................................................................. 43
    5.1.3 Type of data .......................................................................................................................................... 44
    5.1.4 Cronbach’s alpha .................................................................................................................................. 45
    5.1.5 Analysis of hypotheses .......................................................................................................................... 46
6. Conclusion ....................................................................................................................................................... 51
  6.1 Summary of the dissertation ........................................................................................................................ 51
  6.2 Conclusion of the findings ........................................................................................................................... 52
  6.3 Critical reflections ....................................................................................................................................... 53
    6.3.1 Ethical and societal implications ............................................................................................................ 54
  6.4 Practical implications .................................................................................................................................... 54
  6.5 Future research .......................................................................................................................................... 55
References ............................................................................................................................................................ 56
Appendix 1. Questionnaire (in Swedish) .......................................................................................................... 60
Appendix 2. Questionnaire........................................................................................................62
Appendix 3. Descriptive data ..................................................................................................64
Appendix 4. Cronbach’s alpha ...............................................................................................65
Appendix 5. Normal distribution shown in a boxplot ............................................................66
Appendix 6. Spearman’s Correlation .....................................................................................67
1. Introduction

In this chapter an introduction to the topic of destination branding will be given, followed by a problematisation on the issue and a brief discussion on why further research on the matter is required. The chapter will then continue with the formulation of the research question and the purpose of the dissertation. Lastly, the section will end with limitations and the outline of this dissertation.

1.1 Background

Today, destinations are involved in a very tough competition for the awareness of tourists. People are traveling more than ever and the last decades have shown a steady increase in the tourism sector (Hallonsten, 2013). However, due to the huge amount of information available online, it might be difficult for destinations to grab a potential tourists’ attention. This easily accessible online information has also created problems regarding the credibility of the information available online. Now almost everybody can be an author and upload information on the Internet. This is creating difficulties when trying verifying how credible the information online is (Metzger, 2007). Therefore, the question is what tourists consider as credible information. Perhaps it is not even something destinations can control but instead, up to tourists and their uploaded user-generated content (UGC) on social media that will make information credible. However, user generated content is still something that affect destinations and their image and therefore something that is important for destinations to be aware of. UGC refers to information that is “digitalized, uploaded by different users and made accessible through the Internet”(Munar, 2011).

Thanks to the development of the Internet, it is nowadays easy for tourists to look up and verify different types of information concerning a destination. The Internet has changed how tourists access travel information, plan a trip and share their travel experiences; the latter being a kind of user-generated content (Hays, Page, & Buhalis, 2013; Lange-Faria & Elliot, 2012). In the beginning of online marketing destinations could create a Webpage and use it in the same way as brochures and the tourist influence was very limited. Nowadays, tourists are more active than before when it comes to selecting and creating information about a destination on the Internet. This makes user-generated content to an important factor in shaping the destination image (Munar, 2011).

The Internet has also changed how word of mouth (WOM) is perceived. WOM can be described as, information and recommendations from family and friends to other persons
(Tham, Croy, & Mair, 2013). However, today is WOM available electronically, in the form of different social media instead of only in a face-to-face conversation (ibid). This means that social media is starting to become the main channel where travel information is shared and spread (Xiang & Gretze, 2010). Zhou and Wang (2014) and Lange-Faria and Elliot (2012) define social media as, “a technological platform that allows persons to: write, share, evaluate and discuss different contents”. Social media include: email, Websites, online message panels, chat rooms and so on (ibid).

The aim of this dissertation is to examine which dimensions that influence the perceived credibility on user generated Websites such as, TripAdvisor.

To be able and investigate the aim of this dissertation one social media has been selected, namely, TripAdvisor. TripAdvisor is the largest travel-related UGC site (Ayeh, Au, & Law, 2013). It is a Website where consumers have the opportunity to share their opinions about what they experienced on a trip (Litvina, Goldsmith, & Pan, 2008). TripAdvisor advertises themselves as: the largest site for unbiased travel reviews that provides the real story about hotels, attractions and restaurants all around the world (ibid). Since, TripAdvisor is one of the largest travel site online, it will be used when investigating what influences perceived credibility on online content.

1.2 Problematisation

This section will discuss why online credibility is an interesting area for further research. The first argument is about credibility itself. The credibility aspect is important. However, there seems to be little written about the credibility of user-generated content in social media. Previous research has recommended further examination of credibility. For example Tham et al. (2013), suggest that further studies should examine how tourists perceived credibility on social media. The information on social media effects potential tourists on where they will travel or what they will do (Digital Visitor, 2014). The question remaining is what it is that makes the information influential. Research has shown that information must be credible to influence potential tourists. However, the credibility online might be more questioned since social media do not go through the same procedure as newspapers and books, where the information is reviewed (Flanagin & Metzger, 2000). Additionally, there is no relationship between the source and receiver online (Tham et al., 2003), which might have an impact on how credibility is perceived. Furthermore, it should be remembered that there is often a
purpose to why information is uploaded in the first place (*ibid*), which also might impact credibility online. For example there might be a difference in perceived credibility depending on who the publisher is (Metzger, 2007).

This dissertation is going to investigate which dimensions are influencing credibility online and if the information on TripAdvisor is seen as credible.

The second argument is that social media is not a heavily researched topic. For example Munar (2012) suggests that there is need for more research on the topic of social media and destination management because the theoretical development within this field is still at an early stage. Okazaki and Taylor (2013) agree that up till now, social media has not been heavily researched and, as a result, there are only a limited number of studies published. Hays et al. (2013) also suggest that studies exploring social media and the tourism sector are needed to provide a well-accepted representation of the social media phenomena. Tham et al. (2013) continue by stating that there is a need for further studies exploring the influence of social media on destination choice. Additionally, it has been argued that social media provides multiple opinions from different sources, which increases the total credibility. A good example of this would be Facebook (Tham *et al.*, 2013; Xiang & Gretzel, 2010), that has thousands of users. However, it has also been claimed that in media, where official tourism organisations participate has a stronger influence on destination choice (Tham *et al.*, 2013). Thus, there seems to be a disagreement about the perceived credibility existing in social media, which makes it an interesting topic for further research.

The third argument is by Metzger (2007), who claims that the development of the Internet has increased access to information at a lower cost than before. The result is that more information from more sources is available and more easily accessible than ever before. Thus, almost anybody can be an author on the Internet, which can influence issues of credibility (*ibid*).

The fourth argument is that the credibility of user-generated content in websites only has been researched in a limited number of resent studies. Most previous studies on online UGC have not been focusing on the perceived credibility of the user generated information, especially when it comes to studies within tourism research (Ayeh, Au, & Law, 2013). Therefore, regardless of the growing interest in social media, the understanding of how important credibility is when it comes to UGC is still limited (*ibid*). It is suggested that future studies should investigate UGC platforms since, there seems to be a common request for more
research on the topic. Additionally, by investigating how potential tourists perceive credibility, the marketing managers of these destinations can receive a valuable insight on the importance of user-generated content. Even if UGC is not necessarily something that can be controlled by a destination, it is still something that affects them and their brand. Hence, it is important for destinations to be aware of the possible influences UGC can have on their branding, and if they somehow can utilise this to their advantage. For example, monitor how tourist trends and patterns over time have changed (Munar, 2012).

1.3 Research question
This paper will concentrate on the credibility aspects of social media content available online for tourists. From the problematisation the question that will be answered in this dissertation is:

*Which dimensions influence perceived credibility on social media in the field of destination branding?*

1.4 Purpose
The purpose of this dissertation is to add to the knowledge about how potential tourists perceive credibility when they view a Website that is designed for tourists. The aim is also, to examine which dimensions that influence the perceived credibility on social media content. The results from this kind of study might be able to provide a better insight on what factors that affect the credibility of UGC in social media.

1.5 Limitations
This dissertation will have two main limitations. Firstly, it will look at one social media namely: *TripAdvisor*. TripAdvisor is selected because it contains user-generated content in the form of text, photos and the Website is also well known (Ayeh et al., 2013). Secondly, is that participants in this sample are only chosen from Kristianstad University (HKR). However, according to Flanagin (2000) Internet users are often young and educated. Thus, choosing students at HKR seemed to be suitable. The term HKR might also be used when referring to the University of Kristianstad. Thus, the sample is very limited.
1.6 Outline

This dissertation will consist of six chapters. The first chapter will describe the background and presented the problematisation. From the problematisation the research question and the purpose of this dissertation will be developed. Lastly the first chapter will end with limitations and outlines. In the second chapter a summary on development of the Internet will be given. In the third chapter the literature review will be presented. The section will then end in a theoretical framework and model. In the fourth chapter the methodology, used in this dissertation will be described. In the fifth the empirical material be presented and analysed. Finally, in chapter six, the dissertation will end with a summary of the dissertation, conclusion, practical implications and suggestions for further research.
2. Development of the Internet

There are different ways for people and organisations to communicate; it can either be offline or online (Björner, 2013). Online communication will be investigated in this dissertation.

2.1 Advances of the Internet

A contributing factor to the growing interest in tourism is the development from Web 1.0 to Web 2.0 (Ayeh, Au, & Law, 2013). The term Web 1.0 refers to the phase of the World Wide Web, when websites did not support user-generated content. The development from Web 1.0 is known as Web 2.0 (Munar & Jacobsen, 2013). Web 2.0 permits increasing influence by smart Web services where, users can contribute by: developing, rating, collaborating and distributing Internet content and customizing Internet applications (Munar, 2011).

The development to Web 2.0 was driven by four factors: firstly, nowadays there are more powerful and affordable hardware and software available. Secondly, there are faster advances in easy-to-use tools for creating and sharing content. Thirdly, today people of the world have a higher e-literacy than before. Fourthly, there has been an increase in the use of portable and wireless platforms (ibid).

The transformation to Web 2.0 permits Internet users, in this case tourists, to use social media when they are trying to develop an image and an opinion about a destination. Thus, the next section will bring forth what social media is in a tourism context.

2.1.1 Social media as channels of marketing communication

Social media has transformed the nature and content of consumer conversations (Kimmel & Kitchen, 2014). Brake and Safko (2009, p 6.): provide following definition of social media:

Social media refers to activities, practise and behaviours among communities of people who gather online to share information, knowledge and opinions using conversational media. Conversational media are Web based applications that make it possible to create and easily transit content in the form of words, pictures, videos or audios.

In this dissertation the definition by Brake et al.’s. (2009) will be used.
The interest in social media is continuously growing which has resulted in various types of user-generated content (UGC) websites. Examples of these include: social networking, online travel communities, and review sites (Ayeh, Au, & Law, 2013). Social media use many different platforms, such as: wikis (wikitravel), blogs (travel blog) and microblogs (Twitter), social network sites (Facebook), media-sharing sites (Flickr or YouTube), review sites (TripAdvisor) and voting sites. These types differ in their level of allowing social interactivity, structure and reach of communication, and context richness as well as levels of hierarchy and control established by site administrators (Munar & Jacobsen, 2013). Thus, social media is providing new channels for sharing travel information and is also becoming the primary media which information is shared (Xiang & Gretzel, 2010).

Social media is particular important for tourism due to the fact that it is an information-intensive-industry (Wang, Fesenmaier, & Yu, 2002). Tourists gather information to support their trip planning and to be able to make good decisions about: lodging, restaurants, attractions and tours (Xiang & Gretze, 2010). Through social media tourists can share their knowledge and also their experience (Munar & Jacobsen, 2013). Tung and Ritchie (2011) define a tourism experience as; an individual’s subjective evaluation and experience of events related to the tourist activity; in the beginning, during and after the trip.

Social media has increased in popularity and since it supports users to share information, Internet users have been increasing their control while the authority of marketers of destinations have diminishes. As a result marketers and institutions do not have the full power over the image of the destination (Thevenot, 2007). As it was established earlier in this dissertation user generated content is information from family and friends to other persons (Tham, Croy, & Mair, 2013). However, the next section will describe more detailed what the concept UGC mean.

### 2.1.2 User generated content (UGC)

The transformation of the Internet has radically changed how tourists, gather information about a destination and/or to share their tourism experiences (Xiang & Gretzel, 2010). Digital content provided by tourists has increasingly influenced destination awareness and image creation (Tussyadiah & Fesenmaier, 2009). Hence, user generated content (UGC) is a popular way to contribution to tourism sites (Munar, 2011). Another terminology of user-generated content is tourist created content (TCC) (ibid). However, in this dissertation UGC will be used.
UGC can create difficulties to monitor and control all the possible ways the brand could appear in because it is characterized by flexibility of genres. For example, after one user has commented on something, a Website can remain open to other users to comment as well (ibid).

According to Munar (2011) tourists create three main categories of digitalized content: visual, audio and narrative. The visual content consists of two main types: photographic and audio-visual. The audio content can be in the form of podcasts. The narrative type can for example be a destination brand combined with words, taglines or slogans (ibid).

Munar (2011) continues by arguing that UGC is about communication and personal expression and the content encourages both the knowledge sharing of tourism experiences. Experiences are personal and depend on the tourist reactions and how the tourist perceives a specific place or product, for example: destinations, attractions or accommodations (Munar & Jacobsen, 2013). When tourists share experiences they do not only include knowledge-related aspects such as prices, weather conditions, beaches and other attractions but might as well include communicating emotions, imaginations or fantasies about a holiday (ibid).

This user-generated content can be spread through the Internet and social media, which is a kind of word of mouth. Therefore, the next section will present word of mouth and more importantly electronic word of mouth.

2.1.3 WOM and eWOM

A result of the development to Web 2.0 users are now able to connect to each other through social networks and interpersonal communications (Kimmel & Kitchen, 2014). It is argued that certain people, called opinion leaders have the power to personally influence the decision-making of others by passing on information. For example the power to affect other’s attitudes and behaviours towards something in the marketplace, for example a brand, a store sale or an advertisement (Kimmel & Kitchen, 2014). Word of mouth is defined as: an oral and person-to-person communication, between a receiver and a communicator, which the receiver perceives as non-commercial concerning a brand (Kimmel & Kitchen, 2014).

Traditional word of mouth (WOM) and electronic word of mouth (eWOM) has been considered to refer to the same concept and are only distinguished by which channels that are using (Tham et al., 2013). However, according to Kimmel and Kitchen (2014) online social networking channels are providing an attractive way for the fast and extensive distribution of
eWOM amongst people. People do not even have to encounter each other in any offline situations. Thus, social media provides an additional way for WOM to be spread across a large number of people, which might only be connected through a common interest or need. Compared to WOM, eWOM provides a better reach and is characterized by greater specialization. There is likely to be an apparent expert about virtually anything online and there is evidence that trust levels can be high for unknown consumers engaged in eWOM on trusted websites (Kimmel & Kitchen, 2014).

However, for the information to have an effect on potential tourists it needs to be considered credible. Therefore, the literature review will focus on marketing and different aspects that previous research have established as important for online credibility.
3. Literature review

In this chapter the literature field will be described. The first section in this chapter will state the definitions of marketing and branding applied in this dissertation, and also describe the concepts of place and destinations branding. Thereafter, the second section will focus on credibility. The credibility section will be divided in, types of credibility and different factors that influence credibility. The factors will be listed according to what previous authors have discussed. The final section will sum up the factors in a theoretical summary, a model and hypotheses.

3.1 Marketing

Marketing research is the key mechanism where companies can understand their current, as well as, potential customers (Young & Javalgi, 2007). Without this open dialog with customers, companies are unable to keep up with vital consumer trends and the many influences, which affect the customers of an organization (ibid). Marketing is a social process (Dann, 2010). Marketing can be defined as: "the activity, set of institutions, and processes for creating, communicating, delivering, and exchanging offerings that have value for customers, clients, partners, and society at large" (American Marketing Association, 2013). This definition of marketing will be used in this dissertation.

The marketing concept implies that companies need to satisfy the consumers’ preferences, which are based on needs and wants (Carrigan, Marinova, & Szmigin, 2005). In today's consumer environment there are many choices and a lot communication. Hence, growth can only be accomplished by organizations that are skilled in developing well-targeted strategies, which are directed to specific markets (Young & Javalgi, 2007). One important part of marketing strategies is branding (Bastos & Levy, 2012). Therefore, the next section will describe what branding is.

3.1.1 Branding

Today, branding is widely acknowledged as an effective tool for organizations to develop competitive advantages within the market, as it tries to generate value for both producers and consumers (Kaplan, Yurt, Guneri, & Kurtulus, 2010). Brands advertise identities and try to create beauty, commitment, and distinction to something (Bastos & Levy, 2012). The core
idea of branding is to generate feelings of membership, of power and of excitement \((\textit{ibid})\). The acknowledgement of brands has triggered an increase of studies within the field (Kaplan \textit{et al.}, 2010). This intensified research has increased the understanding of how brands operate and how they have developed into the most strategic marketing tool (Kaplan \textit{et al.}, 2010). In the following section a kind of branding, place branding will be presented.

### 3.1.2 Place branding

Thanks to the increased interest in branding, place branding is now developing into a crucial area for marketers (Kaplan \textit{et al.}, 2010). Place branding refers to the practice of applying suitable marketing strategies to distinguish cities, regions and countries from competition that takes in consideration economic, social, political and cultural aspects \((\textit{ibid})\). Place branding concerns everything a place wishes to display. The experiences place displays are created from a range of everyday contexts, where landscapes are presented (Rowley & Hanna, 2011). Due to the increasing global rivalry, places must display a good environment that is effective when they are competing for new resources \((\textit{ibid})\). Branding can be used to increase resources for a place. Those resources can for example be more foreign investments, residents, and/or visitors \((\textit{ibid})\).

A strong emphasis on place branding has developed in the literature, especially within the field of destination marketing (Kaplan \textit{et al.}, 2010). One type of place branding is destination branding, where the targets are visitors. In this dissertation is destination branding one of the main foci. Thus, the next section will describe destination branding more closely.

### 3.1.3 Destination branding

There has been an increasing interest in destination branding, as it plays a relevant role for competing in the current tourist market since destination branding is able to influence or adapt tourist expectations (Sartori, Mottironi, & Anton, 2012).

There are several possible definitions on what destination branding is. Therefore, in this section the definition that will be used in this dissertation will be outlined. Furthermore, the general purpose of destination branding will also be explained.
Campelo, Aitken, Thyne and Gnoth (2014) define a destination as “a destination that can be seen as a geographical place which is decided by and attached to a group of meanings and values”. This definition will be used to explain what a destination is. There are also multiple definitions of what destination branding is. One definition is “a way to communicate a destination’s distinctive identity by differentiating a destination from its competitors” (Vilchez, 2013). There is another and more extensive definition by Blain, Levy and Ritchie (2005, p. 337):

Destination branding is the set of marketing activities that (1) support the creation of a name, symbol, logo, word mark or other graphic that readily identifies and differentiates a destination; that (2) consistently convey the expectation of a memorable travel experience that is uniquely associated with the destination; that (3) serve to consolidate and reinforce the emotional connection between the visitor and the destination; and that (4) reduce consumer search costs and perceived risk. Collectively, these activities serve to create a destination image that positively influences consumer destination choice.

In this dissertation the definition by Blain et al. 2005 will be used. Tasci and Kozak’s (2006) state that; a destination brand refers to marketing activities, which influence: awareness, choice, satisfaction, recommendation, and loyalty. Furthermore, Beritelli (2011) and Haugland, Ness, Grønseth and Aarstad (2011) also state that destination branding involves a combination of services created and provided and they add that destination branding has to be in collaboration with the local stakeholders’ opinions. The purpose of destination brands is to make a promise to tourists on what they can expect to experience at the destination (Björner, 2013).

From a tourist point of view destination brands helps to: identify, describe and distinguish a destination from other destinations, communicates an image to tourists about experiences and highlights characteristics that make a destination distinctive and attractive (Blain, Levy, & Ritchie, 2005). One of the hardest challenges with creating a distinctive destination brand is to be able to understand the nature of a destination’s identity and to recognize the core attributes that define its character (Campelo et al., 2014).

Today, a destination’s brand is not only affected by the destination itself but also by user-generated content that spreads through electronic word of mouth. However, the information might not have much effect if it is not considered credible. Therefore, the next section will be about credibility online.
3.2 Credibility

People increasingly rely on the Internet and web-based information despite evidence that it is potentially inaccurate and biased (Flanagin & Metzger, 2000). However, the Internet differs from other technologies that are used for information retrieval. The Internet is an open source and free for anyone to use, which can influence its reliability and credibility as an information source. Newspapers’, books’ and magazines’ content go through editorial reviews before they are published. However, this type of review is largely absent when it comes to most Internet information (Flanagin et al., 2000). This makes credibility important, especially in tourism (Loda, Teichmann, & Zin, 2009).

Before presenting the different aspects and dimensions influencing credibility on online content, the definition must first be clarified. Credibility can simply be defined as believability (Tseng & Fogg, 1999; Liu, 2004). According to Liu (2004) information credibility decides to what extent users think information is: truthful, unbiased, accurate, reputable, competent and current. Source credibility is usually known to consist of expertise and trustworthiness (Pornpitakpan, 2004). Expertise refers to the extent a communicator is perceived to be capable of making correct statements. Trustworthiness refers to which degree an audience perceives the statement made by a communicator to be valid (Hovland, Jannis & Kelley, 1953). In this dissertation credibility will be seen as believable information, which is reliable and trustworthy.

Tham et al. (2013) suggest that there are five dimensional differences between electronic word of mouth and word of mouth associated to credibility: source-receiver relationships, channel diversity, information solicitation, message retaining and motivation for revealing information. Dimensions in eWOM can create challenges concerning credibility of user generated content and partly explain why credibility on social media is such an important research topic.

The first dimension is source-receiver relationships, states that when the communication occurs through the Internet, the source and the receiver are often unknown to each other (ibid). The communication can be between people that do not necessary have met each other (Kimmel & Kitchen, 2014). This creates a distant and unattached relationship between the source and the receiver (Tham et al., 2013) Additionally, today it is very easy to create an online identity, which makes UGC vulnerable to different kinds of strategic manipulation (Ayeh et al., 2013). For example, a travel intermediary can create a false identity and pose as
an independent reviewer that post biased comments and reviews. Consequently, it will promote their own reputation or hurt competitors (Litvina, Goldsmith, & Pan, 2008).

The second dimension describes the channel diversity. When communication occur online, signals available when talking to a person like: facial expression, dressing style and so on are lost and can create misinterpretations (Ayeh et al., 2013).

The third dimension is about solicitation, which means that information is requested for a particular purpose (Tham et al., 2013). Online it is often a wider scope, to satisfy a large range of profiles (ibid).

The fourth dimension, message retaining is about how well a person recalls a conversation that has taken place. However, when the information is shared through the Internet it is accessible to a larger audience and it makes it storable (Cheung, Luo, Sia, & Chen, 2009).

The final dimension is discussing the motivation for revealing information (Tham et al., 2013). Thanks to online interactions, tourists can gain various perspectives of a destination (ibid). Internet creates opportunities for people to create a mutual interest for a destination (Munar & Jacobsen, 2013).

These unique characters of user-generated content can create problems for credibility online. For example, as stated by Tham et al. (2013), online communication has an unattached relationship between the source and the receiver. Not knowing the source can lower the credibility because the person reading the information does not know the source identity and might be exposed to manipulations (Litvina et al., 2008). Additionally, all the personal cues like facial expression are not available and can decrease credibility (Ayeh et al., 2013).

This makes credibility online an interesting topic in the following section different kinds of credibility will be discussed and end with which one was applied in this dissertation.

### 3.2.1 Types of credibility

Tseng and Fogg (1999) claim that there are four types of credibility: presumed, reputed, surfaced and experienced. The first, presumed credibility is explained as: a person reading the information assumes that the source, hence the information is trustworthy. The second, reputed credibility is established through a third party statement: for example different awards
or by persons with an official title. If there is a link on one Web site to another it is often viewed as a third-party validation and likely to increase the linked site’s perceived credibility. The third, surfaced credibility describes how much a person believes something based on a simple examination. For example, a Website may appear credible just because of its visual design (ibid). The factors are all influencing the Website and its content appearance, thus a person makes assumptions from the examination of the Website. Certain design features such as: cool colour tones and balanced layout, improved users perception of the trustworthiness, which is a component of credibility. Thus, good visual design makes a Website seem credible. Finally, experienced credibility means that trust is gained from an individual’s past experience (Tseng & Fogg, 1999).

This dissertation will focus on surfaced credibility, as it was stated above, because this dissertation investigates perceived credibility, which is about how people perceive a Website and the content.

3.2.1 Factors that influences credibility

It is important to understand the skills needed to determine credibility of online information, which is mainly the same as for evaluating much other online information, regardless its topic (Fritch & Cromwell, 2001). There are different aspects on what creates credibility online. Since Metzger and Flanagin have written extensively within this topic they will be used in this dissertation. The first author, Metzger (2007) did a literature review of what other authors’ claim influence online credibility, which will form the basis in this dissertation. However, additional articles are needed to explain and understand which items that might influence credibility. The following part will present what previous research has stated to be important when creating credibility in online content; these items will be presented after authors.

3.2.1.1 Metzger (2007)

Metzger (2007) did a review on previous research on items that influenced online information credibility. Metzger (2007) collected only the main factors that had been examined in previous research. However, not all items are applicable to all Websites (Metzger, 2007). The items summarized in table 1 came from the following sources: Alexander and Tate (1999);
Eysenbach and Kohler (2002); Fogg et al. (2003); Freeman and Spyridakis (2004); Metzger et al. (2003); Rich and Belkin (1998); Rich (2002) and Walthen and Burkell (2002).

Table 1. Factors that influence credibility of online information (Metzger, 2007)

| Presence of date stamp showing information is current |
| Source citations |
| Citations to scientific data or references |
| Author identification |
| Author qualifications |
| Presence of contact information |
| Absence of advertising |
| Presence of privacy and security policies |
| Certifications or seals from trusted third parties |
| Well-organized site |
| Attractive, and consistent page design, including graphics, logos, colour schemes |
| Easy navigation |
| Absence of typographical errors and broken links |
| Sponsorship by of external links to reputable organizations |
| Download speed |
| Notification/presence of editorial review process or board |
| Professional-quality and clear writing |
| Past experience with source/organization (reputation) |
| Message relevance |
| Ability to verify claims elsewhere |
| Comprehensiveness of information provided |
| Domain name |
| Ranking in search engine |
| Plausibility of arguments |
| Paid access to information |

3.2.1.2 Flanagin and Metzger (2000)

Flanagin et al. (2000) identifies five items that should be used when evaluating credibility of Internet-based information: accuracy, authority, objectivity, currency, and coverage (Flanagin & Metzger, 2000). Accuracy refers to the degree to which a Website is free from errors. Authority means that a Website may be judged by noticing who authored the site and whether contact information is provided for that person or organization, and whether the Website is recommended by a trusted source. Objectivity involves identifying the purpose of the site, whether the information is fact or opinion based. This also includes understanding whether there might be a commercial intent or not. Currency refers to whether the information is up to date. Coverage refers to the comprehensiveness or depth of the information provided (ibid).
3.2.1.3 Fogg, Soohoo, Danielson, Marable, Stanford and Tauber (2003)

In the article by Fogg et al. (2003) an online experiment was conducted where they wanted to find out which items people notice in a Website when evaluating credibility. This was accomplished by analysing what the users had commented concerning the credibility aspect (Fogg et al., 2003).

The first item was named design look. The participants commented on the design of the Website more often than any other Website feature. Comments on the “look” included the layout, typography, white space, images, and colour arrangements and so on. If a Website look had a more professional look it was considered more credible. The second item was about the information structure: in this category participant commented on how well or poorly the information was merged. If it was hard to navigate the site to find things of interest was also evaluated in this category. Sites that were easy to navigate were seen as being more credible. The third item was information focus, which stated that if the information was a simple message without unnecessary information it was often seen as more credible.

The fourth item, underlying motives discussed what the perceived underlying motive of the Website or the institution sponsoring the site was. The comments often referred to how Websites lost credibility if the purpose appeared to be, selling articles to the users. The fifth item was usefulness of information, if the information was useful the website felt more credible. The sixth factor was accuracy of information. The item received comments about the (perceived) accuracy of the Website’s information. Participants commented if they had any doubt about the information on the site but also people confirmed the accuracy of what they found on the site. Some of the participants thought that if the information was already stated elsewhere the participants found the information believable. The seventh item, reputation stated that unfamiliar Websites were seen as less credible. The eighth item, advertising, was about how much advertisement existed on the Website and how it affected the credibility. Advertisements were usually considered by the participants to affect the credibility negatively.

The ninth item was information bias. The tenth item commented on tone of the writing, which stated that slang or poor language harmed the credibility. The eleventh item was identity of site sponsor; if there is information about who has created the Website the information seems more credible. The twelfth item was functionality of the Website, if there were for example broken links and so on, the credibility lowered.
Items thirteenth to eighteenth were only noticed by less than four percentages in the survey and they were: customer service, past experience with site, information clarity (easy to understand), performance on a test, readability and affiliations (ibid).

3.2.1.4 Robins and Holmes (2008)
The article discusses relationship between Web design and perceived credibility of the information and the importance of first impression that a person like a tourist get when opening the site. The first impression is made in a few seconds and one important dimension that might get Internet users to stay on the Website is the age’s design. In this article there was a statistical significance between design and perceived credibility. Thus, design has a crucial impact on how credibility is perceived (Robins & Holmes, 2008).

3.2.1.5 Westerman, Spence and Van Der Heide (2014)
Social media seems to be designed to provide information in real time. Therefore, the more recently updated the information is on a given social media the more credible it should be. Therefore, Westerman et al. (2014) believed that, recent updating would have a positive linear effect on perceived source credibility such that faster and more frequent updates would lead to increased source credibility.

3.2.1.6 Flanagin, Metzger, Pure, Markov and Hartsell (2014)
The aim of the article written by Flanagin et al. (2014) was to determine the credibility of commercial information online and if ratings are an important item for perceived credibility. The participants were able to choose the item that they thought most important for information credibility. Even if the article investigated commercial information it can still be applied to this dissertation because, as stated by Fritch & Cromwell (2001), it is still mainly the same criteria that are used when evaluating credibility. The items were ranked according to their importance, starting with the most important factor first (see table 2).
Table 2. Items used to determine credibility of commercial information online (Flanagin et al., 2014)

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Items</th>
<th>Authors</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>The Website seemed safe and secure</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>The information on the Website is up to date</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>The information is very complete</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>There are high ratings, positive comments or good review</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>The information seemed reasonable to you</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>The Website is easy to use</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>The Website does not try to convince you to do or buy something</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>The information is well written and you see no typing mistakes</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>You get more than just one person’s opinion</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>You have heard good things about the information source or Website creator</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Experts believe the information (like your doctor, teacher and so on)</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>The information came from an expert on the topic</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Others recommended the Website or information source</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>There is information about the source’s or author’s education or training</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>the information on the Website is similar to information on other Websites</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>you ask an expert (like your doctor, teacher and so on) who you know in person</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>you have heard of the source or information creator before</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Asked an expert that they know in person</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>People you know, such as friends and family, believed the Website or information source</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>The information you find is similar to what you already think</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>A lot of other people used the Website</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>The website looks good</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>The Website address had a certain ending (like gov or edu or .com)</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>You just liked the Website</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

3.2.2 Theoretical summary of the dimensions

The literature review has described different aspects of credibility and presented items that previous researchers have mentioned and described as important when creating credibility in online information. In table 3, 11 dimensions are presented. Moreover, the items associated with each dimension are also presented together with corresponding authors. The dimension UGC is presented after the dimensions.

Table 3. Summary of dimensions that influences credibility

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Dimension</th>
<th>Items</th>
<th>Authors</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td><strong>Authority</strong></td>
<td>1) Author qualifications</td>
<td>(Flanagin et al., 2014; Metzger, 2007)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>2) Presence of contact information</td>
<td>(Metzger, 2007; Flanagin et al., 2000; Fogg et al., 2003)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>3) Certifications or seals from trusted third parties</td>
<td>(Metzger, 2007)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>4) Author identification</td>
<td>(Metzger, 2007)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Category</td>
<td>Elements</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>-----------------------</td>
<td>------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Communication</td>
<td>1) Information clarity (easily understood) (Fogg et al., 2003) 2) Information was well written and without typing mistakes (Flanagin et al., 2000; Fogg et al., 2003; Flanagin et al., 2014; Metzger, 2007) 3) Information was very complete (Flanagin et al., 2000; Fogg et al., 2003; Flanagin et al., 2014; Metzger, 2007)</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Advertisement</td>
<td>1) Website does not try to convince you to do or buy something (Flanagin et al., 2000; Fogg et al., 2003) 2) Absence of advertising (Fogg et al., 2003; Flanagin et al., 2014; Metzger, 2007)</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Updates</td>
<td>1) Website is up to date (Flanagin et al., 2000; Westerman et al., 2014; Flanagin et al., 2014) 2) Presence of date stamp showing information is current (Metzger, 2007)</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Design</td>
<td>1) Attractive, and consistent page design, including graphics, logos, colour schemes (Fogg et al., 2003; Flanagin et al., 2014; Metzger, 2007; Robins et al., 2008) 2) Website was easy to use (Fogg et al., 2003; Metzger, 2007; Flanagin et al., 2014)</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Truthfulness</td>
<td>1) Accuracy of information (Fogg et al., 2003) 2) More than just one opinion (Flanagin et al., 2014; Metzger 2007)</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Reputation</td>
<td>1) Past experience with site (Fogg et al., 2003) 2) There are high ratings, positive comments or good review (Flanagin et al., 2014) 3) Heard something good about the Website or the creator of the site (Fogg et al., 2003; Metzger, 2007; Flanagin et al., 2014) 4) A lot of people used the Website (Flanagin et al., 2014) 5) Ranking in search engine (Flanagin et al., 2014)</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Similar information elsewhere</td>
<td>1) The information was similar to what the participants already thought (Flanagin et al., 2014) 2) People that the participant knew believed the information (Flanagin et al., 2014) 3) Ability to verify claims elsewhere (Metzger, 2007; Flanagin et al., 2014)</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Experts</td>
<td>1) Experts (like a doctor, teacher and so on) believe the information (Flanagin et al., 2014) 2) Information came from an expert on the topic (Flanagin et al., 2014)</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Others</td>
<td>1) Customer service (Fogg et al., 2003) 2) Performance on a test (Fogg et al., 2003) 3) Download speed (Metzger, 2007) 4) Paid access to information (Metzger, 2007) 5) The information seemed reasonable (Flanagin et al., 2014) 6) Affiliations (membership) (Fogg et al., 2003) 7) Source citations (Metzger, 2007) 8) The Website address had a certain ending (like .com) (Flanagin et al., 2014; Metzger, 2007)</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

26
User generated content is the eleventh dimension and concerns whether the content on a Website is perceived as more credible if a traveller has published it. According to Tham et al., (2013) and Xinga et al., (2010) there is a disagreement if it is more credible when travel agencies participate or if the channel variations of social media where travels give different views provide more credible information. For example, a Website might be open for other tourists to comment on what previous travellers have uploaded or expressed their opinion about a destination (Munar, 2011), which provides a broader view. Additionally, these comments and experiences tourists share are personal and depend on the person (Munar & Jacobsen 2013). However that might be perceived as more credible, instead of information coming from a travel agency that probably wants to promote their own destination above competitors (Litvina et al., 2008).

The next section will describe more which dimensions that will be used in this dissertation.

### 3.2.3 Theoretical framework and hypotheses

This section will describe the dimensions that are used to investigate if they influence perceived credibility in an online content. Hence, if a Website is considered more credible if the dimensions are present on the site. There are totally 11 dimensions, from, which dimensions relevant for this dissertation will be chosen. The dimensions will be chosen based on two criteria: how frequently they have been mentioned in previous research, and how they have been rated on their influence on credibility in previous studies. Using these two criteria dimensions that are well established and discussed can be chosen.

In the next section will hypotheses be presented.

#### 3.2.3.1 Hypotheses

The first dimension that is going to investigate perceived credibility online is **user-generated content**, which concerns whom the publisher is. For example, previous tourists’ comments about a destination might feel more credible, since it might provide a broader view on a destination due to the channel diversity (Xinga et al., 2010). Instead of a travel agency’s comments and reviews, which might be biased (Litvina et al., 2008), and might have manipulated the information (Ayeh et al., 2013). Thus, user-generated content will be used to see if it has any influence on credibility.
H¹: There is a positive relation between information published by travellers and credibility

The second dimension that will be investigated is authority. This dimension is examined in previous studies conducted by Flanagin et al. (2000), Flanagin et al. (2014), Fogg et al. (2003) and Metzger (2007). In the study by Flanagin (2000) it was expected that a person would notice what the publisher had for qualifications and whether the Website was recommended by a trusted source. According to Flanagin et al. (2014) information of the authors education or training was expected to determine how credibility was perceived online. Even though authority has not been highly ranked to influence credibility in previous research, eleventh of eighteen and fourteen of twenty-three; it still fulfils one of the main criteria for this dissertation. Therefore, authority will be used in this dissertation to see if it has any influence on credibility.

H²: There is a positive relation between displayed authority affirmations and credibility

The third dimension is communication, which is discussed by previous researchers (Flanagin et al., 2000; Flanagin et al., 2014; Fogg et al., 2003; Metzger, 2007). In a study by Flanagin et al. (2014) the third most influential item on credibility was that the information should be very complete. Flanagin et al. (2014) continue by claiming that it is important that the Website is well written and without typing mistakes (ranked number eighth of twenty-three). Fogg et al. (2003), states that the fifteenth most important item is information clarity. Information focus in this case means that the information should be able to be clearly understood. Lastly, comprehensiveness of information is, according to Metzger (2007, an important factor when establishing credibility. Therefore, even if the dimension varies in ranking, the main criterion, cited by several researchers is fulfilled and will thus be used to investigate credibility.

H³: There is a positive relation between well written and complete content and credibility

The fourth dimension, advertisement is a well-cited factor frequently discussed in previous research (Flanagin et al., 2000; Flanagin et al., 2014; Fogg et al., 2003; Metzger, 2007). Fogg et al. (2003) observed a factor they named underlying motives, which was ranked number four of eighteen in its influencing on credibility. The factor discussed what the perceived underlying motives of the Website were. The comments Fogg et al. (2003) got often stated that Websites lost credibility if the purpose appeared to sell things. In the same article there was also a factor titled advertising, which was ranked number eight. The factor concerned the
comments about the amount of advertisements on the Website. Advertising was often considered to affect the credibility negatively (ibid). Hence, the dimension advertising will be used to examine credibility.

\( H^4: \text{There is a positive relation between less displayed advertisements and credibility} \)

The fifth dimension is called updates. This dimension is well mentioned by previous researchers (Westerman et al., 2014; Metzger, 2007 Flanagan et al., 2014; Flanagan & Metzger, 2000) who believe that recent updates of the information have a positive effect on credibility. Additionally, when Flanagan et al. (2014) investigated which factors were the most important to create credibility, the factor that the information on the Website was up to date was the second most important factor. Thus, this factor will be used in this dissertation and the hypothesis is:

\( H^5: \text{There is a positive relation between recent updates and upload on information and credibility} \)

The sixth dimension is design and it is, like the other dimensions, frequently mentioned (Fogg et al., 2003; Metzger, 2007; Flanagan et al., 2014; Robins & Holmes, 2008). Design is recognized for having a significant impact on credibility. The dimension is highly ranked in previous studies by Fogg et al. (2003), Flanagan et al. (2014) and Metzger (2007). Website’s look was the first factor that was mentioned and hence, the most important factor for credibility in the experiment by Fogg et al. (2003). The participants in that experiment believed that if the design looked professional or good the credibility increased. Even in the article by Flanagan et al. (2014) good design is mentioned as one of the factors influencing credibility. Additionally, Robins and Holmes (2008) state that design has a high influence on perceived credibility. Therefore this is going to be used in this dissertation.

\( H^6: \text{There is a positive relation between good design and functionality on the Website and credibility} \)

The other five dimensions: truthfulness, reputation, similar information, elsewhere, experts and others, will not be used in this dissertation because there are fewer researchers that have stated that they have an impact on credibility or is not as highly ranked as the other six.
dimensions stated previously. Hence, they did not match the criteria this dissertation used when selecting dimensions.

From the six hypotheses stated before, a model (fig. 1) has been made to display the expected correlations.

Figure 1. Model of dimensions influencing credibility
4. Research Methodology

This chapter will start by shortly explaining different research approaches and describing which one that have been applied in this dissertation. The following section will then focus on research philosophies and approaches that have been used. In the next section motivation to choice of theory and methodology will be made. Afterwards, the research strategy will be presented. Thereafter, the operationalization of all the dimensions will be made. The sample’s ethical consideration will also be presented in this chapter. The chapter will end with the concepts validity, reliability and generalization.

4.1 Research philosophy

Depending on which research philosophy you choose the reader will assume a certain research strategy and method that will be used (Saunders, *et al.*, 2007). A research philosophy permits a writer to make assumptions about how the world is seen from their perspective. The chosen philosophy will be influenced by practical consideration, due to the fact that some of the philosophies are better suited for different purposes (*ibid*). There are different research philosophies: *pragmatism, objectivism, subjectivism, interpretive, radical humanist* and *radical structuralism*. However, the three main philosophies are: *interpretivism, realism* and *positivism* (Saunders, Lewis, & Thornhill, 2007). The following section will only describe the main philosophies and end with, which was applied in this dissertation.

If the researcher believes that the world is a complex place that needs deep insights to understand it, an interpretivist approach would be most appropriated to use (Saunders, *et al.*, 2007). This approach considers it very important to understand the difference existing between humans (*ibid*).

Realism is the second philosophy and is connected to scientific analysis and similar to positivism. The essence of realism is that the senses show us the reality, which means that objects exist independent of the human’s mind. There are two subcategories of realism: *critical realism* and *direct realism* (Saunders, *et al.*, 2007).

The third philosophy is positivism, which is the philosophy that this dissertation was founded on. Positivism is often associated with the natural sciences and supports the use of its methods (Bryman & Bell, 2011). A researcher that has a positivistic philosophy often develops the hypotheses from already existing literature and theories. To contribute to the development of existing theories, the hypotheses are tested. Another characteristic of positivism is that the
research, to the extent possible, is done objectively. Additionally, positivism is often associated with quantitative research methodology. Hence, it is often claimed to not affect the subjects when collecting data (Saunders, et al., 2007).

This dissertation had a positivistic philosophy. The interpretivistic approach was not used in this dissertation, even if it is discussable if credibility as a concept is too complex and needs deeper understanding. However, this dissertation’s aim was to investigate dimensions that were already claimed to influence credibility, to see if there exists a relationship between two variables. The next section will explain which research approach this dissertation applied.

4.2 Research approach

There are three different research approaches: induction, deduction and abduction, which can be applied to a research (Saunders, et al., 2007). The choice of research approach dictates the design and methodology that will be used in a study (ibid). The different approaches will shortly be presented and then end with presenting, which approach that have been used.

The inductive approach is often associated with social sciences, where the researcher is developing a theory from collected data. The approach allows a deeper understanding of the nature of a problem. Therefore, the method in an inductive approach often collects qualitative data (Saunders et al., 2007).

When applying a deductive approach the researcher develops a theory with hypotheses, which are then tested through a research strategy. This approach is often connected to research in the natural sciences and is the dominant approach within this field. A deductive research wants to explain a causal relationship between variables. The data collected with these methods are often quantitative, which makes it possible to generalize the result to a larger population (Saunders, et al., 2007).

The abductive approach allows a researcher to combine the inductive and deductive approaches. In this approach the researcher is shifting between empirical and theoretical reflections when working with the theory (Alvehus, 2013).

Since this dissertation has a deductive approach, hypotheses were developed to investigate if there were relationships between different dimensions and perceived credibility. The aim of this dissertation was to investigate dimensions that might influence how potential tourists perceive credibility, in TripAdvisor.
4.3 Choice of theory

The aim of this dissertation is to investigate the dimensions influencing credibility of UGC in social media from a destination branding perspective. Therefore, it is important to know about destination branding and how the development of Internet changed how tourists began to use social media and share UGC online. There are already theories about which factors influence credibility online. Metzger and Flanagin are two authors that have written considerably about the topic online credibility. For example, Metzger did a literature review of which factors previous research found to influence credibility. However, all articles described in the credibility section are to some extent adding the understating of the topic that was studied in this dissertation.

4.4 Choice of empirical methodology

A researcher can either chose to collect quantitative or qualitative data; both methods have their advantages. Quantitative methods are best suited with a deductive approach where you are to test theories objectively (Bryman & Bell, 2011). A quantitative method provides benefits like giving a wider perspective on a phenomenon, since it is easier to collect more data in a shorter time than qualitative methods (Denscombe, 2009).

Qualitative methods can be interpreted as a strategy that usually stresses the important of words and emphasises an inductive approach (Bryman & Bell, 2011). A qualitative method has advantages of providing a deeper understanding of a phenomenon (Denscombe, 2009).

Due to that this dissertation wants to explain if different dimensions affect credibility online, there is no need for a deeper understanding in this study. In addition, a quantitative study can also generate more data and give a wider perspective on the result. Therefore, a quantitative study was chosen to answer the research questions in this dissertation.

4.5 Research design

Different research designs are better suited to for different purposes (Bryman & Bell, 2011). There are three research designs a researcher can choose between: exploratory, descriptive or explanatory (Saunders et al., 2007). Exploratory is the better design if the purpose is to clarify the understanding of a problem, because it allows flexibility and adaptation to changes. Descriptive design can be seen as an extension of exploratory that seeks to reveal a truthful
profile of persons, events or situations (ibid). An explanatory study is good to use if a study want to determine if there is a causal relationship between two variables. The purpose is that after studying a situation or problem to be able to explain the relationship between different variables (Saunders et al., 2007). This dissertation had an explanatory design and the purpose in this dissertation was to explain what effects credibility online.

4.6 Research strategies

There are seven research strategies available when collecting data: case study, action research, grounded theory, ethnography, archival research, survey and experiment (Bryan & Bell, 2011). The choice of strategy depends on the research approach and research question (Saunders et al., 2007). The next section will only describe the strategy that has been used in this dissertation, and then argue why it has been selected.

A survey (questionnaire) was conducted to collect data for this dissertation. Surveys are often associated with a deductive approach (Saunders et al., 2007). A questionnaire is a good choice if there is shortage of time but still a need to collect a lot of data (Denscombe, 2009). The data generated by this strategy often allows for generalizations to be made, which strengthen the conclusions from the analysis. Additional advantages are, more convenience for the respondents, which can fill out the questionnaire in their own time or that there is absence of the interviewer effect (Saunders et al., 2007). These benefits are of importance to test the hypotheses and research question in this dissertation, which is why a questionnaire was selected. Surveys can either be Internet based, face-to-face (structured interviews), through telephone or plain survey (ibid). In this dissertation a paper based questionnaire was distributed to the respondents.

4.6.1 Questionnaire

This dissertation used a survey, in form of a questionnaire. The questionnaire displayed four pictures consisting of user-generated content about a destination (Istanbul). The pictures were all taken from TripAdvisor and selected to create a general impression of the Website. The respondents then answered statements about the impression they got from the Website. Thus, this survey generated primary data, which means that data was collected specifically for this research project (Bryman & Bell, 2011).
4.7 Operationalization

Operationalization refers to when a researcher converts the theoretical concepts into measures. With the help from indicators a researcher can measure the concept (Bryman & Bell, 2011). This dissertation used a structured questionnaire and below follows the concepts used in this dissertation and their operationalization.

4.7.1 Dependent variable: Credibility

The dependent variable is credibility. A dependent variable changes in response to changes in other variables (Saunders, Lewis, & Thornhill, 2007).

Both Flanagin et al. (2000) and Metzger et al. (2003) used a multidimensional concept, consisting of believability, accuracy, trustworthiness, bias and completeness when they operationalized media credibility. These five measurements from Flanagin et al. (2000) and Metzger et al. (2003) were also used to measure online credibility for this dissertation. This was investigated by, presenting pictures (all taken from TripAdvisor) to the participants in a questionnaire. The pictures were there to convey a general impression of TripAdvisor. After the participants had viewed the pictures they were asked to rate on a scale graded 1-7, how believable, accurate, trustworthy, unbiased and complete they thought the Website was. As Flanagin et al. (2000) and Metzger et al. (2003) stated the higher believability, accuracy, trustworthy, unbiased and complete the information is the more credible it is.

The questionnaire also consisted of statements that were developed from each dimension in the theoretical model. The respondents rated if they agreed or disagreed with the statements concerning the general impression of the Website on a 7-point scale. 1=”Strongly disagree” to 7=” Strongly agree”. The higher the score was the higher was credibility perceived.

4.7.2 Independent variables

An independent variable is the one that causes changes to the dependent variable/s (Saunders et al., 2007). The independent variables are: authority, communication, advertisement, updates, design and user generated content.

Much of the statements used to measure the independent variables were developed from what Flanagin et al. (2000) asked in their survey and by the factors stated in the model. The reason
is that there were a lot of statements that suited this dissertation’s aim. However, not all the factors developed in this dissertation’s model could be derived from Flanagin et al. (2000), which meant that some of the statements were developed from what previous authors had talked about but not explicated asked for. The next section will shortly present the statements, which were asked by Flanagin et al. (2000) in their study.

Flanagin et al. (2000) conducted a survey and used accuracy, authority, objectivity, currency, and coverage: to assess the degree to which respondents verify the various types of information they obtain from the Internet. The participants were asked to respond on a 5-point scale (where 1 = "never,” 2 = "rarely,” 3 = "occasionally," 4 = “often,” and 5 = "all the time”). Respondents were asked to indicate to which degree they checked: (1) who the author of the website was and (2) whether contact information for that person or organization was provided on the Website; (3) to verify the author’s qualifications or credentials; (4) to consider the author’s goals/objectives for posting information online; (5) to see if the information was current; (6) out other sources to validate information they found online; (7) for an official "stamp of approval”; (8) whether the information represented was opinion or fact; and (9) to see that the information was complete and comprehensive (ibid). In the following sections each factor will be discussed.

4.7.2.1 User-generated content
In the dimension user generated content it was discussed whether or not information is more credible when previous tourists publish the information than a travel agency (Tham et al., 2013; Xinga et al., 2010). Additionally, when Flanagin et al. (2000) conducted their study they wanted to know how often respondents considered who the author of the Website was. Hence, the following statements were developed:

- It is mainly other travellers who wrote the information.
- It is mainly a travel agency who wrote the information.

4.7.2.2 Authority
The second dimension in the model is authority. Authority consisted of four items in the summary. The first item was author qualifications, which meant that the author’s qualifications for example education or training were available on the Website. Moreover,
Flanagin et al. (2000) asked the respondents to indicate how often they looked for the author’s qualifications or credentials. Therefore, the statement partly evaluating authority is:

- It is clearly displayed what qualification the person how wrote the information has.

The second, item in the dimension was presence of contact information. Additionally, Flanagin et al. (2000) asked the respondents to indicate how often they looked if there was contact information available to the person or organization that provided the information. Thus, the following statement was developed:

- The contact information is clearly displayed.

The third item in authority was, certifications or seals from trusted third parties are displayed. Additionally, Flanagin et al. (2000) also investigated if the respondents looked for an official” stamp of approval”. Thus, this statement is going to be used.

- Certifications or seals are clearly displayed.

The fourth item, author identification is a component of authority (Metzger, 2007). Therefore the following statement was developed.

- It is clear who has published the information.

4.7.2.3 Communication

The dimension communication can be measured by: first, if the information had clarity, which is that, the information could easily be understood (Fogg et al., 2003). Therefore, the first statement to evaluate communication will be:

- The information could easily be understood.

Second, if the information was well written and without typing mistake (Flanagin et al., 2000; Flanagin et al., 2014; Fogg et al., 2003; Metzger, 2007), is also in the model under communication. Therefore, the second statement will be:

- The information is well written.

Third, if the information was very complete (Flanagin et al., 2000; Fogg et al., 2003; Flanagin et al., 2014; Metzger, 2007), was stated in the model. Moreover, Flanagin et al. (2000) wanted to know how often participants checked if the information was complete and comprehensive. This will be tested by:

- The information was very complete about the destination.
4.7.2.4 Advertisement
The items expected to evaluate the dimension advertisement were: (1) *The Website does not try to convince you to do or buy something* and (2) *absence of advertisements*. Additionally, Flanagin *et al.* (2000) wanted to know how often respondents consider the author’s goals/objectives for posting information online. From that the following statements were developed:

- The Website contained advertisements that wanted you to go somewhere.
- The Website displayed a lot of advertisements.

4.7.2.5 Updates
The previous items, defined in the model under updates were: *Website is up to date* and *presence of date stamp showing information is current*. Thus, the factors stated that recent updates and information on when the material was posted is important for credibility. Furthermore, Flanagin *et al.* (2000) asked their participants how often they thought about how current the information was. Therefore, the statements evaluating updates will be;

- It is clear *when* the information was written on the Website.
- The information was updated and recently published.

4.7.2.6 Design
The items that are assumed to effect design were: (1) *attractive and consistent page design, including graphics, logos, colour schemes* and (2) *Website was easy to use*. In the experiment conducted by Fogg *et al.* (2003), comments about the Website’s layout, typography, white space, images, colour schemes, were common. Furthermore, comments that a Website, which looked more professional, was more credible. Additionally, Robins and Holmes (2008) claimed that the design of a Website is crucial for perceived credibility. Thus, the statements that were developed are;

- The picture displays an attractive page (ex. graphics, logos and colour outlines)
- The picture displays interesting photographs.
- It seems easy to find more information.
4.7.3 Control variables
Some of the control variable used in this study is taken from Flanagin et al. (2000). According to Flanagin et al. (2000) Internet users are often young and well educated. These factors: education and age could affect the proposed hypotheses and was controlled in the survey (ibid). Ayeh et al. (2013) used in their survey asked if participation had (1) taken, at least, one leisure trip in the last 12 months and (2) used the Internet to search for travel information. Therefore, these variables will also be used as control variables in this dissertation. Additionally, questions about the respondent’s gender, age, field of studies and year of study will also be asked.

The control variables in this dissertation will be:

- How often do you travel on leisure trips?
- How often do you use the Internet in search of travel information?
- Gender
- Age
- What is your field of studies?
- What year are you in?

4.7.4 Sample selection
This dissertation used a convenience sample. Even though this sampling method can be criticised for not selecting a good sample of respondents, it still has advantages that can justify its use (Denscombe, 2009). A convenience sample can be a good choice if there is limited time or money (ibid). There was restricted time for this study to collect the data. Therefore, a sample that could be collected quite quickly, but still generated enough respondents felt like the best choice. It can be argued that a survey online could have been used but there would have been no guarantee that this method would provide enough data for the following analysis

Flanagin et al. (2000) state that Internet users are often young and well educated. Hence, Kristianstad University seemed appropriate to collect the sample from. However, the data was collected at HKR during a period of 5 days. Consequently, not all majors were available for selection. Some classes had exams, VFU (clinical training) or other arrangements that made
the unable to participate. This meant that only classes that had time and were located at HKR could be selected. A request for permission to distribute the questionnaire in class was sent out to twelve teachers, out of those 10 replied and 5 gave their permission. The total numbers of registered students, in those classes were, 356 students\textsuperscript{1}. However, due to that not all students attended the lecture, not all registered students answered. Instead the sample consisted of totally 217 respondents.

4.7.5 Ethical consideration

According to Bryman and Bell (2011) there are some ethical principles that need to be taken into account when conducting business research. The first principle a researcher should take in consideration is lack of consent. The participant should receive as much information as possible so that they can decide whether or not they want to participate (\textit{ibid}). The lecturer of the classes that participated had received an email where they were asked if it was possible to get some time during their lecture to distribute a questionnaire. In the email it was explained the purpose of the survey and how long it was approximately going to take (10-15 minutes). The lecturer had a chance to decline or agree if their students had the time to participate. Additionally, in class the students were orally asked if they could take part in a study by answering questions and statements in a questionnaire. However, when the class was asked, it is of course difficult to receive all respondents’ agreement (\textit{ibid}). Moreover, it was clearly written in the questionnaire who was conducting the study and what its purpose was.

The second and third principles, invasion of privacy and data management (Bryman & Bell, 2011), were also considered in the questionnaire that the respondents answered. It was clearly displayed that all the information would be treated anonymously. There were only questions asking about the respondent’s age and education, and year of study but no other identification of the person. Additionally, when analysing the data the participants were given an ID-number so that even if the investigated topic might not be considered as sensitive, it would still provide additional anonymity to the data management principle.

The fourth principle is deception, which means that the researchers present the research as something else to the respondents (Bryman & Bell, 2011). However, as stated above both the lecturer and respondents were told the purpose of the survey and how long time it was appreciated to take. There were no other methods used like recoding or observation that the

\textsuperscript{1} Ladok at HKR 2014-05-16
respondents did not know about. However, it was not specifically told that the pictures were taken from TripAdvisor but in the pictures the logo of TripAdvisor was clearly displayed. Thus, when the survey was conducted some ethical principles were taken in to consideration for the respondents account.

4.8 Validity

When conducting data collections it is important to be aware of three concepts, namely: validity, reliability and generalizability, which will be described in the following sections.

Validity has to do with whether the results actually are about what they appear to be. For example, if the relationship between the variables really is a casual relationship (Saunders et al., 2007). Validity is also about whether or not a measure that is developed to measure a concept actually measures that concept. Therefore, there are different kinds of ways that can help a researcher to establish validity (Bryman & Bell, 2011). In this dissertation face validity and construct validity were applied.

Face validity refers to questions regarding if the measure, question or scale seems logical and fit to measure what it is indented to (Bryman & Bell, 2011). This is a process where other qualified persons can help to define if the factors asked really are relevant (ibid). The survey was tested on three persons before it was presented to the respondents. This was done to see if the questionnaire needed to be modified because something was unclear. Additionally, a member of the faculty at Kristianstad University then checked the questionnaire.

Another kind of validity is construct validity. Construct validity has to do with questions, whether or not a measure developed from a concept really reflects the concept that it is supposed to be expressing. The hypotheses should be developed according to theories that are relevant to the concept, for example from previous research (ibid). This dissertation has mainly used construct validity when determining which items are important. The items have been chosen after what previous research has stated to be influential and also what they have really asked when measuring credibility. Thus, construct validity ought to be high.

Validity is closely connected to reliability, since validity presumes reliability (Bryman & Bell, 2011). However, the words have different meanings and are distinguished as two separate concepts (ibid). Hence, the next section will describe more closely the term reliability.
4.9 Reliability

Reliability refers to the extent your data collection techniques or analysis will yield consistent findings (Saunders et al., 2007). The question is whether a result is repeatable or not and is also often connected with quantitative research (Bryman & Bell, 2011). Reliability can also be defined as the consistency of a measure of a concept. The main factors that are important to be aware of when evaluating if a measure is reliable are: stability and internal reliability. Stability is concerned with questions like, if the measure is stable over time and if the result does not change (ibid). In this case, stability over time could not be performed because of time limitations. However, internal reliability is about to which degree the items that the dimension consisted of were consistent. One way to test internal reliability is by performing Cronbach’s alpha, which proposes that the dimension’s items were internally reliable (ibid). Before analysing the data the Cronbach’s alpha test was performed on the statements to see if they were internally reliable (see appendix 3).

According to Saunders et al. (2007) there are some threats against reliability that are considered in this study, subject or participant bias and observer bias. Subject or participant bias is that the individuals answer the way they think they should answer and not how they really think. However, by allowing anonymity participants might feel more at ease to answer as they really think. In the survey it was clearly stated that all information would be anonymity, to try and make respondents feel comfortable to answer as they really thought. Observer bias means that the persons conducting the study might interpret the given answers differently, which might affect the result (ibid). However, in this dissertation it is only one person that collects and interprets the data, which diminishes potential observer bias.

4.10 Generalizability

Research that use quantitative methods wants the sample to be as representative as possible. In other words the aim is to be able and extrapolate the result to a bigger population (Bryman & Bell, 2011). The result is restricted to the population studied (ibid). I do not argue that the result of this dissertation can be extrapolated to all the students in Kristianstad University. It is only generalizable to the 356 students that were registered in those classes.

² Ladok at HKR 2014-05-16
5. Empirical findings and analysis

In this chapter the collected data from the survey will be presented. The first section will describe the sample’s distribution. The second part will describe what type of data that the surveys generated. The third part will discuss how well the dimensions are internally consistent. Finally, the analysis of the hypotheses will be presented.

5.1 Empirical findings

This chapter will start with presenting the sample used in this dissertation.

5.1.2 Sample

The total sample consisted of 217 students from the University of Kristianstad. 73 students of the sample were men and 144 were women. The major that the respondents attended were biology, gastronomy, biomedical science, nursing and business. 12 participants had biology as their major (both biodiversity and cell biology were included). 38 respondents attended the nurse program and 23 participants attended the gastronomy program at HKR. 38 respondents were biomedical science majors. However, most of the respondents, 125, attended the business program.

The age of the respondents differed from 18-53 years old. Most of the participants (87) were between the ages 20-21 years old. There were also a larger proportion of the participants between 22-23 (41), 18-19 (30) and 24-25 (26). 11 respondents were at the age of 26-27 years old. 19 participants were at the age of 26+. One respondent chose not to answer the question on how old they were. Table 4 displays the descriptive data of the sample.

Table 4. Descriptive Statistics

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Dimension</th>
<th>N</th>
<th>Minimum</th>
<th>Maximum</th>
<th>Mean</th>
<th>Std. Deviation</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Travel information</td>
<td>217</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>7</td>
<td>5.88</td>
<td>1.754</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Leisure trips</td>
<td>217</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>7</td>
<td>3.38</td>
<td>1.486</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Age</td>
<td>216</td>
<td>18</td>
<td>54</td>
<td>2.67</td>
<td>4.639</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Credibility Mean</td>
<td>217</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>7</td>
<td>3.938</td>
<td>1.025</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>UGC- Traveller</td>
<td>214</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>7</td>
<td>4.57</td>
<td>1.467</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>UGC- Agency</td>
<td>216</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>7</td>
<td>3.50</td>
<td>1.479</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Authority Mean</td>
<td>217</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>7</td>
<td>2.882</td>
<td>1.155</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Communication Mean</td>
<td>216</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>7</td>
<td>3.662</td>
<td>1.260</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Advertisement Mean</td>
<td>216</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>7</td>
<td>3.585</td>
<td>1.556</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Updates Mean</td>
<td>216</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>7</td>
<td>3.321</td>
<td>1.451</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Design Mean</td>
<td>216</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>7</td>
<td>4.188</td>
<td>1.271</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Valid N</td>
<td>213</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Additionally, the control variables were tested with either a T-test or an ANOVA-test. These tests were performed to investigate if there were any difference between the groups within a dimension and how credibility is perceived. For example if there is any difference in how credibility was perceived depending on if it was a female or a male respondent. The difference between a T-test and an ANOVA-test is that in a T-test only two groups can be compared while ANOVA allows more groups to be compared (Pallant, 2013).

The variable gender was tested with a T-test. However, there was no significant difference between men and women and perceived credibility (r=0.373). The ANOVA-test tested for significant differences in perceived credibility between majors, but showed no significant differences (r=0.111).

Then Spearman’s correlation was performed on the control variables age and leisure trips to examine if there was a correlation between them and the perceived credibility dimension. If no correlation was found, it was unnecessary to investigate where in the group it differed. In both cases there were no significant correlation (r=0.167 and r=0.058 respectively); hence there was no need to perform an ANOVA-test.

Spearman’s correlation was also performed on the control variable how often the respondents searched for travel information online. The Sperman’s test showed that there existed a significant positive relation between the dimensions (p<0.01). Thus, the more often a respondent searched for information, the higher was the perceived credibility for the Website TripAdvisor.

Additionally, the mean for the dimension credibility was calculated for the whole sample. The mean was 3.938. Hence, the perceived credibility of information on TripAdvisor was seen as fairly credible.

5.1.3 Type of data

The questionnaire generated both ordinal data and nominal (categorical) data. Ordinal data means that it can be ranked (Bryman & Bell, 2011). One example of ordinal data is when respondents are asked to rate something on a scale, where the differences between the grades might not be the same between each grade. It is only stating an order (GraphPad Software, 2009). Nominal data means that the data consists of categories that cannot be ranked (Bryman & Bell, 2011).
In the questionnaire the respondents were asked to rate the statements on a 1-7 scale. However, it cannot be stated that the differences between 1 and 2, is the same difference as between 6 and 7 but it simply states an order, hence it can be classified as ordinal data.

5.1.4 Cronbach’s alpha
The dimensions in the model’s dimensions consisted of different items. Therefore, the Cronbach’s alpha test had to be finished before other test, could be performed. This test measures how well items relate to each other, in other words, how well the internal consistency is (Connelly, 2011). The result in one item should to some degree predict the result in an item that measures the same dimension. The higher Cronbach’s alpha is, the higher degree of consistency and lower measurement miscalculation there are between the two items (ibid). The alpha value should be above 0.7 (Pallant, 2010; Connelly, 2011; Bryman & Bell 2011) to be efficient. However, according to Hair, Black, Babin and Andersson (2010) Cronbach’s alpha value should be between 0.6- 0.7 to be acceptable.

Table 5 presents the result from the Cronbach’s alpha tested on the statements.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Dimension</th>
<th>Cronbach’s alpha</th>
<th>Number of statements</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Credibility</td>
<td>0.831</td>
<td>5</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Authority</td>
<td>0.673</td>
<td>4</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Communication</td>
<td>0.800</td>
<td>3</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Advertisement</td>
<td>0.617</td>
<td>2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Updates</td>
<td>0.632</td>
<td>2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Design</td>
<td>0.699</td>
<td>3</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

There internal consistency between the items measuring credibility and communication were at an acceptable level. Both of the dimensions were above the accepted level 0.7 (Pallant, 2010; Connelly, 2011; Bryman & Bell 2011) with a good margin.

The other dimensions, authority, advertisement, update and design were above the accepted level 0.6 (Hair et al., 2010) but not with as good a margin as the other two dimensions. There was no need to perform this test on the dimension UGC since the two statements were
contrast to each other. If one statement had a high value from a respondent the other should not be highly ranked as well.

When the statements had been measure to have internal consistency, it was possible to calculate the mean of each dimension.

Since the data is ordinal and nominal, the test that was used was Spearman’s correlation because it can be used for non-parametric data (Bryman and Bell, 2011; Pallant, 2013). In the next section the analysis of the hypotheses will be presented.

5.1.5 Analysis of hypotheses

Spearman’s correlation is performed on the data to see if there is any correlation between perceived credibility and the independent variables (ibid). The distribution of the sample follows a normal distribution, see appendix 5. From the correlation table 6 is displaying the outcome.

Table 6. Correlation credibility and dimensions

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Dimensions</th>
<th>N</th>
<th>Coefficient (r)</th>
<th>Sig. Value</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Credibility Mean</td>
<td>217</td>
<td>1.000</td>
<td>.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>UGC-Traveler Mean</td>
<td>214</td>
<td>0.194 **</td>
<td>0.004</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>UGC-Agency Mean</td>
<td>216</td>
<td>-0.039</td>
<td>0.570</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Authority Mean</td>
<td>217</td>
<td>0.357**</td>
<td>0.000</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Communication Mean</td>
<td>216</td>
<td>0.480**</td>
<td>0.000</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Advertisement Mean</td>
<td>216</td>
<td>0.097</td>
<td>0.156</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Updates Mean</td>
<td>216</td>
<td>0.256**</td>
<td>0.000</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Design Mean</td>
<td>216</td>
<td>0.416**</td>
<td>0.000</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

* Sig. At 0.05, ** Sig. at 0.01

To interpret the strength of the relation Pallant (2013) suggests the following guidelines:

r= 0.10 – 0.29 (low)

r= 0.30 – 0.49 (moderate)

r= 0.50 – 1.0 (strong)
These recommendations apply regardless of whether the –value is negative or positive (ibid). These parameters will be used to determine if there is a positive or negative relation between the dimensions and perceived credibility.

The significant level used throughout this dissertation is P < 0.01.

5.1.5.1 Hypothesis 1

The first hypothesis is as follows:

There is a relation between information published by travellers and credibility

As it was stated previously, the test Cronbach’s alpha could not be applied to the statements measuring the dimension user generated content. Therefore, they were measured separately in the correlation test.

Hypothesis one is not rejected since the dimension UGC-traveller is statistically significant at a significant level of P < 0.01. The dimensions UGC-traveller and credibility had an r-value at 0.194, which means that there is a positive correlation, yet low relationship between the dimensions. Then, as a control, the dimension UGC-Agency was tested just to see if there was any effect on perceived credibility or not. However, the dimension UGC-Agency did not have a significance effect on perceived credibility (r=0.570).

5.1.5.2 Hypothesis 2

The second hypothesis is as follows:

There is a relation between displayed authority affirmations and credibility

Since the Cronbach’s alpha was 0.673 for the dimension authority the statements’ mean were calculated together. Then Spearman’s correlation tested the dimensions, which showed a significant correlation (P= < 0.01).

Additionally, the r –value of the correlation between the dimensions credibility and authority (r= 0.357) shows a moderate relationship between the variables. Thus, hypothesis two is not rejected.
5.1.5.3 Hypothesis 3
The third hypothesis is as follows:

*There is a relation between well written and complete content and credibility*

The Cronbach’s alpha was very high, 0.800 for the dimension communication. Therefore, the mean of the dimension communication could be calculated. The correlation test shows a significant correlation at the 0.01 significance level.

Furthermore, these dimension, credibility and communication, had the r-value of 0.357, which indicates a moderate strength of the relation. Therefore, the third hypothesis was also not rejected.

5.1.5.4 Hypothesis 4
The fourth hypothesis is as follows:

*There is a relation between less displayed advertisements and credibility*

The statements’ mean for advertisements had the Cronbach’s alpha 0.617, which was above the acceptable level by Hair *et al.* (2010). Consequently, the statements were put together to measure the dimension advertisement.

Hypothesis four is rejected, since there is not any significant correlation between advertisement and credibility (P=0.156), which is also shown by the low r-value (r= 0.097), which means that there is no relation between the variables.

5.1.5.5 Hypothesis 5
The fifth hypothesis is as follows:

*There is a relation between recent updates and upload on information and credibility*

The statements’ mean for the dimension updates had the Cronbach’s alpha 0.632. Thus, the statements’ mean were adequate to be calculated together. Although there was not a very strong relationship only low (r= 0.256) between the dimensions. Hypothesis, five, is not rejected since there was a significant relation at 0.01.
5.1.5.6 Hypothesis 6
The sixth hypothesis is as follows:

*There is a relation between good design and functionality on the Website and credibility*

The Cronbach’s alpha for the dimension, design was 0.699. The statements’ mean were calculated together the correlation test was performed, showing a significant correlation (P= < 0.01).

Furthermore, the r-value was 0.416 for the dimensions credibility and design is, which means that the relation between them is moderate. Therefore, hypothesis six was not rejected.

In the next section a summary of the results will be presented.

5.1.5.7 Summary of the hypotheses
In the table 7 was a summary of the outcome from the hypotheses presented.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Hypotheses</th>
<th>Outcome</th>
<th>Coefficient (r)</th>
<th>Relationship</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1</td>
<td>Not rejected</td>
<td>0.194</td>
<td>Low</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2</td>
<td>Not rejected</td>
<td>0.357</td>
<td>Moderate</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3</td>
<td>Not rejected</td>
<td>0.480</td>
<td>Moderate</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>4</td>
<td>Rejected</td>
<td>0.097</td>
<td>-</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>5</td>
<td>Not rejected</td>
<td>0.256</td>
<td>Low</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>6</td>
<td>Not rejected</td>
<td>0.416</td>
<td>Moderate</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Five of the hypotheses were not rejected while one was rejected. Hypothesis one, information feels more credible if published by a traveller, was not rejected. Even though the relationship is low it is still statistically significant. Hypothesis two, three and six are all significantly correlated to the Website’s perceived credibility, with a moderate strength of the relationship. Furthermore, updates on information and perceived credibility (hypothesis 5) are significantly correlated, however with a weak relationship. Finally, hypothesis six, the design of a Website and how the credibility is perceived, has a moderate, but significant relationship to perceived credibility, which indicates that they are influencing one another. Interestingly, hypothesis four, that there would be a positive relationship between advertisements and credibility, showed no significant correlation and was thus rejected.
The dimension communication had the highest r-value at 0.480. Thus, according to this study the dimension of communication is the most important one for establish credibility online.

The second most influential dimension was design, with an r-value of 0.416. This result supports the conclusion made by Fogg et al. (2003), stating design to be one of the most important dimension influencing online credibility.

The lowest relationship was surprisingly the dimension UGC-traveller at r = 0.194. Thus, this dimension should have the least effect on perceived credibility online. This result is interesting since TripAdvisor is one of the largest user generated Websites and therefore it was suspected in this study that the dimension user generated content should have a larger, if not the largest, impact on perceived credibility.
6. Conclusion

In this chapter the conclusion of this dissertation will be presented. Chapter five begins with a summary of the dissertation. Then the conclusion will be presented, which will then be followed by critical review and practical implications. Lastly, suggestions for further research are discussed.

6.1 Summary of the dissertation

The study’s research question was:

Which dimensions influence perceived credibility on social media in the field of destination branding?

To be able to investigate the research question TripAdvisor, the largest user generate Website was used. On TripAdvisor Internet users, like tourists, can share experiences and communicate their opinions about a destination to other travellers. This affects destinations and their Web image, both positively and negatively. However, for the information to have an effect it needs to be considered as credible. Thus, the most important variable for online communication should be how credibility is perceived.

This dissertation investigated perceived credibility and how variables from previous research affect online credibility. From previous research a model, displaying dimensions suggested to have an impact on perceived credibility, was developed. The dimensions were user generated content, authority, communication, advertisement, updates and design. The aim was to determine if there is a correlation between the dimensions and perceived credibility. To investigate this relationship a quantitative method was chosen since it provides a broader view of the phenomenon.

Data was collected through a paper-based questionnaire that displayed pictures from TripAdvisor and statements about the dimensions. It should be noted that the sample used was limited since the questionnaire was only performed on HKR students. Furthermore, only students having lectures at Kristianstad University during the five-day period allocated to data collection had the opportunity to participate. Additionally, not all classes that were contacted had the opportunity to participate due to exams. Students are a good target group since Internet users are often young and well educated (Flanagan & Metzger, 2000). The total sample consisted of 217 students, with five different majors. More data about the sample can
be view in table 4. The results from the collected data was then analysed statistically and discussed.

### 6.2 Conclusion of the findings

The credibility aspect is important to be aware of when it comes to online information since it does not go through the same critical review as offline sources. Even if previous research claims that there are certain dimensions that influence credibility online, there are still request for further research, especially applied to user generated content and Website concerning destination branding. Therefore, the purpose of this dissertation was to explore if there were any significant relationships between the suggested dimensions and perceived credibility on TripAdvisor.

The dimensions that were investigated were chosen according to how often they have been cited in previous research and how highly ranked they were in those studies. The dimension UGC-traveller was chosen a bit differently since not much research has been conducted on that topic.

The following hypotheses were developed:

- **H₁**: There is a positive relation between information published by travellers and credibility
- **H₂**: There is a positive relation between displayed authority affirmations and credibility
- **H₃**: There is a positive relation between well written and complete content and credibility
- **H₄**: There is a positive relation between less displayed advertisements and credibility
- **H₅**: There is a positive relation between recent updates and upload on information and credibility
- **H₆**: There is a positive relation between good design and functionality on the Website and credibility

The result showed that five of the six hypotheses were not rejected and had statistical significance (P= < 0.01). Thus, in hypotheses one, two, three, five and six there existed a positive correlation between the dimensions and perceived credibility, see table 7. Only hypothesis four, advertisements, was proven to not have a statistical significance and was rejected. However, in the not rejected hypotheses there were non that had a strong relationship to perceived credibility. Nevertheless, there was still a positive relationship.
The dimension communication had the highest r-value, 0.480. Thus, in this dissertation communication was influencing perceived credibility on TripAdvisor the most. The weakest relationship was found between UGC and perceived credibility, which indicates that in this study it was not highly influential.

The mean of the dimension credibility was calculated to 3.938, indicating that the information on TripAdvisor was seen as fairly credible. It might be that there are other dimensions, not mentioned in this dissertation that influence perceived credibility since TripAdvisor has become one of the largest Websites for destination information.

Furthermore, since hypothesis four was rejected the model of dimensions influencing credibility, see figure 1, needs moderation since the dimension advertising did not have a correlation perceived credibility. Thus, the dimension advertisement to not influence TripAdvisor’s perceived credibility.

To conclude, the result showed that there was a positive relationship between credibility and; user generated content, authority, communication, updates and design. However, the dimension advertisement, which was expected to also affect perceived credibility online, was not supported. A summary of the rejected and not rejected hypotheses can be seen in table 7. Thus, the research question: Which dimensions influence perceived credibility on social media in the field of destination branding? has been answered.

6.3 Critical reflections

There are some things that could be criticized regarding this study. Firstly, the sample that was used in this dissertation was a convenience sample. It could be criticised if this is a good way to choose respondents since it creates difficulties to generalize the result to a larger population. However, due to the limited time it was not possible to conduct the study on a larger sample, hence population. Therefore, this study’s population is the students, 356 that are registered in those classes that participated in the study.

Secondly, the study only investigated if there is a relationship between the dimensions and perceived credibility, but not why they might be influencing perceived credibility online. Nor does this dissertation examine if it is perceived credibility that affects the dimensions or the other way around. If future studies investigate that, it might strengthen this dissertation’s result.
Thirdly, not all the statements used in this dissertation, were developed after what, Flanagin and Metzger (2000) had asked in their study. Hence, the construct validity could be questioned on some of the statements that measured the dimension.

6.3.1 Ethical and societal implications

Today, a lot of information search and communication occurs online. People turn to the Internet and social media when searching for and trying to develop an opinion of something. While other persons post updates on their experiences and views of different things. For example, on TripAdvisor can people upload what they thought and experiences during a vacation, if it was good, bad and so on. This affects destinations, which are also trying to display themselves to potential tourists. Thus, the relationship between potential tourists and destinations happens online and through social media. Therefore, in today’s society, the Internet provides a good, if not the best, way to reach out to as many people as possible. Consequently, it is important to know makes information online seem credible, especially for destinations that are trying to grab the attention of potential visitors. By knowing what is perceived as credible information destinations can try and learn from it so that they can adapt to target potential tourists better. If destinations can reach out to more tourists and get them to visit there, it will affect that society since tourists might be an important source of income for some destinations. Therefore, the result of this dissertation is important for societies to help them understand credibility online so that they might increase their visitors.

6.4 Practical implications

The aim of the dissertation was to investigate and provide additional information on what influences perceived credibility online. Previous research has focused on how perceived credibility of online information in general is perceived. Therefore, this study has some academic value since it focus more on user-generated content from a destination perspective.

From the result of this study can guidelines be made that has some value for the Website TripAdvisor. Additionally, the result can be used as guidelines for Internet users when they upload information online, or example how to make it credible so that people take the time and read it. Furthermore, even if a destination manager cannot control all the dimensions discussed it might still provide a helpful view of how information can be uploaded to grab the
attention of potential tourist. The dimensions user generated content, authority, communication, updates and design should be visible for the participants for them to feel that the information is more credible, which might result in them traveling there.

6.5 Future research

This study has only investigated if there exists a relationship or not between selected dimensions and perceived credibility online. It would be interesting to study if there are certain combinations among the dimensions that are influencing perceived credibility more than other or. That might result in finding additional dimensions that were not examined in this dissertation.

Furthermore, it would be interesting to investigate why some dimensions matter for Internet users. For example, apply the same dimensions studied in this dissertation examined but through a qualitative study like interviews. This would provide a deeper understanding of perceived credibility online and might get a different result.

Additionally, it would be interesting to apply the model of the dimensions to a wider sample, to see if a different result would be achieved. Alternatively, one could apply the study to other schools around Sweden, which could not be achieved in this dissertation due to the limited time period.

Moreover, this dissertation has used TripAdvisor to investigate the dimensions but it would also be interesting to explore another user generated website. For example Resedagboken, this is a Website that works as an online diary for the traveller. Thus, the dimension UGC-traveller could be further investigated.
References


Appendix 1. Questionnaire (in Swedish)


Bakgrundsinformation:

Kön: Man Kvinna

Ålder:_____________________________________________________

Vad studerar du?______________________________________________________________

Vilken årskurs går du?__________________________________________________________

Var vänlig utvärdera vilket du tycker frågorna stämmer (1= ”Inte alls”, 7= ”Väldigt ofta”)

Hur ofta reser du på nöjesresor? ____________________________

Hur ofta använder du dig av Internet när du söker efter reseinformation? ____________________________

Följande bilder visar information som kommer från en och samma hemsida, var vänlig och utvärderar ditt helhetsintryck av dem.
Hur väl instämmer du i följande påståenden att hemsidan som beskrivs ovan är:
(1= "Instämmer inte alls", 7= "Instämmer helt").

Tillförlitlig: 

Korrekt: 

Pålitlig: 

Opartisk: 

Komplett: 

Var vänlig och utvärdera hur väl du instämmer i följande påståenden om ditt helhetsintryck av hemsidan:
(1= "Instämmer inte alls", 7= "Instämmer helt").

Det är tydligt vilka kvalifikationer personen har som skrev informationen. 

Det finns tydligt angivet kontaktinformation, så att man kan nå företaget. 

Certifikat och sigill framgår tydligt. 

Det framgår tydligt vem som har publicerat texten. 

Informationen kommer främst från andra resenärer. 

Informationen kommer främst från resebyråer. 

Informationen är lätt att förstå. 

Informationen är välformulerad. 

Informationen om destinationen känns komplett. 

Hemsidan är fri från reklam som försöker sälja något till mig. 

Det framgår tydligt när informationen var skriven. 

Informationen var nyligen uppdaterad och publicerad. 

Hemsidan har ett bra utseende (ex. grafiken, logotypen, färggrann). 

Hemsidan innehåller intresseväckande fotografier. 

Det verkar lätt att hitta mer information. 

Hemsidan innehåller mycket reklam.

_Tack för din medverkan!_
Appendix 2. Questionnaire

Hi, I am a business student at Kristianstad University and right now am I writing my bachelor dissertation. This survey is conducted to investigate how Internet users perceive the credibility on a Website that targets tourists and visitors. I would be very grateful if you took the time and answered the following questions. All information will be treated anonymously.

Background information:
Gender: Male Female

Age: __________________________

What is your field of studies? __________________________

What year are you in? __________________________

Please rate the questions after how well they fit (1 = “not at all”, 7 = “Very often”)

How often do you travel on leisure trips? __________

How often do you use the Internet in search of travel information? __________

The following pictures display information that is taken from the same Website. Please evaluate you general impression of the pictures.
Please rate how well you agree with the following statements about the general impression of the Website displayed above:
(1= “Not agree at all”, 7=”Agree totally”).

Believable: [ ] [ ] [ ] [ ] [ ] [ ] [ ]
Accurate: [ ] [ ] [ ] [ ] [ ] [ ] [ ]
Trustworthy: [ ] [ ] [ ] [ ] [ ] [ ] [ ]
Unbiased: [ ] [ ] [ ] [ ] [ ] [ ] [ ]
Complete: [ ] [ ] [ ] [ ] [ ] [ ] [ ]

Please rate how well you agree with the following statements about the general impression of the Website displayed above:
(1= “Not agree at all”, 7=”Agree totally”).

Clearly displayed what qualification the person how wrote the information has.
The contact information is clearly displayed.
Certifications or seals are clearly displayed.
It is clear who has published the information.
It is mainly other travellers who wrote the information.
It is mainly a travel agency who wrote the information.
The information could easily be understood.
The information is well written.
The information was very complete about the destination.
The Website contained advertisements that wanted to sell you something.
It is clear when the information was written on the Website.
The information was updated and recently published.
The picture displays an attractive page (ex. graphics, logos and colour outlines).
The picture displays interesting photographs.
It seems easy to find more information.
The Website displayed a lot of advertisements.

Thank you for your participation!
Appendix 3. Descriptive data

Table 4. Descriptive Statistics

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Dimension</th>
<th>N</th>
<th>Minimum</th>
<th>Maximum</th>
<th>Mean</th>
<th>Std. Deviation</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Travel information</td>
<td>217</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>7</td>
<td>5.88</td>
<td>1.754</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Leisure trips</td>
<td>217</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>7</td>
<td>3.38</td>
<td>1.486</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Age</td>
<td>216</td>
<td>18</td>
<td>54</td>
<td>22.67</td>
<td>4.639</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Credibility Mean</td>
<td>217</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>7</td>
<td>3.938</td>
<td>1.025</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>UGC-Traveller</td>
<td>214</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>7</td>
<td>4.57</td>
<td>1.467</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>UGC-Agency</td>
<td>216</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>7</td>
<td>3.50</td>
<td>1.479</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Authority Mean</td>
<td>217</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>7</td>
<td>2.882</td>
<td>1.155</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Communication Mean</td>
<td>216</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>7</td>
<td>3.662</td>
<td>1.260</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Advertisement Mean</td>
<td>216</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>7</td>
<td>3.585</td>
<td>1.556</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Updates Mean</td>
<td>216</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>7</td>
<td>3.321</td>
<td>1.451</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Design Mean</td>
<td>216</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>7</td>
<td>4.188</td>
<td>1.271</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Valid N</td>
<td>213</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Table 8. Data over the variable gender

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Gender</th>
<th>N respondents</th>
<th>Percent (%)</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Men</td>
<td>73</td>
<td>34</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Women</td>
<td>144</td>
<td>66</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Table 9. Data over the variable field of study

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Field of study</th>
<th>N respondents</th>
<th>Percent (%)</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Biology</td>
<td>12</td>
<td>6</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Biomedical</td>
<td>38</td>
<td>18</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Gastronomy</td>
<td>23</td>
<td>10</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Nursing</td>
<td>19</td>
<td>8</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Business</td>
<td>125</td>
<td>58</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
## Appendix 4. Cronbach’s alpha

Table 5. Crobach’s alpha test on five dimensions

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Dimension</th>
<th>Cronbach’s alpha</th>
<th>Number of statements</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Credibility</td>
<td>0.831</td>
<td>5</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Authority</td>
<td>0.673</td>
<td>4</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Communication</td>
<td>0.800</td>
<td>3</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Advertisement</td>
<td>0.617</td>
<td>2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Updates</td>
<td>0.632</td>
<td>2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Design</td>
<td>0.699</td>
<td>3</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Appendix 5. Normal distribution shown in a boxplot
Appendix 6. Spearman’s Correlation

Table 6. Correlation credibility and dimensions

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Dimensions</th>
<th>N</th>
<th>Coefficient (r)</th>
<th>Sig. Value</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Credibility Mean</td>
<td>217</td>
<td>1.000</td>
<td>.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Authority Mean</td>
<td>217</td>
<td>0.357**</td>
<td>0.000</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Communication Mean</td>
<td>216</td>
<td>0.480**</td>
<td>0.000</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Advertisement Mean</td>
<td>216</td>
<td>0.097</td>
<td>0.156</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Updates Mean</td>
<td>216</td>
<td>0.256**</td>
<td>0.000</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Design Mean</td>
<td>216</td>
<td>0.416**</td>
<td>0.000</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>UGC-Traveller Mean</td>
<td>214</td>
<td>0.194 **</td>
<td>0.004</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>UGC-Agency Mean</td>
<td>216</td>
<td>-0.039</td>
<td>0.570</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

* Sig. At 0.05, ** Sig. at 0.01