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# THE INFLUENCE OF ONLINE REVIEWS ON SAUDI CONSUMERS' TOURISM DESTINATION CHOICES

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University of Plymouth

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**UNIVERSITY OF  
PLYMOUTH**

**THE INFLUENCE OF ONLINE REVIEWS  
ON SAUDI CONSUMERS' TOURISM DESTINATION CHOICES**

by

**AREJ ALHEMIMAH**

A thesis submitted to University of Plymouth  
in partial fulfilment for the degree of

**DOCTOR OF PHILOSOPHY**

Plymouth Business School

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## Author's Declaration

At no time during the registration for the degree of Doctor of Philosophy has the author been registered for any other University award without prior agreement of the Doctoral College Quality Sub-Committee.

Work submitted for this research degree at the University of Plymouth has not formed part of any other degree either at the University of Plymouth or at another establishment.

Relevant scientific seminars and conferences were regularly attended at which work was often presented. Papers have been presented by the author based on the PhD work.

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# **The Influence of Online Reviews on Saudi Consumers' Tourism Destination Choices**

**Arej Alhemimah**

## **Abstract**

Online consumer reviews (OCRs) can be key aspects of how tourists choose a travel destination. OCRs are particularly important for experiential purchases such as tourism destinations, because consumers have difficulty assessing the quality of intangible products prior to consumption. OCRs can thus shape preconceptions or expectations about a destination for potential tourists, subsequently influencing visit intention. Social influence impacts adoption intention, but this relationship in the context of tourism OCRs and destination choice has largely been ignored, despite the fact that tourism often involves travel across different cultures.

The aim of this research is to investigate the influence of OCRs posted on tourism websites, and to examine the impact of social influences on the OCR reader's intention to visit a tourist destination. The research has a country-specific focus in that the study population is resident in Saudi Arabia (KSA).

The study model, the Online Consumer Reviews Influence Model (OCRIM) expands the Information Adoption Model with two constructs from the Theory of Reasoned Action and four of Hofstede's (1980) cultural dimensions. OCRIM explores the impact of OCR features in tourism websites, and of social influences on OCR readers' visit intention. The proposed information adoption process comprises three constructs: perceived information usefulness, perceived information trust, and information adoption. Five factors are proposed to determine the information adoption process: website quality, review provider credibility, argument quality, information

sidedness, and subjective norms. OCRIM was validated through PLS-SEM on a survey of 384 tourists resident in KSA.

The findings of this thesis are that website quality, information sidedness, and subjective norms influence tourist visit intention, with subjective norms exerting the strongest influence. Additionally, OCR readers' cultural values (particularly collectivism, power distance, and uncertainty avoidance) influence visit intention. Perceived information usefulness was found to influence visit intention indirectly, through perceived information trust and information adoption. These findings have both theoretical and practical implications: they validate this study's extension of a well-established framework, and the results have provided empirical evidence for the direct impact of social influences on tourist visit intention. Understanding the characteristics of OCRs that influence tourist visit intention will enable marketers to develop more effective sales platforms online. Tourism managers and policy makers alike should pay close attention to OCRs in order to better understand tourist behavioural intention.

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### List of Abbreviations

Abbreviation	Full Term
ABS	Association of Business Schools
APC	average path coefficient
ARGQUAL	argument quality
ARS	average R-squared
AVE	average variance extracted
AVIF	average variance inflation factor
CB-SEM	covariance-based SEM (one of two types of SEM)
CEDA	Council of Economic and Development Affairs (KSA)
CGM	consumer-generated media
CITC	Communications and Information Technology Commission (KSA)
Colvism	Collectivism
EU	European Union
eWOM	electronic word-of-mouth
ELM	Elaboration Likelihood Model
FBM	Fogg's Behaviour Model
GCC	Gulf Cooperation Council
GDP	gross domestic product
GEA	General Entertainment Authority (KSA)
GLOBE	Global Leadership and Organizational Behaviour Effectiveness study
GoF	goodness-of-fit
IAM	Information Adoption Model
INFOA	information adoption
INFOS	information sidedness
ICO	individualism/collectivism orientation
ICT	information and communications technology
IS	information systems
IT	information technology
ITA	International Trade Administration (USA)
KSA	Kingdom of Saudi Arabia
L1	first language
L2	second language

MAS	MAS Tourism Information and Research Centre (KSA)
Masc	masculinity
M/F	masculinity/femininity
MCI	Ministry of Commerce and Investment (KSA)
MCIT	Ministry of Communications and Information Technology (KSA)
NCeL	The National Centre for e-Learning and Distance Learning (KSA)
OCR	online consumer review
OCRIM	Online Consumer Reviews Influence Model
PDA	Perceived Derived Attributes model
PIU	perceived information usefulness
PIT	perceived information trust
PLS-SEM	Partial Least Squares (one of two types of SEM)
PwrDistnc	power distance
$Q^2$	second quartile: the median of the data
$R^2$	coefficient of determination
RPC	review provider credibility
SAR	Saudi Arabian riyal
SEM	Structural Equation Modelling
SNs	subjective norms
SCTH	Saudi Commission for Tourism and National Heritage
TPB	Theory of Planned Behaviour
TRA	Theory of Reasoned Action
TAM	Technology Acceptance Model
TAM2	Technology Acceptance Model 2
TAM3	Technology Acceptance Model 3
UGC	user-generated content
UncrAvo	uncertainty avoidance
UNDP	United Nations Development Programme
UN-DESA	United Nations Department of Economic and Social Affairs
UNESCO	United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organization
USD	United States dollar
UTAUT	Unified Theory of Acceptance and Use of Technology
VAF	Variance Accounted for
VIF	variance inflation factor
VINT	visit intention



WEBQUAL	website quality
WOM	word-of-mouth
WTTC	World Travel and Tourism Council

## **Chapter One: Introduction**

This chapter first provides a brief background for the study. Next, it highlights the research gaps and the contributions that this research makes toward filling those gaps. Subsequently, the research aim and objectives are stated. Finally, additional reasons for the significance of the study are presented and an overview of the structure of the thesis is provided.

## **1.2 Research background**

As the public continue to rely less on television and more on online media as their source of information, and as consumer trust in corporations has declined (Jalilvand and Samiei, 2012), electronic word-of-mouth (eWOM) and online consumer reviews (OCRs) have become an increasingly important marketing and branding tool for companies of all sizes and in many industries (Jalilvand and Samiei, 2012; Kang and Hustvedt, 2014).

An OCR is a form of eWOM that allows consumers to share with fellow consumers online their own experiences with goods or products which they have purchased or used (Hennig-Thurau et al., 2004). OCRs are thus a form of user-generated content (UGC) which is posted on e-commerce websites or third-party online sites (Filiari and McLeay, 2013; Huang et al., 2015). Researchers in this domain note that for both vendors and consumers, OCRs have, over the past fifteen years or so, developed into a primary source of information about products and services (Gretzel et al., 2007; Cox et al., 2009; Fotis et al., 2012; Huang et al., 2015; Elwalda et al., 2016). Not only are OCRs now seen by businesses as an indispensable component of marketing communication Chen and Xie (2008); but companies and organizations have been leveraging the information from OCRs as part of their market research, especially with regard to the attitudes of their customers (Dellarocas et al., 2007). Consumers read OCRs in order to make a more complete (both pros and cons) assessment of the product

or service, prior to deciding whether or not to purchase it (Cheung et al., 2008; Ketelaar et al., 2015). When consumers come to trust and find credible the content they read in OCRs, they are more likely to adopt the information provided therein and this perception of trustworthiness in turn influences their online purchasing behaviour (Cheung et al., 2009; Filieri, 2016).

OCRs have been noted as particularly important for experiential purchases, such as destinations, as consumers have difficulty assessing the quality of intangible products prior to consumption (Ye et al., 2011). Unlike tangible products, intangibles have no or few physical qualities by which they can be judged. Tourists are often unfamiliar with the destination and related tourism products and services; thus, external sources of information are imperative for destination choice (Chatterjee, 2001). Additionally, travel purchases are considered high-involvement products (Park et al., 2007a) given the greater cost, in time and effort as well as in monetary outlay, relative to low-involvement products (e.g., hardware or books).

This assertion is borne out by recent data. According to a 2018 marketing survey, 61 percent of tourists indicated that they ‘prefer to go online to research their next holiday, choose it and book. Some combine online with in-store visits and calls to sales and customer service centres’ (Holiday Hypermarket, 2018, p. 13). However, according to Chung and Buhalis (2008) the proliferation of information available on the Internet from a glut of providers has heightened concerns about credibility. They explain that the ‘type and relative importance of information sources have changed over time’ (Chung and Buhalis, 2008, p. 72). Research suggests that travellers have turned to OCRs instead of vendor-generated content in ever-increasing numbers to plan their trips (Buhalis and Law, 2008; Filieri, 2016).

Studies conducted by Fotis et al. (2012) and Cox et al. (2009), among others, demonstrate that individuals are increasingly utilizing information from UGC websites

to make travel-related decisions and to shape perceptions and images about destinations and travel offerings. According to a 2016 industry report, 59.4 percent of American travellers used UGC in the form of used OCRs about hotels, destinations, and/or travel-related activities to help plan their leisure travel (Destination Analysts, 2016). The U.S.-based Family Travel Association's 2017 survey revealed that 59 percent of respondents reported using popular travel websites such as TripAdvisor and Expedia as sources of information and/or for suggestions when planning travel, 51 percent said they consulted other travel review websites, and 74 percent reported using general online search engines for this purpose. In comparison, only 12 percent of respondents said they consulted travel agents when planning trips (Jenss, 2017).

The most recent data indicates that the travelling public's reliance on OCRs continues to grow. According to TripAdvisor's report to its shareholders for the third quarter of 2018, the online travel site has over 702 million reviews and opinions for users to browse through (TripAdvisor, 2018). Travelers' recommendations via UGC influence consumer decisions regarding where to go on holiday, which accommodation to book, and once there, which attractions to visit and where to go to eat (Gretzel and Yoo, 2008; Dickinger, 2011; Fotis et al., 2012; Sparks et al., 2013; Destination Analysts, 2016).

Credibility is even more important in the travel planning context because of the aforementioned intangible nature of tourism products and the relatively large economic and psychological risks associated with travel decision-making (Loda et al., 2009). Rising numbers of travellers are resorting to UGC websites for travel-related content that has been posted by travel consumers rather than by service providers (Gretzel et al., 2007), for reasons which will be discussed in Chapter Four, Section 4.2.4. UGC such as OCRs allows consumers to identify the best hotels, restaurants, and attractions, enabling travellers to avoid the worst products and services, with the final result of improving their decision-making (Filiari and McLeay, 2013).

Tourism consumers write OCRs to depict their own experiences and describe how satisfied (or dissatisfied) they were with their experience; a major purpose of this is to help other potential tourists with travel decisions (Gretzel and Yoo, 2008). For example, a 2015 survey, based on ‘data from over 12,000 properties located in the top 25 traffic markets’ and including interviews with executives from four international hotel chains, was carried out in 14 countries. The study found that 79 percent of TripAdvisor users read at least six to 12 reviews on the site before selecting a hotel (TripAdvisor, 2017). An average of 390 million people visit TripAdvisor every month (TripAdvisor, 2017), and the main purpose is to utilize other travellers’ reviews (Ricci and Wietsma, 2006; Yoo et al., 2009).

Recommendations of other consumers who have prior experience with a tourism product are not only the most preferred sources, but also the most influential sources for travel decision-making (Pan et al., 2007). OCRs can thus shape preconceptions or expectations about a destination for potential tourists, and influence visit intention (Beerli and Martin, 2004a and 2004b; Jalilvand et al., 2012). In other words, eWOM and OCRs can be a key aspect of how travellers choose a tourism destination (Cox et al., 2009; Kim and Hardin, 2010; Ye et al., 2011). Knoll (2016) asserts that recent eWOM studies conducted in the social media context show that, in order to understand the influence of eWOM, the characteristics of eWOM information should be considered in conjunction with consumers’ behaviour toward that information; this view is in line with the approach of the current study, which accounts for the role of characteristics of OCRs.

Social influence has been noted by many researchers as a key element that influences consumer intention (Chen et al., 2012; Alharbi et al., 2015; Hsu and Lin, 2016), but considering the role of social influence in the context of OCRs has largely been ignored. Furthermore, in the extensive review of the existing literature carried out

for this present research, few studies have been found which have considered the role of OCR features combined with social influences on the reader of the review, and on that reader's subsequent behaviour. Recent studies in hospitality and tourism (e.g., Schoefer, 2010; Mazaheri et al., 2011; Mazaheri et al., 2014; Carpenter et al., 2013; Kitayama and Park, 2014; Buzova et al., 2016; Cheng et al., 2016a; Cheng et al., 2016b; Weber et al., 2017) do, however, demonstrate a growing awareness of the role of cultural values on consumer attitudes and purchase behaviour.

Cultural values influence cognition and emotion in individuals (Markus and Kitayama, 1991). Recent studies in hospitality and tourism (such as those cited in the preceding paragraph) have begun to acknowledge the influence of individual cultural values on consumer attitudes and purchase behaviour. Considering, for instance, that hotel guests often come from diverse cultures and countries, it seems to be common sense that hoteliers should have some knowledge of the important role of cultural differences in the behaviour and attitudes of their customers (Hu et al., 2018).

The relationship of cultural values to attitudes and behaviour is relevant to marketing in general, more so than ever as markets become increasingly globalized (Soares et al., 2007). According to Fan et al. (2018), cultural differences play a significant role in source credibility; however, other research (Luo et al., 2014) has found no direct link between espoused cultural values and source credibility.

With regard to OCRs, however, the influence of the individual's society and culture has largely been ignored, with King et al. (2014) commenting that eWOM, and thus OCRs, consumer information adoption and its effects on behavioural intention in cross-cultural contexts is unknown in any kind of structural depth. Moreover, Hsu et al. (2016) note that researchers have examined 'eWOM effects or the factors of social influence without clarifying the causal relationships among constructs, such as consumers' attitudes toward products, attitudes toward websites, purchase intention, and

perceived eWOM review credibility' (p. 981). Previous research has also found that consumers are likely to look to their own cultural norms before adopting information (Shu and Scott, 2014). In their study of eWOM in social networking sites, Chu and Kim (2011) reported that social relationships influenced eWOM readers' adoption of information, and that readers were more likely to act on recommendations from members of their own community. Hsu et al. (2016) found that both social influence and perceived eWOM review credibility had effects on eWOM review adoption; specifically, that perceived eWOM review credibility was the mediating factor between social influence and eWOM review adoption, and that perceived eWOM review credibility was a determinant of eWOM review adoption. Thus, the current research will also consider the role of subjective norms and cultural influence, factors which have not been much studied in the context of OCRs. As described in the following sections, the current study aims to fill these gaps with its investigation of a number of pertinent constructs, and it does so in the context of Saudi Arabian culture and society.

### **1.3 Research contribution**

The major contribution of this study is that it offers a comprehensive theoretical model that explains how OCRs shape visit intention in relation to visitor attractions in the context of an Arab country, specifically, the Kingdom of Saudi Arabia (KSA). It is pertinent to look at a particularly Arab context because countries in the region known as the 'Arab world' share many social and cultural characteristics (Wilson, 1996; Dedoussis, 2004). The model was developed on the integration of the Information Adoption Model (IAM: Sussman and Siegal, 2003; see Figure 4.1), related components of the Theory of Reasoned Action (TRA: Ajzen and Fishbein, 1980; see Section 4.4.4), and Hofstede's framework of cultural dimensions (1980; see Section 4.5.5). The IAM explains how information from the characteristics of OCRs is adopted; however, it has been noted that IAM fails to account for behavioural intention (Erkan and Evans, 2016).



As behavioural intention is a construct of the present study, TRA components are incorporated in order to explain how the consumer intends to behave toward the information; the model extends IAM by adding cultural values, which are antecedents of subjective norms (Srite and Karahanna, 2006). A number of specified cultural values from Hofstede's (1980) model of cultural dimensions are adopted and incorporated into the research model. Additionally, to the information adoption process from IAM, the proposed model adds the construct 'perceived information trust' as a consequence of the perceived information usefulness (PIU) construct and an antecedent of the information adoption construct. The resulting model, introduced in this study, is the Online Consumer Reviews Influence Model (OCRIM). This research model has developed new independent constructs that are relevant to OCRs in the tourism context. OCRIM offers a more comprehensive approach to information adoption by considering the social background and behaviour of the tourist together with the OCR features within the same framework; it thus extends IAM and provides new insights to researchers in fields such as Tourism and Information Systems (IS).

The current study has much to contribute to the literature, since some studies have looked at eWOM in the context of behavioural intention (e.g., Park and Kim, 2008; Senecal and Nantel, 2004; Xia and Bechwati, 2008), but very few of them focus on eWOM or OCRs in the context of tourism, let alone on their impact on tourism destination choice. Finally, this study provides a greater understanding of OCRs within the tourism context by identifying the features of OCRs on tourism websites which influence tourists' visit intention.

This study has valuable implications for marketing practice, especially for tourism marketers, as this research provides marketers with a frame of reference to understand the impact of OCRs and social influences on tourists' visit intention. Since tourism products are intangible, and tourism services cannot be directly assessed before the

consumption experience, therefore, the factors that provided by this study allow market-ers to understand the dynamics of OCRs; thus they can develop more effective market-ing strategies.

#### **1.4 Research aim and objectives**

The aim of this research is to investigate the influence of OCRs which are posted on tourism websites, and to examine the impact of social influences on the OCR reader's intention to visit a tourist destination. The research has a country-specific focus in that the study population is resident in KSA, whereas the tourist destinations are not limited to KSA, but could be anywhere. To address this aim, the following five objectives are set out:

##### **1) To explore the influence of OCR features on perceived information usefulness**

Exploring the influence of OCR features on perceived information usefulness is re-quired when investigating the role of OCRs on visit intention because perceived in-formation usefulness is a determinant of behavioural intention. In fact, identifying such features allows the study to link the relevant OCR features to the context of tourism, and this in turn allows the study to detect the most important OCR features within the tourism context that influence visit intention.

##### **2) To identify the influence of subjective norms on perceived information useful-ness**

Similar to the first objective, evaluating the influence of subjective norms on per-ceived information usefulness allows the study to investigate the indirect role of subjective norms on visit intention through perceived information usefulness, be-cause subjective norms are a determinant of perceived information usefulness.

##### **3) To explore the influence of subjective norms on visit intention**

Exploring the direct influence of subjective norms on visit intention will detect the direct influence without the role of mediating factors; this allows the study to explore the role of subjective norms within the context of tourism OCRs, and to identify whether indirect influences of subjective norms might actually be more valuable in some cases than direct influences, countering the intuitive assumption that a direct effect is necessarily more important than an indirect one.

**4) To examine the influence of cultural values on subjective norms**

To address this objective, the study adopts Hofstede's cultural model; four cultural dimensions are examined: collectivism, masculinity, power distance, and uncertainty avoidance. Examining the influence of cultural values on subjective norms allows the study to assess the role of social influences in KSA on visit intention within the tourism/OCRs context.

**5) To evaluate the indirect influence of perceived information usefulness on visit intention**

The study fulfils this objective by assessing the influences of mediating factors on visit intention: particularly, by assessing the influence of perceived information usefulness on perceived information trust, and of perceived information trust on information adoption. Similar to the fourth objective, the study addresses this objective by testing the mediating effects between perceived information usefulness and visit intention within the tourism/OCRs context.

### **1.5 Significance of the research**

Worldwide, tourism continues to play an increasing role in contributing to national income, and is considered by intergovernmental agencies such as the World Economic Forum as an important driver of economic growth and development (Tang and Tan, 2013). Tourism generates investment in infrastructure, training for future

employees, and provides new jobs (Ohlan, 2017), all of which in turn ideally enhances the economic wellbeing of a county’s citizens (Webster and Ivanov, 2014). In 2017, travel and tourism reportedly accounted for 10.4 percent of gross domestic product (GDP) and 9.9 percent of total employment globally (World Travel & Tourism Council, 2018). Ohlan (2017) counts tourism as the largest export industry worldwide other than raw materials such as fuels, chemicals and foodstuff.

According to the World Travel and Tourism Council (WTTC), in KSA, tourism accounted for 10.2 percent of the total contribution to GDP in 2016, with a direct financial contribution of 244.6 billion Saudi Riyals (SAR: ~USD 65.2bn; WTTC, 2017, p. 4). the direct contribution of travel and tourism to KSA’s GDP has been increasing year after year and is forecasted to continue this trend, as shown in Table 1. Domestic tourism constitutes a major portion of this spending: in 2016 it accounted for 57.6 percent of total tourism contribution (WTTC, 2017, p. 4).

**Table 1.1:** Direct Contribution of Travel and Tourism to GDP in KSA.

Year	Contribution (in billions of SAR)
2012	67.9
2013	68.6
2014	71.9
2015	78.1
2016	82.3
2017	88.2
2018	91.6 (expected)
2028	131.3 (forecasted)

*Source: WTTC, 2017, p. 13.*

Oil revenues are no longer as lucrative as they once were, and research has indicated that there is a need for income diversity if KSA is to sustain long-term economic growth (Alodadi and Benhin, 2015). Consequently, the kingdom has begun investing in alternate potential wealth-generating revenue sources. The tourism sector is

one area that is being more thoroughly investigated by researchers and policy-makers alike.

As mentioned at the beginning of this chapter, travel and tourism consumers are relying increasingly on OCRs to assist them in their purchase decisions. The majority of behavioural intention models in common use were developed in either Euro-centred ('Western') or East Asian cultures, so the assumption that these models could be applied appropriately in cross-cultural settings is perhaps premature. In fact, relatively little attention has been devoted to investigating the validity of these theories under other cultural settings (Albaum and Peterson, 1984; Lee and Green, 1991). Nevertheless, scholars have asserted that it is crucial to examine the cross-cultural application of behavioural theories, because these tend to come from the realm of psychology, which has been criticized as loaded with cultural bias (Schiffman and Kanuk, 1994; Chan and Lau, 1998).

It is vital for travel and tourism e-vendors to understand the relationship between behavioural intention and social influences. This is particularly true for non-Western, collectivist cultures, where people tend to be more reliant on group opinions (Lee and Green, 1991). As detailed in Chapter Four, Section 4.5.5, KSA is considered to be a collectivist culture. Also, there are very few studies that consider the role of OCR features in conjunction with both the social influences of the reader and their subsequent behaviour (Knoll and Proksch, 2015).

As mentioned earlier, social influence is believed to play a key role in influencing behavioural intention, and research in tourism indicates that individual cultural values influence consumer attitudes and purchase behaviour. Despite this recent scholarly interest, the influence of the individual's society and culture has not been the focus of much research. In particular, research on the influence of OCRs and consumer information adoption, on behavioural intention in cross-cultural contexts is sparse. The

current study examines Saudi Arabian culture specifically, where subjective norms and cultural values have been noted to have a strong influence on behavioural intention (Almaghrabi et al., 2011; Alharbi et al., 2015). Although previous studies have examined the relationship between behaviour and culture, it seems appropriate to re-examine Hofstede's cultural dimensions and their influences on behavioural intention.

## **1.6 Research context**

To address the current research aim, the present work tests the research model OCRIM in KSA. As mentioned earlier, KSA is an oil-rich country heavily relying on its natural resources to increase and sustain economic growth. In this respect, it is of interest to the present research that the Saudi government is actively promoting a national strategy to boost trade in sectors other than those related to petroleum: for example, KSA's 'Vision 2030', which was launched in April 2016 by Saudi's Deputy Crown Prince. Vision 2030 encompasses a framework for the conversion of the Saudi economy from its over-reliance on oil revenue and the public sector. It is expected that this unprecedented widespread transformation will positively impact almost every sector within the Saudi economy (BMI Research, 2016).

As a service sector industry, tourism is particularly driven by and dependent on information and up-to-date data (Johnson, 2010). Johnson's (2010) study on tourism in KSA also notes that in order for tourism to be an effective engine for economic reform, the kingdom must follow through with responsible planning and long-term focus, and because Saudi Arabia's laws and culture are based on Islamic teachings, any initiative should be 'set within the framework of Islamic values as the key driver of all activities and projects inclusive of effective leadership and strategic direction' (p. 93). For the reasons cited above, the role of OCRs in the context of local tourism in KSA constitutes a fertile ground on which to study the impact of OCRs and social influences on visit intention.

## 1.7 Research outline

This thesis contains eight chapters, as detailed below:

**Chapter One** provides a brief overview of the study. It presents the background to the study, research gaps and contribution, the research objectives and research significance, and finally, the context and structure of the thesis are stated.

**Chapter Two** is about the contextual background for this research. This chapter presents tourism in KSA, where the model is tested. It briefly introduces the state of local tourism in KSA in terms of the technological environment, including e-commerce, e-communications, and e-systems relevance, and their impact on tourism.

**Chapter Three** begins by presenting the research model. Thereafter, the chapter carefully assesses the impact of OCR features and social influences on visit intention. This chapter identifies the hypotheses postulated in this study.

**Chapter Four** reviews the literature on the role of OCRs in the tourism context. This chapter supports the focal point of this research and identifies the most relevant OCR features; it explores the role of social influences on behavioural intention within the tourism context. Additionally, the chapter highlights the theoretical foundations upon which this present study is built on.

**Chapter Five** first presents the research hypothesis to be tested in this study. It then presents the philosophical assumptions and research philosophy. After that, the paradigm of inquiry is discussed in term of ontology, epistemology, and methodology. Subsequently, it identifies the research method used to collect the data and test the hypotheses. It also covers the issues of research ethics, translation, operationalization of the variables, and the statistical techniques employed to analyse the data. The research methods are also justified and supported by key previous studies in the field. Finally, it presents the pilot test for the study.

**Chapter Six** is contains the analysis of the research data. It presents the results obtained from the survey. The chapter starts with descriptive statistics to describe the sample and check the statistical assumptions; it then proceeds to assess the measurement models to check the reliability and validity of the measures used in the survey. Thereafter, the structural models are evaluated, and the hypotheses tested.

**Chapter Seven** provides a discussion of the study results. It starts by presenting the main findings of this research, then explains these findings and links them back to the literature. In this chapter, the research objectives proposed in the thesis are thoroughly addressed. In this chapter, justification is provided where the current study's results contrast with those of previous work.

Finally, **Chapter Eight** concludes this thesis. This chapter recalls the research aim, objectives, and questions, and links them to the research findings. Theoretical and practical implications are presented, the limitations acknowledged, and areas for future research identified.



## **Chapter Two: Study Context**

## **2.1 Introduction**

Having discussed the research models developed in this study, this chapter presents relevant information about the country where the model is tested. It first provides a brief summary of tourism in the Middle East, followed by an overview of tourism in Saudi Arabia that comprises domestic tourism, outbound tourism, and international tourism in Saudi Arabia. Thereafter, the technological environment in Saudi Arabia is discussed, focussing on e-learning, e-government, e-commerce, e-communications, and e-systems relevance, and their impacts on tourism. Finally, a summary of the chapter is presented.

## **2.2 A brief summary of tourism in the Middle East**

As discussed previously, in tourism studies, the topics of consumer behaviour and destination choice are subjects of serious focus (Merwe et al., 2011). When it comes to tourism in less developed countries, and especially in Muslim-majority regions, these issues have, not been studied in much depth or (Avraham and Ketter, 2013; Almuhrzi et al., 2017). Many such localities have attempted to cultivate tourism within recent years, although growth has often been slow in comparison to popular Western destinations (Guillot, 2007). However, a plethora of historical, cultural, artistic, and natural sites means that countries such as Saudi Arabia often represent untapped prospects as tourist destinations, potentially contributing considerably to economic growth and social development.

According to Statista (2019a), inbound visitor growth in the Middle East rose by 5.6 percent in 2017, and increased even further in 2018 by 6.1 percent. According to the WTTC (2015a), travel and tourism accounted for 7.4 percent of GDP in 2014, with capital investment totalling USD 43.8bn. Whilst statistics show that promotion of tourism

is rising, many have cited barriers to such growth, including infrastructure, visa restrictions, and political instability in certain areas (BMI Research, 2016).

### **2.3 Saudi Arabia tourism overview**

Saudi Arabia is a prominent country for tourism in the Middle East, contributing 33.8 percent of total Middle East tourist arrivals in 2015 (MAS [Tourism Information and Research] Centre, 2016). The country encompasses a natural site for tourism in terms of its geographical location, its rapid cultural development, and its friendly relations with other world communities. Saudi tourism accounted for 10.2 percent of the total contribution to GDP in 2016, with a direct financial contribution of 244.6bn SAR (USD 65.2bn). Domestic tourism spending in 2016 contributed to 57.6 percent of total tourism spending. During the same period, visitor exports (defined as ‘spending within the country by international tourists for both business and leisure trips, including spending on transport, but excluding international spending on education’; WTTC, 2016, p.4) accounted for 42.4 percent of all tourism spending and for 9.7 percent of employment (WTTC, 2016).

According to Sadi and Henderson (2005), the revenue generated by tourism has led to a change in official attitudes toward tourism. Oil revenues are no longer as lucrative as they once were, and research has indicated that there is a need for income diversity if the kingdom is to sustain long-term economic growth (Alodadi and Benhin, 2015). This has resulted in a search for and new investment in alternate potential wealth-generating revenue sources, particularly in regard to the tourism sector, which is being more thoroughly investigated by researchers and policy-makers alike.

Thus, in 2000, the Supreme Commission for Tourism was established in Saudi Arabia, created to emphasize tourism and its potential to retain Saudi tourists, increase investment opportunities, develop human resources, and expand and create new job opportunities for Saudi citizens. This commission would eventually be re-named the Saudi

Commission for Tourism and National Heritage (SCTH) in 2015 (SCTH, 2019). Whilst the Middle East may be underdeveloped in terms of tourism, Saudi Arabia has made strides in recent years to exploit its potential as a tourist destination, in terms of both domestic tourism and, more recently, with respect to international visitors, with some 19.1 million inbound visitors visiting Saudi Arabia in 2016, compared with 18 million visitors in 2015, according to MAS (2016).

Nonetheless, the Saudi Arabian tourism sector remains primarily dominated by domestic and religious tourism, with approximately two million visitors annually making the visit for Hajj, the pilgrimage to Makkah (Zamani-Farahani and Henderson, 2010). Whilst religious destinations remain a major draw for visitors, the kingdom boasts a number of other attractions, including public and private museums (155), archaeological sites that are suitable for access by the public (75), crafts centres (2), registered UNESCO World Heritage sites (5), and architectural heritage sites (10), which can be exploited to expand the sub-division of leisure tourism ('National Transformation Program': Vision 2030, 2016).

### **2.3.1 Tourism development in Saudi Arabia**

A cursory review of the relevant literature indicates that tourism is becoming increasingly indispensable to Saudi Arabia's economic well-being (Burns, 2007; Johnson, 2010; Sfakianakis, 2014; Ekiz et al., 2017; Debusmann, 2018). According to the SCTH's mission statement, tourism is officially recognized by the Saudi government as a source of significant contribution to 'the achievement of major national socio-economic development objectives' and that the 'rationale for Saudi tourism is based upon the notion of sustainable development' (STCH, 2019).

In April 2016, the Saudi government initiated its 'Vision 2030' (Vision 2030, 2016). As its name implies, Vision 2030 is a macro-plan encompassing all the major

sectors of Saudi Arabia's economy and thus its society as well. At its foundation is the diversification of the Saudi economy away from its over-reliance on petroleum revenue and on public sector jobs. A main goal of this unprecedented, widespread transformation is to positively impact almost every sector within the Saudi economy (BMI Research, 2016). The tourism sector is a key component of Vision 2030, as discussed below in Section 2.3.4. Furthermore, as part of Vision 2030, KSA has stated that it aims 'to expand entertainment options for its citizens and visitors'; to this end, in 2016 it established the General Entertainment Authority (GEA) in order to 'organize and develop the entertainment sector and support its infrastructure in the Kingdom' (GEA, 2019).

Indeed, KSA has been rapidly developing its tourism infrastructure, including the construction of a new international airport in Jeddah that will be able to handle 100 million passengers (Alawi, 2018), a USD 2 billion heritage tourism scheme in Taif (ITA, 2018), and a USD 500 billion mega-city on the Red Sea coast (Garfield, 2018; ITA, 2018). The foregoing explains how and why the tourism industry currently attracts a high level of attention from the national government, and it also indicates that this is the time to explore marketing strategy in order to assess tourist behavioural intention via their use of online sources, in particular eWOM/OCRs.

### **2.3.2 Domestic tourism in Saudi Arabia**

As previously mentioned, domestic tourism accounts for a large portion of tourism in Saudi Arabia, with approximately 49.9 million domestic tourism trips taken in 2016 (MAS, 2016). The expansion of religious tourism has been acknowledged with initiatives such as the Umrah Plus program (*Umrah* is an optional minor pilgrimage made by Muslims to Makkah and, unlike the Hajj, it may be performed at any time of the year).with the aim of boosting foreign pilgrimage to cultural and religious sites outside the main centres of Makkah and Madinah (Sadi and Henderson, 2005). As of 2018, Muslims visiting Saudi Arabia on an Umrah visa are eligible to request a 'post-Umrah

tourist visa' which allows them to extend their stay in order to engage in leisure tourism. Also in early 2018, the kingdom began making tourist visas available to 'citizens from all the countries who have access to the Kingdom' (Obaid, 2018).

In 2015, the SCTH composed a document detailing a strategy for tourism in the kingdom, to be achieved via the attainment of the following objectives:

- Support the national income
- Increase tourism's role in operation and employment
- Increase its role in achieving sustainable development
- Enhance its role in developing local communities economically and socially
- Increase tourism awareness and distribute the tourism culture among citizens
- Develop tourism education and training
- Discover tourism components and capabilities

Thus, it can be seen that the kingdom is increasingly interested in the benefits of tourism and is moving toward the implementation of governmental policies, as well as an administrative framework that incorporates research policies, in order to promote tourism and cultivate investment. The SCTH mention a number of promising tourism projects which may be offered for investment upon research study. Specifically, these are sites that have the potential to be identified as tourist destinations or expanded upon as current tourist destinations, and they include lakes, islands, hot springs, mountains, valleys, and parks.

Such projects are predominantly directed toward encouraging domestic tourism, though there are current plans in place to encourage culture, heritage, ecotourism, and leisure pursuits from international visitors, as discussed below. Domestic tourism is particularly subject to attention due to gains in household disposable income (Destination

Saudi, 2017; United Nations Development Programme [UNDP], 2018) and a culturally-endorsed focus in Saudi Arabia on family-oriented leisure activities. It has been commented that, particularly in recent years, the domestic tourism has been growing more accessible, with increasing amounts of investment in infrastructure, including transport and hotel development as part of Saudi Arabia's Vision 2030 program, proposed to provide a set of frameworks and recommendations to foster economic growth and development. For example, an increase in the budget for cultural and entertainment activities has been proposed from the current level of 2.9 percent to 6 percent, in a bid to bring current cultural and entertainment activities to a level desired by Saudi citizens. However, as mentioned earlier, research that investigates tourist behaviour in developing countries such as Saudi Arabia, and focussing in particular on choosing a tourist destination, has been lacking.

In survey data from 169 respondents canvassed from several regions of Saudi Arabia, it was indicated that on average 90 vacation days were spent away from home (mean 23 days; mode 30; median 21). No differentiations were noted in mean time away between international (24.0 days) and domestic (23.7 days) tourists, and most holidays were taken in the summer. Of particular relevance, there was a notable preference for domestic (59%) over international destinations (41%). Four reasons were given for choosing to travel internationally rather than domestically: shopping (18% of respondents); cooler climate (11%), lower prices (9%), and facilities and attractions (62%), indicating that an investment in facilities and attractions would advance domestic tourism growth, as it has done in recent years (BMI Research, 2016). This is particularly pertinent when one considers domestic spending; for example, in 2014, leisure travel spending (inbound and domestic) was reported to generate 90.1 percent of direct travel and tourism GDP, compared with 9.9 percent for business travel spending (WTTC, 2015b). Additionally, Seddon and Khoja (2003) reported that the most popular domestic

destinations were mountains (33%), coasts (26%), and holy cities (16%), indicating that whilst respondents appreciated desert landscapes, there was a strong disposition toward cooler climates.

### **2.3.3 Outbound tourism**

As is previously mentioned, there are a number of reasons why Saudi residents choose to travel outside of the kingdom. According to BMI Research (2016), Saudi outbound tourism was expected to increase significantly from 2016 until 2020, with the number of outbound tourism travellers projected to increase from 11.8 million in 2016 to 14.9 million in 2020. This trend in outbound tourism may be attributable to several factors, including a population that is proportionally young (47% under age 25 as of 2017 [Index Mundi, 2018]) becoming increasingly affluent, and who consider the opportunity for out-of-home leisure and entertainment within their regions to be limited (Mumuni and Mansour, 2014). Much outbound travel is dominated by trips to neighbouring countries in the Middle East, and culturally similar countries in North Africa. This is mainly due to cultural and language similarities, but also because of business ties, and the fact that visas are unnecessary when travelling between Gulf Cooperation Council (GCC) states. Outbound travel represents major competition for the domestic tourism market in Saudi Arabia, limiting potential domestic tourism income (BMI Research, 2016). Mumuni and Mansour (2014) comment that domestic tourism organizations need to understand the factors that Saudi residents deem necessary as part of a holiday in order to formulate strategies which will foster domestic tourism as an alternative to outbound trips.

### **2.3.4 International tourism in Saudi Arabia**

Visas to the kingdom were issued to international tourists for the first time in 2006. Travelers can only visit Saudi Arabia as part of organized group tours, and in coordination with local travel agents. Subsequently, in 2010, the kingdom ceased to issue



such visas, and allowed only employment visas, business visas, and Hajj and Umrah visas (which latter authorize the visitor to journey within the kingdom only to Makkah and Madinah (Elliott, 2018). However, in 2018 Saudi Arabia resumed issuing tourist visas and has since been actively encouraging international inbound tourism (Elliott, 2018).

Therefore, until very recently international visitors have been primarily drawn by religious pilgrimage, although cultural and nature-based attractions, as well as study tours, are also attractive to sightseers from abroad. Itineraries for such visits include heritage sites, natural scenery, and traditional villages. The kingdom is reportedly eager to expand this arena and attract tourists in the leisure sector, with global hotel groups such as Marriott, Carlson Rezidor, InterContinental, and Starwood recently establishing new properties across the country (BMI Research, 2016).

According to Statista (2019b), there were approximately 19 million international tourist arrivals in Saudi Arabia in 2017, an increase from 18.1 million visitors in 2016. International religious tourism is expected to increase with the continued implementation of Vision 2030. Vision 2030 pays special attention to the maintenance and growth of religious tourism in the kingdom, and refers to the current third expansion of the Two Holy Mosques, along with reconstruction programs to modernize and increase the capacity of the nation's airports. The kingdom has also recently launched the Makkah Metro project, to complement the railroad and train projects that will promote ease of transport for pilgrimage visits. Further, the establishment of new tourist attractions and cultural venues has been proposed to improve the overall experience of pilgrimage for those visitors. Additionally, visa application procedures are being streamlined, as well as the integration of e-services (Council of Economic and Development Affairs [CEDA], 2016).

Thus, the tourism sector is a driving force within Vision 2030, and investment from international and regional hotel chains is noted as a key result. In 2016 the MAS Centre estimated that the number of international excursions made to Saudi Arabia would increase from 18 million to 25.8 million between 2015 and 2020 (MAS, 2016). BMI Research (2016), however, commented that these projections may be exaggerated, and predicted that the figure for international trips to Saudi in 2020 will remain somewhere closer to 20 million. They also noted that pilgrimage numbers are expected to grow, with government policy that focusses on improved safety for pilgrims and improved infrastructure expected to be a key factor in this increase. Specifically, the number of inbound visitors is predicted to increase by just under 6 percent annually between 2016 and 2020, to reach 19.7 million in 2020 (BMI Research, 2016).

Concomitant with the increase in international religious tourism in Saudi Arabia, international tourism revenues are also increasing and contributing to total GDP. However, it has been noted that whereas international tourists may contribute to large spending figures on luxury travel, hotels and resorts, and expenses such as food and shopping for the duration of their stay, tourism receipts may be somewhat constrained by the fact that the market is mostly saturated by domestic tourism. Furthermore, whilst there is a large volume of inbound visitors who make pilgrimages to sites such as Makkah, many of these are low-income visitors. It is noteworthy that the United Arab Emirates (UAE), by comparison, records similar figures in terms of inbound, foreign visitors, yet numbers suggest that the volume of international tourism revenue is almost double that of Saudi Arabia (BMI Research, 2016).

In sum, international tourism in Saudi Arabia still in its initial steps and would need more effort and time to be fully considered as a strong and stable tourism sector in Saudi Arabia. In addition, as mentioned from the previous section (2.3.3) outbound tourism is considered somewhat of a threat to the national economy. Thus, policy aimed

at focussing on developing domestic tourism should primarily be considered by the governmental tourism authority.

## **2.4 The technological environment in Saudi Arabia**

When public access to the Internet began in Saudi Arabia in 1999, its adoption was slow. However, growth has been swift in recent years, with Internet penetration reaching 69.62 percent in 2015 (Statista, 2016). In fact, since 2007, the Internet transformed from a relatively little-used medium to an essential component in the Saudi economy and society. The Communications and Information Technology Commission (CITC) was established in 2007 with the aim of regulating technology and communications services in Saudi Arabia, and has initiated projects in order to regulate and supervise Internet penetration, usage, and growth (CITC, 2009). In 2016, the number of Internet users in Saudi Arabia was 24.2 million, with this figure projected to grow to 27.9 million in 2021 (Statista, 2016). As in many other developing regions, the adoption of Internet technology has impacted many areas of Saudi life.

### **2.4.1 E-communications**

In Saudi Arabia, as with other countries, e-communications have become integral in the way individuals, industries, and governments interact. By the end of the first quarter of 2016, mobile phone subscriptions in Saudi Arabia had reached approximately 51 million, with a penetration rate of 160.6 percent (Ministry of Communications and Information Technology [MCIT], 2016). A 2015 consumer study by the mobile phone maker Ericsson set out to examine smartphone use amongst Saudi residents. Both face-to-face and online interviews were utilized among participants (smartphone users) aged between 5–59, who were connecting to the Internet using 3G or 4G networks in 2014 and 2015. The findings disclosed the views of 2,025 respondents from major cities in Saudi Arabia, including Al Khobar, Dammam, Jeddah, Makkah and Riyadh, a total representation of 30 percent of the population. The findings revealed that Saudi residents

are amongst the highest global consumers of video services on mobile phones, a consumption driven by high smartphone ownership and access to the relatively fast 4G networks. Saudi residents are highly interested in the latest services, such as home and vehicle connectivity. 54 percent of respondents cited the Internet as their primary source of entertainment and news, and a total of 66 percent reported that they used the Internet continually throughout the day. A key finding from the study observed that simplicity was a central quality for smartphone users in Saudi Arabia. 68 percent of respondents said that a key force in smartphone use was as a tool to implement more simplicity in their lives (Ericsson, 2016), indicating that managing both day-to-day events and events such as holidays or trips may be a notable function of smartphone use for residents of Saudi Arabia.

As a result, the number of customers exposed to eWOM and OCRs continues to increase. Currently, most tourism/travel aggregation websites (e.g., TripAdvisor, Expedia, Booking.com, Kayak, Google, etc.) collect and display tourist reviews of the products and services offered. Thus, it is expected that OCRs, which are a form of e-communication, would play an important role in tourist behavioural intention. As mentioned, to the best of this researcher's knowledge, at the time of this writing no research has been published on the topic of OCRs in the tourism context with respect to Saudi Arabia. Nevertheless, the work of Almana and Mirza (2013) and Alballaa and Mirza (2013) indicates that Saudi consumers are, not unlike consumers in studies carried out in Asia and elsewhere, influenced by OCRs with regard to attitudes and behavioural intention. That is, it is plausible that tourism consumers in Saudi Arabia would seek information from OCRs prior to selecting a destination or booking accommodations (Ye et al., 2011; Filieri and McLeay, 2014; Xie et al., 2014).

### 2.4.2 E-learning

E-learning is of interest to this research because it has been suggested that e-learning leads to stronger behavioural intention, as explained below. The National Centre for e-Learning and Distance Learning (NCeL) was developed in Saudi Arabia under the umbrella of the Ministry of Higher Education in order to facilitate the growth of e-learning with higher education. NCeL developed a Knowledge Management Portal (KMP) as a gateway to e-learning, complete with a registered forum designed for user interaction. However, a major barrier presented itself at first, in effectively populating the KMP with quality content in Arabic, which is essential to necessitate its usefulness for Saudi students (Almegran et al., 2007). Though English has rapidly become a second language within Saudi Arabia, Arabic content is crucial for educational websites and pages.

Almegran et al. (2007) assert that teacher and student training programs are vital for easy adaption to new learning technologies. Nonetheless, in spite of the mentioned barriers, the education field in Saudi Arabia has been gradually transforming from traditional classroom environments to e-learning forums and web-based distance learning in higher education (Albalawi, 2012). Albalawi (2012) noted the potential benefits of web-based education systems, including alleviating financial constraints and other strained resources. He further reported that ‘Researchers predict that the Saudi population will grow by one-third every eight years and as such Saudi Arabia cannot accommodate the rapid growth of the college student population’ (p. ii). He remarked that in the three years between 2003 and 2006, the number of students admitted to universities within the kingdom increased by 62 percent (Quraishi, 2012). His study concluded, after assessing factors affecting faculty decisions regarding the participation in web-based instruction, that overall attitudes were favourable, highlighting the budding appetite for e-services in the country.

In relation to e-learning adoption by students, research which employed the TAM has suggested that perceived ease of use influences perceived usefulness of those e-learning tools (Saadé and Galloway, 2005; Landry et al., 2006). Moreover, subsequent studies on e-learning adoption reported that perceived usefulness was a predictor of adoption intention (Saeed and Abdinnour-Helm, 2008; Chang and Tung, 2008; Liu et al., 2010) and two of those found that influence of perceived usefulness to be stronger than any other variable on adoption intention (Chang and Tung, 2008; Liu et al., 2010). In addition to the aforementioned studies, other research on e-learning in the past decade has examined behavioural intention and perceptions around usage as factors that influence it (e.g., Zhang et al., 2008; Walker and Johnson, 2008). Thus, it can be understood that enhancing the e-learning experience would lead to stronger behavioural intention, which can be applied in other contexts as well, such as tourism and travel.

### **2.4.3 E-government**

E-government refers to the developing phenomenon of using ICT as a medium for public administration services. Not only can e-government service delivery enrich public administration governance, but it can also improve government policy transparency and accountability, providing reassurance for citizens (Chatfield and Alhurjran, 2009). To this end, in 2003, the Saudi government instructed the Ministry of Communications and Information Technology (MCIT) to compose a blueprint for the implementation of electronic government services (Saudi National Portal, 2016). Thus, in 2005, MCIT, in conjunction with CITC and the Ministry of Finance, established YESSER, the Saudi e-Government program, with the aim of increasing user acceptance and technology adoption. User acceptance has been pinpointed as of particular relevance to successful execution of new technologies, with the understanding of user acceptance components recently becoming prioritized in this research arena (e.g., Venkatesh et al., 2003).

E-participation is an integral aspect of e-government. The United Nations Department of Economic and Social Affairs (UN-DESA) has described e-participation as ‘civic engagement and open, participatory governance through Information and Communications Technologies (ICTs)’ (UN-DESA, 2018). E-participation improves communication and fosters collaboration between governments and their citizens. Via email, blogs, surveys, chat forums, eWOM on social networking sites, and similar online tools, citizens have the opportunity to contact government agencies with minimal effort and to request information or express their opinions (Hung et al., 2006; Alharbi et al., 2015). It also ‘enables citizens to become more involved in the policy-making process’ (Alharbi et al., 2015). In their 2015 study, Alharbi et al. showed that intention to use e-participation was positively influenced by trust in the e-participation system. This finding is supported by those of previous studies (e.g., Carter and Weerakkody, 2008; Reddick, 2011; Scherer and Wimmer, 2014). It can be supposed from the foregoing that the more the consumers are engaged with e-government services in general, the more they would engage with e-participation, which means they would be more likely to make use of communication tools such as OCRs.

#### **2.4.4 E-commerce**

The Saudi government has shown increasing interest in pursuing e-commerce systems for endorsing national and regional businesses, specifically via the construction of a legal framework for online transactions, which not only affects Saudi Arabia, but also positively impacts business flow and commerce systems in the Middle East (Sait et al., 2004). According to the Ministry of Commerce and Investment (MCI), plans are currently in place in accordance with the Vision 2030 program to establish basic electronic services for small and medium businesses in order to support and maintain growth (MCI, 2016).

A 2014 report on Saudi internet users purported that approximately 32 percent of the adult Internet users in the kingdom utilized e-commerce systems to pay for products and services. The total estimated figure for e-commerce users was estimated at around 3.7 million, which accounted for 12 percent of the total population in the Saudi Arabia. These e-commerce users were estimated to have spent around US\$ 4.3 billion on e-commerce transactions in 2013 (MCIT, 2014). E-commerce revenue reached \$6.8 billion in 2016, and is appraised to reach US\$10.9 billion by the year 2020 (MCI, 2016).

As discussed in detail in previous chapters, empirical studies have demonstrated that consumers find OCRs useful aids in navigating a veritable maze of information about products and services (Häubli and Trifts, 2000; Senecal and Nantel, 2004; Park et al., 2007; Willemsen et al., 2011). As a result, OCRs continue to play an increasingly important role in the consumer's decision-making process, and this is particularly true for tourism consumers. Chen et al. (2014) observe that it is imperative for tourism vendors to take account of this fact.

At the time of this writing, little has been published on the influence of using e-commerce, including eWOM/OCRs, on consumer behavioural intention in Saudi Arabia. However, two studies from 2013 are of interest. Alballaa and Mirza (2013) investigated the use of eWOM by Saudi female consumers. Their research revealed that the majority of participants considered eWOM to be 'important', and that 83 percent of respondents reported that they read eWOM. The authors found that positive shopping experience tended to lead to consumers writing their own eWOM, whereas this link was not as strong with negative shopping experiences. Similarly, Almana and Mirza (2013) found in their study of Saudi consumers (this study sample included both genders) that over 80 percent of respondents reported reading OCRs prior to making purchases online, and that consumers' purchase decisions were influenced by OCRs. Therefore, in the Saudi e-commerce environment, the relationship between e-commerce and OCRs is



central, as OCRs would enhance consumers' e-commerce experience, especially in the tourism context where products are intangible, and the quality is often unknown before consumption (Ye et al., 2011).

#### **2.4.5 E-system relevance and impact on tourism**

Having considered e-communications, e-learning e-government, and e-commerce in the context of Saudi Arabia, we can see that ICT use affects economic and social development in the kingdom, just as it does on a global scale. Disseminating, propagating, and consistently improving accessibility is a central tenet of regional and national development. The widespread supply of information—regardless of geographic location—has clear ramifications for tourism and travel divisions (Shanker, 2008).

Electronic tourism is the utilization of ICTs in the tourism industry, and it is supposed that e-tourism mirrors the digitization of all procedures and value chains in tourism, travel, and hospitality (Buhalis, 2003). At the strategic level, e-tourism incorporates e-business and applies ICTs in order to enhance the proficiency and adequacy of tourism services. Moreover, e-tourism changes all business procedures, including the key connections of tourism associations with all of their partners or investors (Buhalis and Licata, 2002). The e-tourism concept includes all business roles as well as e-strategy, e-planning, and e-management for all subdivisions of the tourism trade, including; tourism, travel, transport, leisure, hospitality, and public sector organizations. In other words, e-tourism can be understood as an amalgam of three distinct fields: business management, IS and management, and tourism (Buhalis and Licata, 2002). It facilitates market comparisons and can lead to increased global supply chains.

Shanker (2008) comments that the importance of ICT to tourism sectors must not be underestimated, particularly in an age where people depend on ready access to accurate, relevant information. The contribution of ICT to tourism has provided various distribution channels, and created new business partnerships via networking,

distribution of product services, and global information provision to consumers. Additionally, and more importantly to the present study, consumers are looking more toward online channels to garner information about travel and destination before planning holidays or trips, highlighting the role of information provision in tourism.

Concomitant with ICT growth in tourism sectors, e-system use is being recognized as a medium for advancing competency and profitability within the Saudi tourism sector (Brdesee et al., 2013). Although research in this area has been fairly limited, there have been a few notable studies. For example, Al-Gahtani et al. (2003) used survey data collected from 722 knowledge workers using desktop computer applications on a voluntary basis in Saudi Arabia, in order to examine the relative power of a modified version of UTAUT (Venkatesh et al., 2003; see Chapter Four, Section 4.3.1) in determining ‘intention to use’ and ‘usage behaviour’, finding that the model explained 39.1 percent of intention to use variance, and 42.1 percent of usage variance. Thus, it was concluded that some features of behavioural intention and restrictions on usage had a tangible bearing on IT adoption in Saudi Arabia. A study by Al-zharani (2011) examined the perceptions and difficulties of IS implementers in both government and organizational sectors. It was found that co-ordination deficiency between Saudi organizations, concomitant with issues associated with technical, behavioural, and structural factors, encumbered IS implementation. This is of relevance to the present study because it highlights the obstacles to adoption of technology such as OCRs.

Brdesee et al. (2013) conducted a study particularly looking at IT system use in the context of religious tourism. Interviews were employed to discover the beliefs and attitudes of executives of Saudi religious tourism organizations, and to identify the factors affecting the use of IS. The authors selected Jeddah as the research site, and ten firms which offered Hajj and/or Umrah services were approached for interviews. Jeddah is the entry point for pilgrimage, but as mentioned in Section 2.3 of this chapter, whilst

in the region many pilgrims also visit other historical, cultural, and artistic attractions. Brdese et al. (2013) concluded from the qualitative data that the organization involved in the study recognized the advantages of IS, but their willingness to adopt systems depended on the characteristics of the system. For example, e-commerce was perceived to have impediments relating to variables such as trust that would limit willingness to engage in religious tourism. However, the broader-based management information systems like YESSER have some motivational characteristics, such as governmental approval and low cost, that endorse their acceptance. Brdese et al. (2013) identified three predominant factors that affect IS adoption by Hajj–Umrah religious tourism operators in Saudi Arabia: External factors (government initiative and support for ICT industry), internal capability (human resources and business model), and relative advantage.

## **2.5 Summary of the chapter**

Tourism is a growing sector within Saudi Arabia: a sector which contributes considerably to total GDP and to economic and social growth (BMI Research, 2016). Domestic tourism accounts for a large percentage of the tourism sector, though it faces competition from outbound tourism, which has been cited as being desirable in terms of amenities and attractions that are not readily available locally; with this in mind, the government authorities have initiated projects to further the leisure tourism division in the kingdom (Mumuni and Mansour, 2014). ICT use has also become an integral contributor to the Saudi economy in general, and while perhaps still in its infancy, it is aimed at furthering the tourism and travel industry. Information provision has been noted as a key factor in e-tourism, with many individuals utilising online services before planning trips (Shanker, 2008). E-tourism has been studied in a limited manner in Saudi Arabia; in particular, an examination of the influence of social environment and the possible boost this could provide to domestic tourism, and in turn, to economic development on the whole, is lacking.

## **Chapter Three: Conceptual Model and Development of Hypotheses**

### **3.1 Introduction**

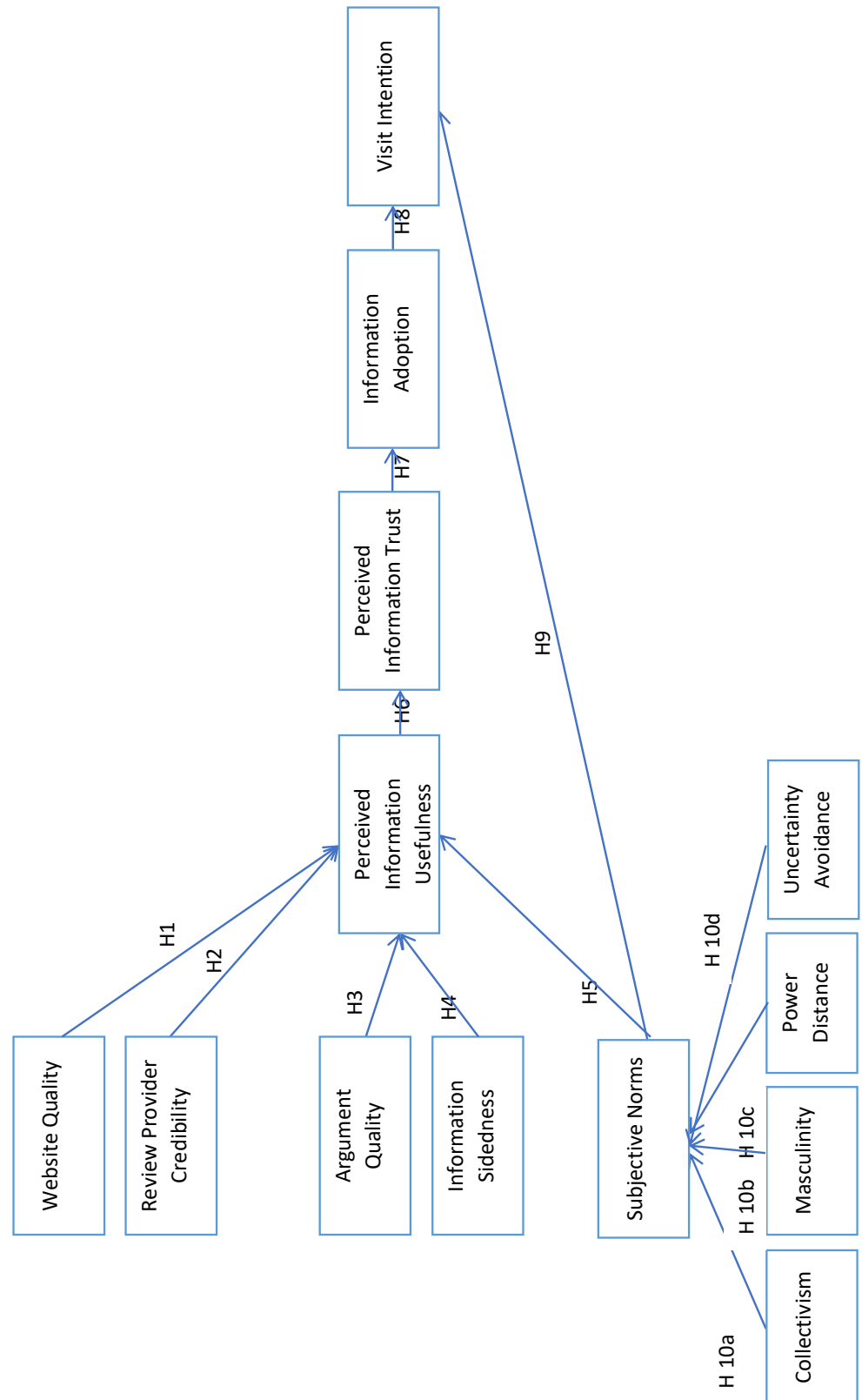
This chapter presents the conceptual model and development of the hypotheses for the research at hand. The chapter starts by exploring the conceptual model for the study. The hypotheses developed during the course of this research are then introduced. As described in detail in the preceding chapters, the study aims to explore the determinants of OCR information on tourism websites and the social influences that influence OCR readers' visit intentions. Thereafter, the influence exerted by five specific OCR features (website quality, review provider credibility, argument quality, and information sidedness) on perceived information usefulness is discussed. Subsequently, this chapter discusses the influences of three proposed information adoption approach constructs (perceived information usefulness, perceived information trust, and information adoption), and the influence of information adoption on visit intention. After that, the influences of subjective norms on perceived information usefulness and on visit intention are examined. Thereafter, the influence of cultural values on subjective norms is explored. Finally, the last section provides a summary of what has been discussed in the chapter.

### **3.2 Conceptual model of the research**

This study develops a theoretical model to explore the influences of reading OCRs on tourists' visit intention. The current study posits that the influence of OCRs on the visit intention of local tourists in Saudi Arabia is a function not only of the features of OCRs, but also of tourists' subjective norms and cultural values. The model developed in this study is named Online Consumer Reviews Influence Model (OCRIM). This model highlights the assessment of social influences as antecedents to perceived information usefulness and thus to perceived information trust of online consumer reviews; it is hypothesized that this will impact consumers' information adoption and visit intention after reading OCRs. It is intended that the research in this thesis proposes

a specific and unique conceptual model which extends and enhances IAM. This proposed model extends IAM (Sussman and Siegal, 2003) by adding cultural values which are antecedents of subjective norms, and it adds behavioural intention as subsequent to information adoption. As explained later in Chapter Four, subjective norms and behavioural intention are derived from TRA, and cultural values are adopted from Hofstede's model of cultural dimensions (1980). Additionally, the OCRIM includes perceived information trust as subsequent to perceived information usefulness. Adding perceived information trust is key to the information adoption process because nearly anyone with online access can produce eWOM/OCR content. The importance of perceived information trust in terms of the research model is explained in Chapter Four, Section 4.2.4; the relationship of perceived information trust to perceived information usefulness is adopted from the Perceived Derived Attributes (PDA) model (Elwalda et al., 2016).

Whilst the IAM refers to source credibility as the reader's perceptions of the trustworthiness and expertise of the information provider (Sussman and Siegal, 2003), the current study examines source credibility as a two-factor construct comprised of website quality and review provider credibility. Additionally, the current study examines the IAM construct of argument quality as a two-factor construct comprised of the quality of the argument and information sidedness. All constructs, website quality, review provider credibility, argument quality, and information sidedness will be discussed in depth in this chapter, in terms of their influence on perceived information usefulness.



**Figure 3.1.** OCRIM Research Model, Consisting of 13 Constructs and 13 Hypotheses.

### 3.3 Hypothesis development

As shown in Figure 3.1, the framework of this study consists of nine independent variables, three mediating variables, and one dependent variable; the hypotheses proposed are as follows:

*H1: Website quality is positively related to perceived information usefulness.*

*H2: Credibility of review provider is positively related to perceived information usefulness.*

*H3: Argument quality is positively related to perceived information usefulness.*

*H4: Information sidedness is positively related to perceived information usefulness.*

*H5: Perceived information usefulness is positively related to perceived information trust.*

*H6: Perceived information trust is positively related to information adoption.*

*H7: Information adoption is positively related to visit intention.*

*H8: Subjective norms are positively related to perceived information usefulness.*

*H9: Subjective norms are positively related to visit intention.*

*H10: Cultural values are positively related to subjective norms.*

*H10a: Collectivism is positively related to subjective norms.*

*H10b: Masculinity is positively related to subjective norms.*

*H10c: Power distance is positively related to subjective norms.*

*H10d: Uncertainty avoidance is positively related to subjective norms.*



These hypotheses are detailed and discussed below.

### **3.3.1 Website quality**

Website quality evaluation consists of features such as user-friendliness, efficiency of site navigation, customization capability, security, and privacy (Yang et al., 2005; Filieri et al., 2015). According to McKnight et al. (2002a), with consumer-generated content, the website ‘front page’ is backgrounded, and the eWOM message board is where users form their first impressions of the site. A website is given a high-quality rating by users if it is ‘perceived as safe and secure, eases consumers’ navigation and the retrieval of information through customized search engines and has forums where customers can interact with other customers’ (Filieri et al., 2015, p. 177). For the purposes of this study, the following definition of website quality seems appropriate: “‘Website quality’ refers to customers’ perception of a website’s performance in information retrieval and delivery’ (Filieri et al., 2015, p. 177).

Customers’ first impressions are formed from their initial interaction with a business or organization’s website (McKnight et al., 2002a). A positive first-time experience with a website, such as secure browsing, straightforward navigation, and easy-to-access information, coupled with user-generated content (UGC) in the form of OCRs and forums for customer interaction, will result in the customer’s perception of that site as reliable (Filieri et al., 2015). In e-tourism in particular, studies on consumer-generated media (CGM) websites which include OCRs have shown that website quality, security, and accessibility (including via mobile devices) have direct effects on customer trust and satisfaction (McKnight et al., 2002b; Bai et al., 2008).

Websites that are renowned as reputable are generally more accepted than unknown sites by consumers, particularly for high-involvement products (Shamdasani et al., 2001). High involvement products are not considered routine purchases and carry more financial and emotional risk should the purchase fail (Park et al., 2007a).

Therefore, it is crucial for marketers to establish how website design and characteristics engender usefulness and thus trust in potential consumers, particularly for high-involvement products like tourism products, in order to ensure continuance of business.

Previous research has shown that consumers may look for specific indicators when searching for website information in a similar fashion to how one may look for indicators of credibility with print materials, such as publisher reputation (Rieh and Belkin, 1998). Rieh and Belkin (1998) identified several website characteristics that stimulated trust in a sample of scholars. Characteristics that were identified included source credibility at the institutional level, such as whether the website had a '.edu', '.gov', or '.com' URL, the first two of which were deemed more credible. Institutional websites, content, format, presentation, and speed of loading were also identified as influencing factors.

Additionally, Park and Lee (2009) also found that the reputation of a website has a notable impact on OCR effects. Websites with established reputations were deemed to be more credible, and thus had a more positive impact on OCR effects, than websites that were unestablished. These effects were more pronounced when the product was an 'experience product' as opposed to a 'search good' or 'search product' (Nelson, 1970). Experience products comprise products whose attributes are difficult to ascertain in advance, whilst characteristics of search goods can be obtained (Nelson, 1970). It has been noted that consumers may depend on external cues when evaluating the quality of a product prior to purchase is difficult (Zeithaml, 1988), therefore it may be that website characteristics serve as external cues in the context of OCR information, particularly when the product is experiential or travel-related (Park and Lee, 2009).

The current study aims to explore tourist visit intention after reading OCRs, and not whether or not an actual visit takes place. In looking at behaviour intention, website quality seems to be the most influential factor. Online sites (such as TripAdvisor) which

host travel-related OCRs tend to separate this function from transactional functions, so the criteria for evaluating quality of the website do not generally include quality of services related to online purchases (Yang et al., 2005).

### ***Website quality and information usefulness***

During the early days of the World Wide Web, it was soon established that website quality does not mean the same thing as information quality (DeLone and McLean, 1992); rather, information quality—also called ‘argument quality’, defined Section 4.2.2—is considered an antecedent of website quality (Filieri et al., 2015). Similarly, Yang et al. (2005) found that information quality and system quality are two distinct determinants of perceived usefulness and ease of use, and thus these must be assessed as separate factors. Filieri et al. (2015) found website quality to be ‘a strong predictor of website trust and of customer satisfaction’ (p. 182). Specifically, the level of performance of a website in terms of ease of use and especially of interaction with other consumers, speed of access to desired information, security, and privacy protection, engenders the trust of the user/consumer in that website and their satisfaction with it (Kim and Niehm, 2009). This is true for both e-commerce and CGM websites (Filieri et al., 2015, p. 182).

Website quality emerged as a strong predictor of website trust and of customer satisfaction. Thus, the higher the perceived quality of a CGM website in terms of its capability to enable (also through customized search functions) consumers’ easy and rapid access to the information they are looking for from different devices (e.g., smartphones), to interact with other consumers, and to guarantee their privacy, the more consumers will trust and will be satisfied with CGM. In fact, Yang et al. (2005) found a significant and positive impact from website quality on users’ satisfaction, and as a result it is expected that website quality influences users’ perceptions of usefulness.

In e-tourism in particular, studies on CGM websites which include OCRs have shown that website quality, security, and accessibility (including via mobile devices) have direct, positive effects on customer trust and satisfaction (McKnight et al., 2002b; Bai et al., 2008). Litvin et al. (2008) note that tourists today can plan and customize their own package tours, and this is possible due to the ease of access to information found in online reviews written by other tourism consumers. Therefore, it seems ever more imperative that these sites be designed in such a way as to foster consumers' trust, leading to their satisfaction and loyalty (Cyr and Trevor-Smith, 2004). In his study of travel website design, Dedeker (2016) found that website design quality, which he defined as 'the summary evaluation of a website's interface design, and of the ease of use of menus, tables, navigation links and the webpage layout' (p. 542), had a significant influence on purchase intention. Yang et al. (2005) assert that since perceived usefulness and ease of use are influenced by both information quality and system quality, it is advisable to separate the content (information) from the delivery system (website) in assessing quality (p. 578).

This study predicts website quality as one of the determinants of tourists' perceptions of OCR information usefulness, and within the context of the study, it hypothesizes that website quality is positively related to perceived information usefulness.

*H1: Website quality is positively related to perceived information usefulness.*

### **3.3.2 Review provider credibility**

Online consumer reviews are often posted by individuals' unknown to the reader of the review, and review providers often post from anonymous profiles; thus, the source credibility of OCRs is not as easily established in comparison to traditional forms of WOM (Xie et al., 2011). Review providers may post personal identifying information along with their review (Xie et al., 2011), but online identities are easily changeable, and thus OCRs are susceptible to abuse (Dellarocas, 2003). For example,

travel operators may pose as consumers and post fake reviews pertaining to the products or services of a competitor, or reviews that extoll the virtues of their own services.

Source credibility in an OCR context can be defined as the extent to which a consumer perceives the source of the review as reliable and honest (Filieri, 2016). Results in this area have often been mixed and inconsistent. For example, Filieri (2016) notes that identity disclosure is only relevant for consumers if a review has already been deemed untrustworthy. In other words, travellers are not normally interested in the profiles of reviewers. Kusumasondjaja et al. (2012) also noted that when reviewer identity is concealed, there is no significant difference between positive and negative reviews either in terms of consumer perception of online review credibility or initial trust in the context of online tourism services, suggesting that identity disclosure may not be as much of a moderator in the perceived trustworthiness of online consumer reviews. However, other research has noted that perceived credibility of the reviewer was a significant predictor of trust in a tourism website (Yoo et al., 2009). Liu and Park (2015) also found that reviewer identity disclosure serves as credibility cues for travellers' assessments of tourism reviewers. Therefore, given the inconsistency of the available literature, the exact relationship between review provider credibility, perceived information usefulness—and thus perceived information trust—of online reviews is yet to be determined. 'Credibility' in this context can be defined as the believability of the source of information: a two-dimensional construct comprising expertise and trustworthiness (Ayeh et al., 2013). For the purposes of this study, 'source credibility' in an OCR context can be defined as 'a message recipient's perception of the credibility of a message source, reflecting nothing about the message itself' (Cheung et al., 2008).

### ***Review provider credibility and information usefulness***

Research has also suggested a positive correlation between source credibility and information usefulness (Sussman and Siegal, 2003; Jin et al., 2009; Ayeh et al., 2013).

The relationship between source credibility and information adoption has been studied in the context of eWOM (Watts and Zhang, 2008; Cheung et al., 2009; Yoo et al., 2009; Filieri et al., 2015). Of particular interest to the current research, a study on travel-related online communities found that the perceived credibility of the source does influence information adoption (Watts and Zhang, 2008), and another found that credibility of the reviewers on a particular website was a determinant of trust in that site (Yoo et al., 2009). If the provider of the information has a high level of credibility, that content is perceived as reliable and useful, and thus the information is more likely to be adopted (Cheung et al., 2008).

Studies examining the impact of source credibility on consumer decision-making with regard to eWOM suggested that source credibility significantly impacts perceived credibility, perceived trustworthiness, and/or information adoption (e.g., Cheung et al., 2009; Yoo et al., 2009; Watts and Zhang, 2008). In their meta-analysis of 20 research articles, Ismagilova et al. (2019) reported finding that source expertise and trustworthiness significantly influenced perceived usefulness and credibility of eWOM, purchase intention, and information adoption. Similarly, in the current study it is expected that source credibility will be found to influence perceived usefulness. Specifically, this study predicts that credibility of the review provider is positively related to perceived information usefulness. Thus, the hypothesis proposed is as follows:

*H2: Review provider credibility is positively related to perceived information usefulness.*

### **3.3.3 Argument quality in the context of OCRs in tourism**

Research has demonstrated that argument quality is a direct influencing factor in the adoption of the information and regarding the credibility of the information (see Chapter Four, Section 4.2.2). In this section, the relationship between argument quality and information usefulness is explored. The elaboration likelihood model defines argument quality as ‘the audience’s subjective perception of the arguments in the persuasive message as strong and cogent on the one hand versus weak and specious on the other’ (Petty and Cacioppo, 1981, pp. 264-265). For the purposes of this study, argument quality can be defined as ‘the extent to which the eWOM readers perceive the argumentation of the eWOM information as strong and plausible’ (Luo et al., 2014, p. 448).

#### ***Argument quality and information usefulness***

In traditional contexts such as knowledge adoption in organizations, research has shown that argument quality and source credibility are primary determinants of information usefulness (Sussman and Siegal, 2003). Results from previous studies (e.g., Watts and Zhang, 2008; Cheung et al., 2012; Luo et al., 2014) suggest that sound, convincing arguments influence eWOM readers to regard OCR information positively and thus to view it as credible. As a result, it is expected to be perceived as useful. It has long been understood that when consumers judge information to be useful and of high quality, they are more willing to purchase the products and services being promoted (Olshavsky, 1985).

Studies analysing user-generated comments on eBay (Lu et al., 2009) and YouTube (Siersdorfer et al., 2010) reported that readers of these OCRs receive a multi-faceted picture of the subject matter (whether video clip or item for sale), including both positive and negative evaluation, and that this information-sidedness factor is a stronger determinant of perceived usefulness than mere quantitative ratings, a point which is

elaborated in the next section. These studies corroborate the findings of earlier work (e.g., Petty and Cacioppo, 1984; Price et al., 2006; Raju et al., 2009) indicating that the qualitative aspect of arguments in eWOM messages is more important than the quantitative component (i.e., than simply the numbers of reviews or ratings), in positively influencing adoption intention (Willemsen et al., 2011).

Furthermore, as Cheung et al. (2013) note, ‘information with higher quality will be considered as more useful in computer-mediated communication’ (p. 506). With these ‘givens’ in mind, argument quality has been studied in connection with eWOM (e.g., Cheung et al., 2008; Cheung and Thadani, 2012), and indeed the argument quality and information usefulness of online reviews have been demonstrated to influence purchase intention (Park et al., 2007a; Lee and Shin, 2014).

As mentioned in Chapter Four (section 4.2.2), Cheung et al. (2009) comment that, in the context of OCRs, if the message is perceived by the reader as valid and coherent, the reader will consider the message as credible, which indicates in turn that it would be perceived as useful. Considering the foregoing, the present study predicts that argument quality influences tourists ‘perceptions of OCR information usefulness.

*H3: Argument quality is positively related to perceived information usefulness.*

### **3.3.4 Information sidedness**

As discussed in Chapter Four, Section 4.2.2, OCRs generally contain open-ended comments regarding a particular product or service, and these are often positively or negatively skewed with arguments to support their views. Although argumentation in OCR research is limited, research in the field of communications has shown that argumentation is a significant predictor of behavioural intention to comply with the given message (e.g., Petty and Cacioppo, 1984). The rigour and validation of online arguments may be determined solely by the presence of the arguments, since there are



no cues such as facial expressions to assist in this (Pickett et al., 2004).

In this study, information sidedness can be defined as whether the information contains one-sided (either only negative or only positive) or both positive and negative comments about the subject being reviewed (Luo et al., 2014, p. 449).

### ***Information sidedness and perceived information usefulness***

Research indicates that consumers perceive two-sided eWOM information (e.g., reviews which provide both positive and negative evaluations) as more believable than one-sided content, which latter they may consider potentially biased (Willemsen et al., 2011; Cheung et al., 2012). Two-sided eWOM information thus would be perceived as more useful, but only if the user can determine whether or not the information is reliable (Cheung et al., 2012). However, contradicting this assumption is a study by Purnawirawan et al. (2012), which found that one-sided (only positive or only negative) review sets were perceived as more useful than two-sided sets.

Cheung et al. (2012) found that OCR readers paid attention to supplemental factors such as information sidedness, source credibility, and argument integrity, in assessing these reviews. In their findings, information sidedness had greater influence on whether or not the review was judged to be credible if the reader had a relatively high level of expertise together with a relatively low level of personal involvement in the topic. Similarly, in the present study it is expected that information sidedness influences perceived information usefulness. This study predicts that information sidedness influences perceived information usefulness. Thus, the following is hypothesized:

*H4: Information sidedness is positively related to perceived information usefulness.*

### **3.3.5 Perceived information usefulness influence on perceived information trust**

Though some research has found that trust is an antecedent of perceived usefulness (Gefen et al., 2003a), others have indicated that perceived usefulness is a direct precursor to trust in an online context (e.g., Awad and Ragowsky, 2008). Additionally, Bart et al. (2005) noted that the mediating role of online trust between website characteristics and consumer behavioural intent was the strongest for sites where consumers infrequently purchase products, or products that are high involvement, such as tourism. There is some disagreement among TAM researchers as to whether trust necessarily precedes perceived usefulness, and in turn is affected by perceived ease of use (e.g., Gefen et al., 2003a); or whether both perceived usefulness and ease of use are preconditions for trust in ecommerce (e.g., Koufaris and Hampton-Sosa, 2004; Awad and Ragowsky, 2008). Elwalda et al. (2016) found that perceived usefulness of OCRs is a direct influence on perceived trust in the e-vendor in an online context, indicating that perceived trust in online vendors can be cultivated by building OCRs and incorporating them into marketing strategies.

Therefore, it is expected in the current research that perceived information usefulness of OCRs directly influences perceived trust in the OCR, thus affecting consumer behavioural intention. The present study posits that perceived information usefulness is an antecedent to trust; hence, in the OCRIM model, the perceived trust component is placed after the construct of perceived information usefulness.

*H5: Perceived information usefulness is positively related to perceived information trust.*

### ***Perceived information trust influence on information adoption***

A lack of trust has often been cited as a barrier to consumers adopting e-commerce (e.g., Wang and Emurian, 2005), and so a number of studies (Grazioli and

Jarvenpaa, 2000; Yoon, 2002; Chen, 2008) have emerged seeking to identify online trust antecedents. Bart et al. (2005) proposed that a mixture of both website and consumer characteristics are determinants of online trust in tourism websites. Yoon (2002) also commented that website trust had a significant impact on consumer purchasing intention. According to Sparks and Browning (2011), ‘consumer reviews, found on travel and hospitality online communities, provide customers with vicarious access to prior service experience on which they can base their belief or trust that a firm will deliver quality service’ (p. 8). Prior research found that perceived information usefulness and credibility are antecedents of information adoption (Cheung et al., 2008; Cheung et al., 2009), and more recent work by Filieri et al. (2015) has shown that trust is a determinant of information adoption in CGC and OCR contexts.

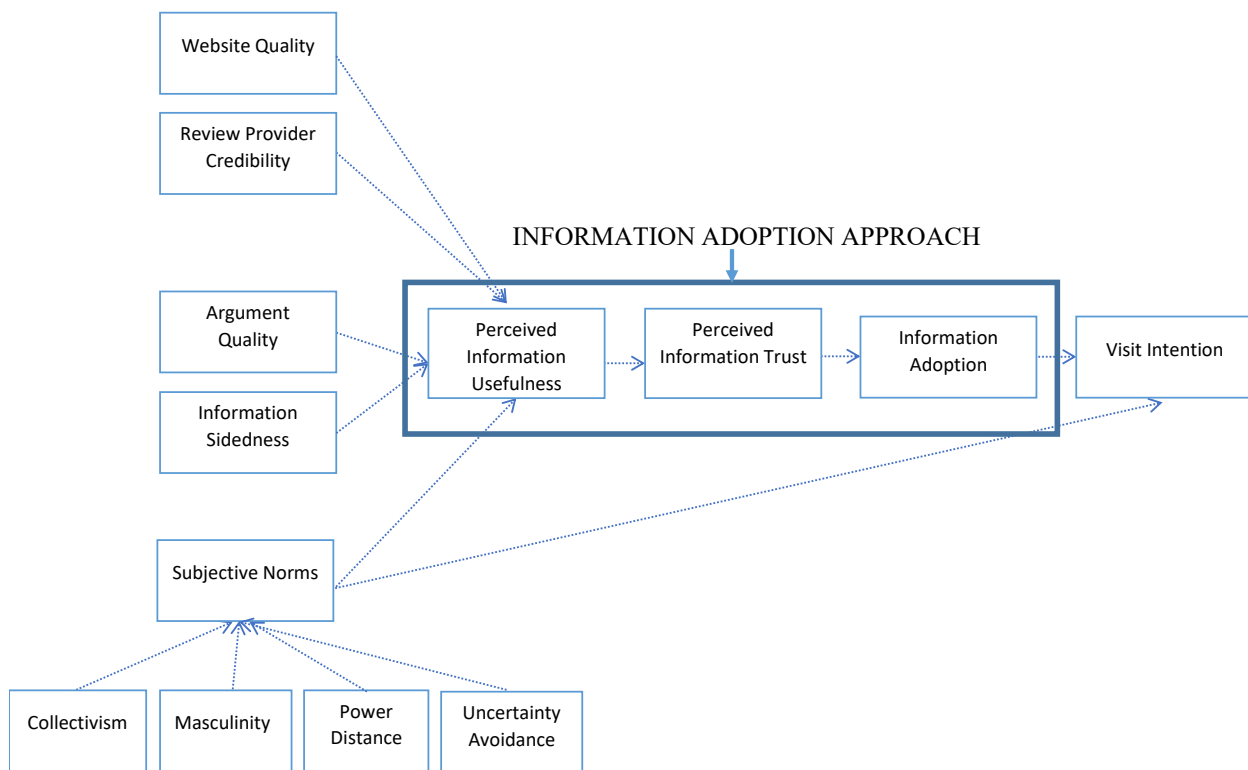
As is mentioned earlier, trust is an essential component in online behavioural intention and purchase decisions (Gefen et al., 2003a; Cheung et al., 2009). When consumers act to gather reliable information about products they are considering purchasing, they are acting to reduce the perceived risk involved, such as cost (Bettman, 1973). Thus, evaluating the trustworthiness of eWOM and OCRs, believed to be a more trustworthy source of information for consumers, plays a key function in consumers’ purchasing intention (Lau and Ng, 2001). Therefore, the present study predicts that tourists’ perceptions of OCR information trust influences information adoption, and hence, that perceived information trust influences information adoption.

*H6: Perceived information trust is positively related to information adoption.*

### ***Information adoption approach for the current research***

As mentioned earlier, this study employs an IAM information adoption approach, positing that perceived information usefulness influences information adoption; crucially, the current study also incorporated the construct of perceived information trust as a related consequence of perceived information usefulness, as posited by the

PDA (Elwlada et al., 2016). The proposed information adoption approach for the current study is as follows: perceived information usefulness influences perceived information trust, which in turn influences information adoption. Additionally, following the information adoption approach the current study extended the IAM by adding the behavioural intention construct from TRA (see Figure 3.2).



**Figure 3.2.** Information Adoption Approach of the Research Model.

### 3.3.6 OCR information adoption and visit intention

‘Message adoption’ is defined as ‘the extent to which an individual accepts the messages after he or she carefully evaluates information in the message and considers it meaningful and beneficial’ (Lee and Koo, 2012, p. 1976). An information adoption-based view of knowledge transfer assumes that, just as people form intentions toward adopting a specific behaviour or a technology, they similarly form intentions toward adopting particular advocated ideas and behaviours. As such, factors that influence the

adoption of behaviours or technologies can be used to understand the adoption of advice as well (Sussman and Siegal, 2003). Research concerning the use of TAM has determined that beliefs about the usefulness of adopting an advocated behaviour are particularly consequential in determining user adoption intention (Sussman and Siegal, 2003). According to Nonaka (1994), information adoption is the phase of the knowledge transfer process in which specific information is internalized as knowledge and has meaning.

Influence from others in one's social media networks has been found to affect purchase intention, and the exchange of eWOM information between members of these networks mediates this (Garber et al., 2009; Wang et al., 2012). Users of social media encounter a wide variety of eWOM information with varying degrees of influence on consumer behaviour (King et al., 2014). Research on OCRs indicates that information adoption increases purchase intention (Cheung et al., 2009; Cheung and Thadani, 2012; King et al., 2014). Chen et al. (2014) define behavioural intention in the context of visiting a destination as 'the willingness to visit the destination mentioned in the blog' (p. 793). For the purposes of the present study it is defined as: 'having the objective to visit the destination mentioned in the OCRs'. Based on OCRIM, when a tourist adopts OCR information, then he/she has already found this information useful and trusts it, which in turn would influence visit intention. Thus this thesis predicts that the adoption of OCR information influences tourists' visit intention.

*H7: Adoption of OCR information is positively related to tourists' visit intention.*

### **3.3.7 Role of social influences in the OCR context**

The current research proposes that in order to fully understand the influence of OCRs on tourist intention to visit a particular destination, one must consider the role of subjective norms and cultural values of the review reader, since, as is aforementioned, cultural values are an influencing factor on normative perceptions and subsequent

individual behavioural intention (Srite and Karahanna, 2006). Therefore, the following section will further examine the constructs of subjective norms and cultural values. The first part of the section will begin by discussing the influence of subjective norms on perceived information usefulness, and then move on to discuss its direct influence on visit intention. The second part of the section starts by highlighting the relationship between subjective norms and cultural values, followed by examining the influence of cultural values on subjective norms in terms of collectivism, masculinity, power distance, and uncertainty avoidance.

### ***Subjective norms and perceived information usefulness***

In the attempt to explain how and why individuals make decisions about the adoption and use of information, both TAM2 (Venkatesh and Davis, 2002) and TAM3 (Venkatesh and Bala, 2008), suggest that subjective norms are a determinant of perceived usefulness and adoption intention. Researchers in information management have found perceived usefulness to be influenced by subjective norms (Yi et al., 2006). Kim et al. (2009) note that this relationship between subjective norms and perceived usefulness is also observed in psychology research. Schepers and Wetzels (2007) observe, ‘people often choose to perform an action when one or more important referents say they should, though they do not like or believe in it’ (p. 91). Moreover, in analysing the impact of subjective norms on perceived usefulness, Schepers and Wetzels (2007) found a large effect size between these two constructs. Therefore, this study predicts that subjective norms positively influence perceived information usefulness.

*H8: Subjective norms are positively related to perceived information usefulness in OCRs.*

### ***Subjective norms and tourist visit intention***

As is mentioned earlier, social influence has been highlighted in various theoretical models, most notably in the Theory of Reasoned Action (Fishbein and Ajzen, 1975) and is explained via the concept of subjective norms (defined in Chapter Four), which refers to how an individual is affected by the perceptions or opinions of significant referents, including friends, family, work colleagues, and so on.

As discussed in Chapter Four, Section 4.4.1, empirical results related to subjective norms were mixed. Mathieson (1991) and Davis et al. (1989) found no significant effect of subjective norm on adoption intention, whereas Taylor and Todd (1995) found significant effects. Hartwick and Barki (1994) found that subjective norm had an effect on adoption intention in mandatory settings but not in voluntary settings, while Venkatesh and Davis (2000) showed that experience and voluntariness moderated the effect of subjective norm on usage intention. One possible reason for the inconsistent findings could be that the effect of subjective norms is contingent on the sample – whether the sample comes from a collectivist or individualist culture.

The mediating role of subjective norms as an influencing factor of consumer behavioural intention has repeatedly been demonstrated in the literature (e.g., Shimp and Kavas, 1984; Vijayasathy, 2004; Kim et al., 2009; Yang and Jolly, 2009; Casaló et al., 2010). The concept has also been integrated into a number of behavioural models, most pertinently in TRA (Ajzen and Fishbein, 1980), in which subjective norms refer to the perceived opinion of referent others and the impetus to comply with the opinion offered (Vallerand et al., 1992). Subjective norms have also been incorporated into other models, such as the unified theory of acceptance and usage of technology (Venkatesh et al., 2003), and is understood as a key determinant of behavioural intention. Additionally, Venkatesh and Davies (2000) in their extension of the Technology Acceptance Model (TAM2) postulate that subjective norms affect

perceived usefulness and behavioural intention. Moreover, subjective norms also play a role in perceived usefulness and behavioural intention in TAM3, which builds on TAM2 to provide a more comprehensive network of the ‘rules’ which act as determinants of IT adoption (Venkatesh and Bala, 2008).

Research has found that subjective norms directly affect consumers’ information-seeking behaviour and online purchasing intention (Pavlou and Fygenon, 2006), participation intention towards online blogs (Hsu and Lin, 2008), and intention to use online social networks (Cheung et al., 2011). As explained in Chapter Four, the level of trust in e-commerce can significantly influence consumer purchase intention, and this relationship may be affected by interpersonal influences (Chen and Dhillon, 2003; Zhang and Zhang, 2005; Yu et al., 2005; Kim et al., 2009). Of particular relevance to the present study, both subjective norms and trust have been found to have a significant impact on citizens’ intention to engage in e-participation activities on e-government websites in a Saudi citizen population (Alharbi et al., 2016). It has also been found that subjective norms directly affect trusting belief, attitude, and intention in an organizational information system context (Li et al., 2008).

Results from research on the relationship between subjective norms and behavioural intention have been mixed. A substantial number of studies reported statistically significant influence from subjective norms on behavioural intention (Venkatesh and Davis, 2000; Venkatesh et al., 2003; van Raaij and Schepers, 2008; Abbasi et al., 2015), whereas other investigations reported non-significant influence (Chau and Hu, 2002; Lewis et al., 2003). Taking Venkatesh and Davis’ (2000) research as the starting point, this study will evaluate only the direct impact of subjective norms on behavioural intention. The role of culture in affecting interpersonal communication should not be underestimated: when utilizing tourism product and destination information, tourists from a culture where SNs exert a strong influence (e.g., Saudi tourists) would refer to their in-



group connections in order to gather and process information about the destination.

Therefore, this study predicts that subjective norms positively influence tourists' visit intention.

*H9: Subjective norms are positively related to tourists' visit intention.*

### ***Cultural values and subjective norms***

Some scholars (e.g., Park et al., 2007b; Baptista and Oliveira, 2015) have argued that technology acceptance models ought to account for cultural factors, because cultural values influence the way in which individuals engage with IS (Kim et al., 2011), and/or accept technology (Srite and Karahanna, 2006). That is, information processing and evaluation are influenced by culture, and cultural values also impact the ways in which people view themselves as individuals and how they identify with their referent groups (Markus and Kitayama, 1991). Due to these influences, individuals from diverse cultures are found to opt for different modes of communication (Kale, 1991). As has been discussed, whilst culture is a collective phenomenon, there is a common assumption that the manifestation of cultural values also occurs through the individual. Thus, cultural effects are not equivalent among members, but dependent on the extent to which a member subscribes to cultural values (Srite and Karahanna, 2006). Therefore, since subjective norms are, by their very definition, subjective to individual perceptions, it is appropriate and meaningful to consider the role of cultural values, which are likely to affect the extent to which a person behaves based on the opinion of referent others who are more or less integrated into the same culture.

Research suggests a relationship between cultural values and SNs; however, findings have varied. A cross-cultural investigation looked at decision-making in the context of online shopping in the United States and South Korea and found that the influence of SNs on purchase intention for the U.S. sample was only half as strong as that same influence in the South Korean sample (Choi and Geistfeld, 2004). Schepers

and Wetzels' (2007) meta-analysis of the moderating role of SNs in TAM found that overall SNs exerted a clear influence on intention, but that contrary to expectations, the influence of SNs was stronger in 'Western' than in 'non-Western' cultures (p. 100).

As mentioned above, Srite and Karahanna (2006) examined the role of cultural values in technology acceptance, utilising the TAM2 constructs, including subjective norms. As predicted, they found, in data collected from a sample of students from 30 different countries, that higher scores on some scales of cultural values were related to the degree to which subjective norms influenced intended behaviours. More specifically, Srite and Karahanna (2006) investigated the dimensions of masculinity/femininity, individualism/collectivism, power distance, and uncertainty avoidance. Masculinity/femininity and power distance were found to have significant effects on the relationship between subjective norms and behavioural intention to use technology. Uncertainty avoidance also yielded significant results; this relationship was noted as more robust for individuals with high levels of espoused uncertainty avoidance. This suggests that individuals with higher levels of uncertainty avoidance rely more on social cues to deduce whether adopting a technology is appropriate.

Interestingly, Srite and Karahanna (2006) found that espoused individualism/collectivism values had no significant effect on the relationship between subjective norms and behavioural intention. Given that collectivist cultures are characterized by a reliance on group opinions (Lee and Green, 1991), this result is surprising. When individuals from collectivist cultures act or intend to perform a certain behaviour, they act in accordance with family, friends, colleagues, and other relevant referents of subjective norms.

*H10: Cultural values are positively related to subjective norms.*

As this study adopts Hofstede's four cultural dimensions, the following section will discuss the influences of collectivism, masculinity, power distance, and uncertainty avoidance on subjective norms.

*Collectivism and subjective norms in the context of tourism OCRs.* Individuals from collectivist societies are likely to be more heavily reliant on group opinions, as opposed to individualistic members who tend to act more autonomously (Lee and Green, 1991). Therefore, when individuals from collectivist cultures act or intend to perform a certain behaviour, they act in accordance with family, friends, colleagues, and other relevant referents of subjective norms. For example, Alharbi et al. (2016) found that the factors of trust and subjective norms significantly impacted on user e-participation intention using data obtained from Saudi citizens, a culture renowned for engendering strong relationships among family members.

Additionally, Lee and Green (1991) highlighted the influencing role of subjective norms in a collectivist culture, whilst Luo et al. (2014) focused on the role of individualism/collectivism in an eWOM context. Fong and Burton (2008) also commented that collectivist cultures engaged in more information-seeking via eWOM than did individualist cultures. This claim seems to be supported by the work of Srite and Karahanna (2006), who investigated individualism/collectivism orientation (ICO) of individuals and examined its influence as a moderator in an extended technology acceptance model; they reported that ICO significantly moderated the relationship between subjective norms and adoption intention.

Earlier research (e.g., Markus and Kitayama, 1991; Bond and Smith, 1996; Triandis, 1989, 1995, 2001) also have reported that ICO exerts substantial influence on individuals' beliefs and attitudes, suggesting that persons espousing a highly individualistic culture place a high value on self-reliance, privacy, and personal independence; their own individual personal beliefs, values, and goals influence their attitudes and opinions;

and they consider themselves to be independent thinkers who are not easily swayed by the opinions of others.. Individuals espousing a highly collectivistic cultural orientation (or low ICO), on the other hand, regarded themselves as part of a ‘collective self’ (Luo et al., 2014, p. 448), placing greater importance on interdependence and in-group relationships (Triandis, 1995), and tended to adhere to the norms of their social group rather than follow their own personal belief system or values (Erez and Earley, 1993). As mentioned, Srite and Karahanna (2006) looked at the influence of ICO at the individual level with regard to technology acceptance; Yoon (2009) investigated the connection between individual-level ICO and online purchase intention. Luo et al. (2014) surmise that OCR readers with low ICO are already primed to accept the opinions of others in their social group, and thus would likely be receptive to WOM in general, which of course would include eWOM and OCRs (Choi and Geistfeld, 2004). This assertion is supported by studies in a range of cross-cultural and technology acceptance contexts (e.g., Lee and Green, 1991; Radford et al., 1991; Putit and Arnott, 2007; Baptista and Oliveira, 2015).

According to Hofstede’s (1980) cultural values model, Saudi Arabia scores high on collectivism. Guided by this viewpoint, this study predicts that collectivism is positively related to subjective norms. Previous research on the relationship between subjective norms and cultural values has focused mainly on the individualism/collectivism (ICO) dimension. At the time of this writing, research into the relationships between subjective norms and the cultural dimensions of masculinity/femininity (M/F), power distance (PwrDistnc), and uncertainty avoidance (UnCrAvo) has not been published. The present study explores the relationships between subjective norms and the four cultural dimensions mentioned above.

*Masculinity and subjective norms in the context of tourism OCRs.* Masculinity vs. femininity is concerned with the division of roles between genders in a society

(Hofstede, 1983). Hofstede (1980) pays particular attention to the traditionally masculine roles of assertiveness and competitiveness, whilst female roles centre on home and child-oriented tasks, and nurturing behaviours. Cultures that are high in masculinity tend to maintain these traditional gender roles, whereas feminine cultures tend to overlap roles. According to Hofstede (1980) Arabic countries, including Saudi Arabia, imply a strong masculine culture. Therefore, high masculinity scores are found in cultures that identify values like assertiveness, and support personal economic success and achievement. Masculinity has also been implicated in intention to use e-commerce technology (Yoon, 2009) and in intention to use ICT (Srite and Karahanna, 2006).

Hofstede and Hofstede (2005) assert that religiosity has a strong relationship with masculinity/femininity (M/F): cultures that score high on masculinity tend to be more religious than cultures closer to the feminine end of the scale (p. 175). Abbasi et al. (2015) suggest a correlation between masculinity and collectivism, so that cultures scoring high on masculinity also tend to be collectivist. Individuals in a high-masculinity culture place emphasis on achievement, tasks, and performance. Hence, this study has proposed that masculinity is positively related to subjective norms.

*Power distance and subjective norms in the context of tourism OCRs.* Saudi Arabia is characteristically a high-scoring culture in terms of the power distance dimension (Hofstede, 1980). Research has shown the high scoring power distance cultures are more likely to seek the opinion of others, and have a higher likelihood of relying on recommendations (Dawar et al., 1996). Western cultures that are typically low in power distance are more likely to utilize websites that primarily deal with marketer-to-consumer communications, whilst cultures high in power distance prefer websites that promote consumer-to-consumer interactivity (Cho and Cheon, 2005). It

has also been indicated that power distance is an influencing factor on behavioural intention to use a technology (Srite and Karahanna, 2006).

In addition to Srite and Karahanna (2006), other researchers have looked at the role of power distance as a potential moderator between subjective norms and behavioural intention (e.g., Zakour, 2004; McCoy et al., 2005; Dinev et al., 2009; Li et al., 2009). Their hypothesis supposes that individuals from a culture which values a greater level of power distance would rely to a greater degree on the opinions of their superiors (the power holders) when making decisions regarding technology adoption, and would be more influenced by the views of those in positions of superiority (Tarhini et al., 2017). However, the research to date does not seem to support this argument. Srite and Karahanna's (2006) study cited above found that low power distance significantly moderated the relationship between subjective norms and behavioural intention, whereas high power distance had a non-significant effect, which is contrary to what they hypothesized. On the other hand, in a study by Dinev et al. (2009), respondents from South Korea and the United States were compared as to their rates of technology adoption with regard to security software such as anti-virus applications. The researchers reported that, as hypothesized, high power distance (exemplified by the sample in South Korea) significantly moderated the effects of subjective norms on behavioural intention, whereas low power distance (represented by the U.S. sample) did not significantly moderate this relationship. The effect of power distance in the context of OCR adoption does not appear to have been explored directly in past research. In the present study, it is expected that power distance is positively related to subjective norms scores.

*Uncertainty avoidance and subjective norms in the context of tourism OCRs.* As with power distance, uncertainty avoidance has been investigated as a potentially moderating factor on the impact of subjective norms on behavioural intention (Zakour, 2004; Srite and Karahanna, 2006; Dinev et al., 2009; Li et al., 2009). Uncertainty

avoidance refers to the extent to which individuals in a society feel uncomfortable with uncertainty; this cultural dimension describes the degree to which members prefer structured or unstructured situations. Structured situations are those in which the rules for how to behave are made clear, possibly imposed by traditional values (Hofstede, 1994). High-scoring uncertainty avoidance cultures may be referred to as rigid, whereas low-scoring cultures may be more flexible (Hofstede, 1980).

Hwang and Lee (2012) reported that uncertainty avoidance moderated the effect of subjective norms on two aspects of trust: integrity and ability, which can be equated with the concepts of perceived expertise and perceived trustworthiness (Petty and Cacioppo, 1981; Goldberg and Hartwick, 1990), explained in the next chapter. In a culture which exhibits a high level of uncertainty avoidance, unknown or ambiguous situations are viewed as a threat, so individuals will look for ways to minimize the uncertainty (Hwang and Lee, 2012). Bagchi et al. (2003) note that modern telecommunication (e.g., mobile phones, email, instant messaging, etc.) can aid in reducing unknown factors during communication. Seeking out and making use of evaluative content available via eWOM such as OCRs is one way of reducing uncertainty in e-commerce. Furthermore, habitual engagement with OCRs can engender in users a sense of ownership of the information (Hwang and Grant, 2011). In fact, Srite and Karahanna (2006) reported that, of the cultural dimensions examined, uncertainty avoidance was the only consistent moderator of the influence of subjective norms on adoption intention.

Some researchers have hypothesized that in a high uncertainty avoidance culture, subjective norms will have a greater influence on behavioural intention because the opinions of others in their in-group allow individuals to minimize uncertainty about technology adoption (Tarhini et al., 2017). Results of some studies (e.g., Srite and Karahanna, 2006; Dinev et al., 2009) indicate support for this hypothesis, although Li et al.

(2009) found that uncertainty avoidance had a non-significant moderating effect on the relationship between subjective norms and behavioural intention.

In the context of travel-related websites, uncertainty is reduced for users by others in their social circles: via eWOM, those who have personal experience with the travel-related product or service inform their online community and share their perceptions. Moreover, as Hwang and Lee (2012) point out, ‘normative pressure from supervisors and peers to use the system reduces uncertainty since it provides strong proof that the system is deemed socially desirable and appropriate’ (p. 172). According to Hofstede’s (1980) cultural model, Saudi Arabia exhibits high scores of uncertainty avoidance. Thus, it is expected that the uncertainty is positively related to subjective norms.

Based on the above-mentioned relationships between the four cultural values dimensions and subjective norms, the current study predicts the following:

*H10a: Collectivism is positively related to subjective norms in the context of tourism OCRs.*

*H10b: Masculinity is positively related to subjective norms in the context of tourism OCRs.*

*H10c: Power distance is positively related to subjective norms in the context of tourism OCRs.*

*H10d: Uncertainty avoidance is positively related to subjective norms in the context of tourism OCRs.*

### **3.4 Summary of the chapter**

In this chapter, the conceptual model was presented, and the hypotheses were developed. The literature related to the conceptual model was discussed, in order to achieve the research objectives as to how potential tourists adopt information from OCRs and the effect this has on their visit intention. The OCRIM framework is intended



to account for four salient OCR features (website quality, review provider credibility, argument quality and information sidedness) and subjective norms, which the research assumes is directly influenced by cultural values, along with the related research hypotheses. The next chapter reviews the literature on the role of OCRs in the tourism context.

## **Chapter Four: Literature Review and Theoretical Framework**

## 4.1 Introduction

Whereas the previous chapter outlined the research objectives of this study, this chapter will discuss the existing literature related to this research. This chapter is divided into eight sections. The next section (4.2) begins by defining the concept of OCRs and highlighting their influence within tourism literature. Section 4.2 also discusses the following, all in the context of OCRs: the influence of source credibility, argument quality information usefulness, information trust, and information adoption. Section 4.3 explores the theoretical background for information adoption theories, whereafter a justification for the appropriate information adoption model for the current research is presented.

Section 4.4 concerns the impact of social influences. The influence of subjective norms on visit intention is discussed. Thereafter, the role of OCRs is examined with regard to behavioural intention and in the tourism destination context. The theoretical background for subjective norms and behavioural intention is explored, and justification of the appropriate behavioural intention theory for the current research is presented.

In Section 4.5 the influence of cultural values is discussed, beginning by exploring definitions of culture, then considering the influence of cultural values in the context of OCRs. Thereafter, the role of culture in information and communications technology (ICT) adoption is discussed, and the relationship between culture and tourism is examined. Cultural models are then reviewed, with a detailed treatment of Hofstede's cultural dimensions and how these may be applied at the individual level. Section 4.6 presents a justification for an appropriate theory of culture for the research model. Finally, the last two sections of this chapter conclude by identifying the research gaps (4.7) and summarizing the chapter (4.8).

## 4.2 Online consumer reviews (OCRs)

Online consumer reviews are a form of electronic word-of-mouth that allow consumers to share, with other potential or actual consumers, their experiences with goods or products they have purchased or used (Hennig-Thurau et al., 2004); OCRs comprise user-generated content (UGC) focussing on product information that is posted on retailer websites or virtual message boards designed to host consumer reviews and opinions (Huang et al., 2015). Chen and Xie (2008) have also described OCRs as a new and integral component in marketing communications. Research suggests that OCRs have become increasingly imperative in consumer purchase decisions and product sales (e.g., Chevalier and Mayzlin, 2004; Mudambi and Schuff, 2010; Almana and Mirza, 2013; Erkan and Evans, 2016).

In the earlier days of the consumer-oriented Internet (i.e., once the Internet began to be utilized for commercial purposes), prospective travellers and tourists were dependent on the content found on the websites of travel agencies, resorts, and others in the tourism and hospitality industry. Recent research has shown that, over the past decade or more, consumers have been turning more and more to UGC as they seek information and make decisions about travel options and destinations (Gretzel et al., 2007; Cox et al., 2009; Fotis et al., 2012). Companies in the travel and tourism industries have reacted to this trend by incorporating UGC sites and social media apps into their websites and other consumer-oriented online interfaces. 'Travelers are becoming more independent, searching for their own information and making their own decisions about destinations and services with less or no involvement of travel intermediaries' (Ayeh et al., 2013, p. 438). Chung and Buhalis (2008) note that as the amount and variety of information and sources available on the Internet have mushroomed, source credibility has become more of a concern. Products in hospitality and tourism are intangible and difficult to evaluate prior to their consumption, meaning that the risk to the consumer is

greater than with tangible products (Loda et al., 2009); therefore, credibility is especially vital to these industries.

In the tourism sector, OCRs are written by travellers in reference to the tourism destinations they have visited, and to related products, services, and brands. There are several mediums dedicated to the provision of consumer travel reviews; for example, TripAdvisor offers advice from millions of travel consumers, reaching 350 million average monthly unique visitors and 385 million reviews and opinions as of 2016, covering 6.6 million accommodations, restaurants and attractions (TripAdvisor LLC, 2016). Tourism consumers write OCRs to depict their own experiences and describe how satisfied they were with their experience, in order to help others with travel decisions (Gretzel and Yoo, 2008). OCRs have been noted to be of particular importance within the travel and tourism industry because consumers are often unfamiliar with the destination and related tourism products and services; thus, external sources of information are vital for destination choice (Chatterjee, 2001). Additionally, travel purchases are considered high-involvement products, given their costliness relative to low-involvement products (e.g., electronic products or books). Previous research has found that consumers rely more on online reviews when the level of involvement in the product is high (Park et al., 2007a). Yoo et al. (2009) reported that for consumers seeking information about travel and tourism products, reviews from consumers who had experience with those particular products were more influential than other types of comments.

OCRs typically contain written information about the traveller's experience or may consist of numerical or 'star' rankings, which are used to summarize product evaluations (Filieri and McLeay, 2013). Written reviews may be detailed or vague, and be positively, negatively, or neutrally valanced; these are factors which have been found to affect consumer purchasing intention (Ketelaar et al., 2015). The present study will

focus more on detailed consumer reviews as a reflection of argument quality, which has been previously noted to play a role in information influence (Sussman and Siegal, 2003). Research on eWOM has shown that two-sided information (i.e., containing both positive and negative comments; see Chapter Three, Section 3.3.4) is perceived as more credible than one-sided information; this is because readers may consider two-sided reviews as more balanced and thus more objective information (Cheung et al., 2012; Luo et al., 2014).

The present review of the available literature on OCRs as they relate to behavioural intention in the domain of tourism revealed that previous studies have researched the influence of source credibility on perceived information usefulness (Cheung et al., 2008; Willemsen et al., 2011) and information adoption, with contrasting results (Watts and Zhang, 2008). To date, there has been little eWOM-related research specifically on the influence of source credibility on trust in websites (Filiari et al., 2015); however, research in e-commerce has indicated that website quality affects consumers' trust in online vendors (McKnight et al., 2002b; Filiari et al., 2015), and studies focussing on e-tourism suggested that website quality directly and positively influences customer satisfaction (Bai et al., 2008; Filiari et al., 2015). Meanwhile, the influence of the individual's society and culture has largely been ignored, with King et al. (2014) commenting that eWOM, and thus OCR, consumer information adoption and its effects on behavioural intention in cross-cultural contexts is unknown in any kind of structural depth-Previous research has also found that consumers are likely to look to their own cultural norms before adopting information (Shu and Scott, 2014); thus, the current research will also consider the role of subjective norms and cultural influence, factors which have not been extensively discussed in the context of OCRs.

#### **4.2.1. Source credibility in the context of OCRs**

Chaiken (1980) described source credibility with regard to text-based messages, stating that it refers to the perception by the message's recipient of the credibility of the source of that message, not about the credibility of the message itself. There are two parts to perceived source credibility: perceived expertise and perceived trustworthiness (Goldberg and Hartwick, 1990). Expertise indicates the knowledge and ability of the source to provide accurate information; trustworthiness refers to the perceived motivation of the information provider to be truthful (Petty and Cacioppo, 1981). The Information Adoption Model (IAM: Sussman and Siegal, 2003) refers to source credibility as the reader's perceptions of the trustworthiness and expertise of the information provider, and not of the actual information being provided (Sussman and Siegal, 2003). However, upon reviewing the literature pertaining to OCRs, it was found that two constructs which represent source credibility are relevant to the scope of the current study: website quality and review provider credibility. Therefore, the current study will examine source credibility as a two-factor construct, comprising website quality and review provider credibility.

Consumers may try to find expert or unbiased sources when seeking information about a product or service. Pre-Internet era research on word-of-mouth found that source credibility and trustworthiness have a strong influence on consumer acceptance of source messages and can lead to changes of opinion (Brown and Reingen, 1987; McGinnies and Ward, 1980). However, the results reported by studies examining the impact of source credibility on consumer decision-making with regard to eWOM have been mixed: some (e.g., Cheung et al., 2009; Yoo et al., 2009; Watts and Zhang, 2008) have indicated that source credibility significantly impacts perceived credibility, perceived trustworthiness, and/or information adoption. In contrast, Ayeh et al. (2013) did not find support for a direct relationship between source credibility and travellers'

intention to use UGC for travel planning, and the influence of perceived trustworthiness on behavioural intention was weak; Cheung et al. (2008), similarly found a lack of significant influence.

In traditional word-of-mouth, the source of information is someone known to the recipient, such as a friend, colleague, or family members; with eWOM, and with OCRs in particular, on the other hand, the source of information is someone who supposedly has purchased or tried the product, but who is not personally known to the OCR reader. Hence, OCRs tend to be given less credibility by consumers, who may consider such eWOM as a supplementary, rather than a primary, source of information (Park et al., 2007a).

Yoo et al. (2009) report finding that source credibility of UGC on travel websites significantly influences trust in that content. Ayeh et al. (2013) looked at the effect of perceived source credibility of travel-related OCRs on attitudes and behavioural intention; their study results showed significant positive influence of perceived source credibility on attitude toward the use of OCRs, which suggests that consumers would be more likely to use eWOM/OCRs to plan travel if they believe that this content is from trustworthy individuals.

Sussman and Siegal (2003) assert that source credibility is relevant within the context of online communication. According to the Elaboration Likelihood Model (ELM; Petty and Cacioppo [1980], explained later in Section 4.3), 'high levels of elaboration represent a central route to influence, while low levels result in a peripheral route' (Sussman and Siegal, 2003, p. 50). The ELM framework has led some researchers to posit that higher levels of source credibility can influence and be influenced by additional constructs to produce a variety of outcomes (Sussman and Siegal, 2003). For example, Petty and Cacioppo (1981) observed that when individuals have a high level of engagement with a message topic, there is minimal influence on attitude due to source



credibility, because they pay greater attention to the argument, which reaches them through the central route, than to the source, which takes a peripheral path. Conversely, when there is a low level of engagement with a topic, source credibility has a greater impact on attitude change (Sussman and Siegal, 2003). Furthermore, Petty and Cacioppo (1986) noted that it is common for individuals to react to signals regarding the source of a message when the meaning of the content of that message is not clear.

Sussman and Siegal's (2003) IAM combined features of TAM and ELM so that the central route is associated with argument quality, and the peripheral route with source quality, mediated by perceived information usefulness (Tseng and Wang, 2016), as shown in Figure 4.1 (see Section 4.3.3 below). The current study examines source credibility as a two-factor construct, comprising website quality (WEBQUAL) and review provider credibility (RPC) (see Section 3.3).

#### **4.2.2 Argument quality in the context of OCRs**

Argument quality has also been identified as a key factor in the amount of influence gained from given information (Sussman and Siegal, 2003). The elaboration likelihood model defines argument quality as 'the audience's subjective perception of the arguments in the persuasive message as strong and cogent on the one hand versus weak and specious on the other' (Petty and Cacioppo, 1981, pp. 264-5). Thus, argument quality is concerned with how rational and well-argued a message is; for the receiver, it comprises the validity of the argument in defining or supporting their own position. Perception of a stronger argument is more likely to result in a more favourable response (Cheung et al., 2012). A number of studies have shown that argument quality is a direct influencing factor in the adoption of the information (Sussman and Siegal, 2003; Willemsen et al., 2011; Luo et al., 2014), and in the credibility of the information given (Cheung et al., 2009). Cheung et al. (2009) comment that in the context of OCRs, if the message is perceived by the reader as valid and coherent, the reader will consider

the message as credible; conversely, if the argument proposed is received as weak and not cogent, the reader will adopt a negative view of the message and be more likely to dismiss the credibility of the review. Additionally, reviews that are deemed high in quality have been shown to have a strong positive relationship with online purchasing intention, a relationship that is particularly salient when the product is high-involvement (Park et al., 2007a). Sussman and Siegal (2003), however, do not identify which factors of an argument would qualify it a high (or low) quality argument.

OCRs typically contain open-ended comments regarding a particular product or service (Park and Kim, 2009a); these are usually positively or negatively skewed with arguments to support their points. Research on argumentation in OCR is sparse, although communications research has highlighted argumentation as a significant predictor of behavioural intent to comply with the given message (e.g., Petty and Cacioppo, 1984). Schindler and Bickart (2005) posit that since OCR writers are often anonymous, readers will examine the content of the review instead of the credibility of the source, which they cannot easily determine.

Persuasion may also be mediated by the content of the review itself. Studies have shown that argument quality is a direct influencing factor in the adoption of information (Sussman and Siegal, 2003; Cheung et al., 2008; Lee and Koo, 2012; Shen et al., 2013; King et al., 2014), and on the apparent credibility of the information given (Cheung et al., 2009). For the purposes of this study, argument quality can be defined as ‘the extent to which the OCR readers perceive the argumentation of the eWOM information as strong and plausible’ (Luo et al., 2014, p. 448). The current study will examine argument quality as a two-factor construct, comprising argument quality and review information sidedness (see Section 3.3).

### **4.2.3 Perceived information usefulness in the context of OCRs**

Online consumer reviews often provide evaluative information in addition to other information (e.g., product descriptions) which can help consumers to form perceptions throughout the stages of purchase decision-making (Mudambi and Schuff, 2010). Perceived information usefulness indicates perceptions by consumers that using information will enhance their performance (Bailey and Pearson, 1983; Cheung et al., 2009). Therefore, the perceived information usefulness of OCRs is likely to influence consumer behavioural intention. Indeed, recent studies (Hsu et al., 2013; Elwalda et al., 2016) have found that perceived usefulness of OCRs such as online blog recommendations significantly influenced reader's intention to shop online. For the purposes of this study, perceived information usefulness is the extent to which a consumer believes that using OCRs aids them in selecting a suitable tourism destination.

The TAM (Davis, 1989) proposes that behavioural intention is defined by perceived usefulness, a notion that was extended in TAM2, which postulates that subjective norms (defined by Fishbein and Ajzen (1975, p. 302) as 'a person's perception that most people who are important to him/her think s/he should or should not perform the behaviour in question') influence behavioural intention through perceived usefulness (Venkatesh and Davis, 2000). Similarly, the IAM cites information usefulness as a mediating role between influence processes and information adoption (Sussman and Siegal, 2003). Perceived usefulness is defined by Davis (1989) as 'the degree to which a person believes that using a particular system would enhance his or her job performance' (p. 320). Therefore, if an individual views a particular system as useful or helpful in improving their performance, they are more likely to adopt the system in question (Davis, 1989); hence, perceived information usefulness is related to behavioural intention.

Supporting evidence from research on online shopping ‘malls’ has shown that there is a significant and direct correlation between perceived usefulness and behavioural intention based on data from 932 internet users (Ahn et al., 2004). Subsequently, perceived information usefulness was found positively related to purchase intention by other researchers (Lee and Koo, 2015). More specifically, Lee and Koo (2015) have examined the message usefulness of online reviews; and found it to be positively associated with purchase intention.

#### **4.2.4 Perceived information trust in the context of OCRs**

As with source credibility, trust is a component which influences consumer behaviour. Shankar et al. (2003) assert that the fact that retail sales transactions are taking place online as opposed to face-to-face at an ever increasing pace means that consumers must find e-commerce websites or online vendors in whom they can place their trust and will thus be loyal to. Therefore, businesses aiming to succeed at e-commerce must take into account the online dynamics of the relationship between trust and consumer behavioural intention (Shankar et al., 2003). According to Cox et al. (2009), the trust placed by consumers in UGC (such as OCRs), as it compares to their trust in other online sources of travel information, is a topic of debate among scholars, and yet research in this area has been slow to develop (Filiari, 2016). Online trust has been the subject of research since the turn of the millennium, but mainly looking at this construct as it pertains to online vendors (e.g., Ba et al., 1999; Hoffman et al., 1999; Jarvenpaa et al., 2000; Bart et al., 2005; Eid, 2011) or more generally to websites (e.g., Fogg et al., 2002; Briggs et al., 2004; Flavián et al., 2006). Some of this research has been important in bringing to the fore the role that cultural difference plays in user or consumer trust in websites (Doney et al., 1998; Jarvenpaa et al., 1999). More recently, researchers have begun investigating the role of trust in the context of eWOM and OCRs (Gretzel and Yoo, 2008; Cheung et al., 2009; Filiari et al., 2015). These later studies have highlighted

the importance of eWOM in the context of online searches and purchases related to travel and tourism (Gretzel and Yoo, 2008; Yoo et al., 2009; Filieri et al., 2015).

Trust in e-commerce research can be understood as the extent to which an e-vendor will engage in transactions in an ethical manner that upholds the consumers' confidence in the seller (Gefen et al., 2003b). Online environments can be considered as uncertain and impersonal environments; thus, consumers may experience doubt as to the veracity of the merchant and any transactions they may make. It is therefore imperative for e-commerce that trust is cultivated between businesses and consumers in online environments; indeed, research has noted trust as a vital influencing factor in consumer behaviours (McKnight and Chervany, 2001).

Bart et al. (2005) proposed that a mixture of both website and consumer characteristics are determinants of online trust in travel websites. According to Sparks and Browning (2011), 'consumer reviews, found on travel and hospitality online communities, provide customers with vicarious access to prior service experience on which they can base their belief or trust that a firm will deliver quality service' (2011, p. 8). Filieri (2016) defines trustworthiness in an OCR context as, 'a review that is perceived by the reader as the honest, sincere, truthful, and non-commercial opinion of a customer who has experienced a product or a service' (p. 47). This is in contrast to an untrustworthy review, which may be considered fake or deceptive; this category includes sponsored and promotional reviews. The current study follows Pan and Chieu's (2011) definition for online perceived trust: they considered online information to possess the characteristic of perceived trustworthiness when the argumentations were trustworthy, reliable, and credible.

As mentioned earlier, trust is an essential component in online behavioural intention and purchase decisions (Gefen et al., 2003b; Cheung et al., 2009). When consumers act to gather reliable information about products they are contemplating

purchasing, they are acting to reduce the perceived risk involved, such as cost (Bettman, 1973). Thus, evaluating the trustworthiness of WOM and eWOM, believed by consumers to be a reliable source of information, plays a key function in consumer purchase intention (Lau and Ng, 2001).

Websites that include UGC have sparked a number of empirical investigations concerning trustworthiness, primarily due to the subjective nature of UGC (Ayeh et al., 2013). It has previously been shown that user-generated reviews are more credible than those by service-providers (Park et al., 2007a). In a key study of UGC travel sources, Ayeh et al. (2013) noted that online travellers appear to be more favourably disposed toward the use of UGC for travel planning if they believe that the information provided is from credible travellers. They further noted that credibility was a fundamental moderator for overall impact and travel intention. Additionally, Alharbi et al. (2015) found that e-trust was a predictor of behavioural intention among Saudi residents and was significantly affected by subjective norms. However, the cited study was concerned specifically with participation intention regarding e-government.

‘Perceived information trust’ in the context of the current research can be defined as the extent to which a potential tourist finds the content of an OCR to be reliable, trustworthy, credible or unreliable, untrustworthy, incredible: an evaluation which may be based on a number of factors, including website quality, credibility of the review provider, and characteristics of consumer review (Filiari, 2016). Additionally, the social and cultural background of the review reader is recognized as a salient factor: as mentioned earlier, cultural difference has been found to influence the mediating factors with regard to trust in websites (Doney et al., 1998; Jarvenpaa et al., 1999; Filiari et al., 2015).

Adding perceived trust is key to the information adoption process (Cheung et al., 2013). Nearly anyone with online access can produce eWOM/OCR content, so it is vital

that readers be able to assess the quality and credibility of such information (Xu, 2014). Information quality is a factor affecting initial trust in the exchange of data between organizations (Nicolaou and McKnight, 2006; Zhou, 2012). Adding perceived information trust is particularly key to this model, as research has shown that website quality is important for establishing initial trust (McKnight et al., 2002a; Lowry et al., 2008; Zhou, 2012). Furthermore, culture has a significant effect on trust in computer-mediated communication platforms, and subsequently in the use of such platforms (Vance et al., 2008). Individual potential users 'are more likely to look to the opinions of those whom they trust to help them in their adoption intentions' (Lee and Wan, 2010, p. 44). From this we can see the effect that subjective norms have on perceived trust. Based on the foregoing, trust can have a key influence. It would be affected by website quality, information quality, cultural values, review provider credibility, and subjective norms. Therefore, adding perceived trust to IAM seems appropriate within the context of this study.

Though some research has found that trust is an antecedent of perceived usefulness (Gefen et al., 2003b), others have indicated the inverse: that perceived usefulness is a direct precursor to trust in an online context (e.g., Koufaris and Hampton-Sosa, 2004; Awad and Ragowsky, 2008). Elwalda et al. (2016) found that perceived usefulness of OCRs is a direct influence on perceived trust in the e-vendor in an online context, indicating that perceived trust in online vendors can be cultivated by building OCRs and incorporating them into marketing strategies. Therefore, it is expected in the current research that perceived information usefulness of OCRs directly influences perceived trust in the OCR, thus affecting consumer behavioural intention.

#### **4.2.5 Information adoption in the context of OCRs**

Previous studies have shown that when it comes to eWOM and OCRs trust is an antecedent of information adoption (Fileri, 2016), and that similarly, information

usefulness and credibility are predictors of information adoption (Cheung et al., 2008; Cheung et al., 2009). Sussman and Siegal (2003) explain the concept of information adoption as; ‘an information-adoption-based view of knowledge transfer assumes that, just as people form intentions toward adopting a behaviour or a technology, they similarly form intentions toward adopting particular advocated ideas and behaviours’ (p. 50). Therefore, influences that are noted in behavioural or technology adoption can also be used in the understanding of information, opinion or message adoption. In the context of OCRs, we can thus understand information adoption as the extent to which consumers use the information they have received to modify their actual or intended behaviour. For example, after reading a negative online tourism review regarding a particular hotel, a traveller may choose to adopt the information, incorporate it into their decision-making process, and choose a more favourable hotel to stay at (Filieri and McLeay, 2016).

The current study adopts an information adoption approach in which perceived information usefulness is considered as the antecedent of perceived information trust, and perceived information trust is considered the antecedent of information adoption; however, where IAM approach has been criticized for failing to account for consumer behaviour towards the adopted information (Erkan and Evans, 2016), the present research will consider information adoption in terms of consumer visit intention. The Information Adoption Model (IAM) is described in Section 4.3.3 of this chapter.

### **4.3 Information Adoption Theories**

This section outlines several prominent frameworks pertinent to information adoption, and for each, briefly describes its attributes and explains why that particular model is or is not suitable for use with the present research.



### **4.3.1 Technology Acceptance Model: TAM, TAM2, TAM3, and UTAUT**

#### ***TAM***

The Technology Acceptance Model, or TAM (Davis, 1989), stems from the Theory of Reasoned Action (TRA; Fishbein and Ajzen, 1975). Whereas TRA (see Section 4.4.4) is a general framework from social psychology built around behavioural theories, TAM was designed to explain user acceptance of computer technology (Rondan-Cataluña et al., 2015), and its focus has been on information system (IS) (Özkan et al., 2010). TAM is based on the constructs of ‘perceived usefulness’ and ‘perceived ease of use’ and is used to predict users’ attitudes towards accepting a particular technology (Erkan and Evans, 2016). With TRA as its theoretical underpinning, TAM proposes that behavioural intention is defined by these two constructs (Venkatesh and Davis, 2000). In recent work on eWOM, TAM has been employed to investigate the effects of information adoption (Hsu et al., 2013; Ayeh, 2015; Elwalda et al., 2016).

Researchers have commonly used TAM to study the adoption of various technologies in the IS field and it has arguably become the most influential theory in this field. However, according to Erkan and Evans (2016), because ‘TAM mainly focuses on the individual usage of a computer and disregards the essential social processes of information development and implementation, in the context of eWOM, where the information is generated by separate individuals, TAM might not deliver adequate understanding of users’ attitudes and intentions’ ( p. 55). TAM focuses on the individual user or consumer of information technology (IT) without taking into account the social consequences of IS use.

#### ***TAM2***

This shortcoming in TAM was later addressed when Venkatesh and Davis (2000) expanded the original model. This extended model, TAM2, considered factors of

social influence such as subjective norms, and cognitive instrumental processes such as output quality and perceived ease of use, to explain perceived usefulness and usage intention. Although TAM2 overcomes many of the TAM limitations, it has also been criticized by researchers. According to Legris et al. (2003), together, TAM and TAM2 account for only 40 percent of the use of a technological system. Due to these limitations in what these models can account for, neither TAM nor TAM2 would be suited to the current research, especially since the present study is not focussed on adoption within IS.

### ***UTAUT***

In order to resolve the remaining problems with TAM2, another model was subsequently presented, UTAUT, or the Unified Theory of Acceptance and Use of Technology (Venkatesh et al., 2003). It is so called because it attempts to unify a number of earlier models meant to explain IS usage behaviour, among them TRA, TAM, and the Theory of Planned Behaviour (TPB; Section 4.4.4). UTAUT postulates that there are four factors which are ‘direct determinants of user acceptance and user behaviour: *performance expectancy, effort expectancy, social influence, and facilitating conditions*’ (Venkatesh et al., 2003, p. 447, emphasis in orig.). In addition, four ‘key moderators’: age, gender, experience, and ‘voluntariness’ affect the influence of the four direct determinants on usage intention and behaviour.

UTAUT has received a number of criticisms: Williams et al. (2015) assert that UTAUT’s popularity is largely due to its relationship to its predecessors, especially TAM. In a systematic literature review, they found that nearly 90 percent of articles citing UTAUT mention it only in the context of either testing or developing the model (Williams et al., 2015). Bagozzi (2007) is concerned because UTAUT is highly complex (‘a model with 41 independent variables for predicting intention and at least 8 independent variables for predicting behavior,’) and yet ‘few of the included predictors

are fundamental, generic, or universal, and future research is likely to uncover new predictors not subsumable under the existing predictors' (Bagozzi, 2007, p. 245). Van Raaij and Schepers (2008) claim that with UTAUT the elements and constructs are grouped and labelled inappropriately, incorrectly combining dissimilar items under a single construct. Furthermore, they state that UTAUT is inefficient compared to TAM and TAM2, because its 'high  $R^2$  [coefficient of determination] is only achieved when moderating the key relationships with up to four variables' (van Raaij and Schepers, 2008, p. 840).

### **TAM3**

Venkatesh and Bala (2008) developed TAM further into a model of the determinants of perceived ease of use based on two sets of new factors which are 'anchoring' and 'adjustment' (TAM3). The set of anchoring factors consists of individual and situational variables which relate to internal control (e.g., computer self-efficacy), external control (facilitating conditions), emotion (e.g., computer anxiety), and intrinsic motivation (expectation of fun, play); the set of adjustment factors include perceived enjoyment and objective usability (Erkan and Evans, 2016). TAM3 integrates the concept of perceived usefulness (Venkatesh, 2000) with that of perceived ease of use: 'could determinants of perceived usefulness influence perceived ease of use and/or could determinants of perceived ease of use influence perceived usefulness?' (Venkatesh and Bala, 2008, p. 275), resulting in a more cohesive model than the previous TAMs for the purpose of understanding information technology adoption. TAM3 has been employed in studies exploring various contexts, ranging from online discussion forums (Adetimirin, 2015) to learning management systems (Jeffrey, 2015).

Taking these criticisms into consideration, it was determined that TAM and its extensions are not the most fitting for this current research. This study has instead

utilized its own research model, called OCRIM. The OCRIM model is described in Chapter Three, Section 3.2.

#### **4.3.2 Fogg's Behaviour Model (FBM)**

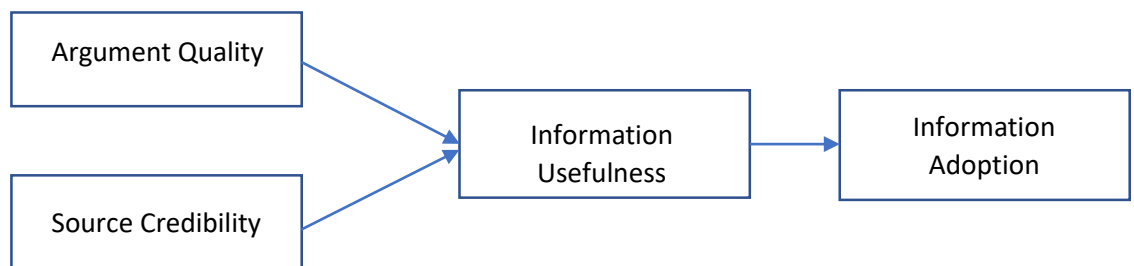
In Fogg's (2009) Behaviour Model (FBM), three components—motivation, ability, and trigger—must occur at the same moment in order for a particular behaviour to happen. If any of those three elements is missing, that behaviour does not occur (Fogg, 2009). Thus, FBM is more appropriate for the study of actual behaviour than of intentional behaviour. The present research assesses the influence of reading OCRs on tourists' intention to visit a particular tourist destination, so FBM would not be practical to assess OCRs on tourist actual behaviour, as the time lapse between reading the OCRs and a resulting visit would be quite long.

Also, the current study does not call for the investigation of tourist behaviour over several points in time. Accordingly, this study employs a cross-sectional survey approach which involves collecting data at a single point in time. This differs from longitudinal (or, indeed, experimental) designs, where data is collected at two or more points in time. A cross-sectional design is the preferred approach for the present research because it enables a large amount of data to be collected in a short space of time.

#### **4.3.3 Information Adoption Model (IAM)**

The Information Adoption Model (IAM: Sussman and Siegal, 2003) takes elements from TAM and from the Elaboration Likelihood Model (ELM) of informational influence. IAM is designed to 'explain how individuals adopt information and thus change their intentions and behaviors within the computer-mediated communication platforms' (Wang, 2016, p. 618). TAM's limitations are mentioned above; it is centred on IS and the individual user, and ignores social processes (Riffai et al., 2012). ELM, a social psychology theory, explains how information in messages

affects and changes attitudes in recipients (Wang, 2016). ELM states that there are two different routes to influencing a person's attitude: a central route and a peripheral route. The central route processes arguments related to information and requires time and effort to scrutinize information; the peripheral route processes information cues and needs less effort. Attitudes 'changed via the central route may be more stable and enduring than [those] changed via the peripheral route' (Zhou, 2012, p. 1519). In their Information Adoption Model (IAM), Sussman and Siegal (2003) combined these features of TAM and ELM, so that the central route is associated with argument quality, and the peripheral route with source credibility, mediated by perceived information usefulness (Tseng and Wang, 2016), as shown in Figure 4.1.



**Figure 4.1.** Information Adoption Model (IAM).

*Source: Sussman and Siegal (2003).*

IAM has found favour with researchers investigating the information adoption process in online communities. According to a recent meta-analysis (Wang, 2016), some studies have modified the IAM by adding new variables relevant to the specific application environment (e.g., Zhu et al., 2016; Tseng and Wang, 2016; Erkan and Evans, 2016), by replacing the original mediated variables with different ones (e.g., Cheung et al., 2009; Chang, Chen and Hsu, 2011; Li, 2013), or combining other theories or models with the original IAM (e.g., Li, 2013; Gunawan and Huarng, 2015). Gunawan

and Huarng (2015) surveyed social network media users who use at least three major social network media platforms. Their analytical framework combined TRA and IAM, and looked at the relationship perceived risk and social interaction as predictors of purchase intention. They found that social integration had no direct effect on subjective norms, and that social influence together with perceived risk sites affects consumers' purchase intention. However, their research neglected the role of perceived trust in an online purchase intention, whereas many other studies have emphasized this as an important role. Moreover, they ignored the role of information adoption process and neglected the information adoption construct, apparently assuming that subjective norms would not influence the information adoption process, and that instead SNs exerted a separate, direct influence on purchase intention.

Erkan and Evans (2016) combined IAM with TRA to examine the influence of eWOM on social media. The aim of their research was to examine the determinants of eWOM information on social media which influence consumers' purchase intention; and to explore whether the eWOM between familiar people on social media or that between anonymous people on other online platforms exerted the greater influence on consumer purchase intention. They used two components of TRA, attitude and behavioural intention. However, they neglected the role of perceived information trust, while many previous researches show its central role in information adoption in eWOM/OCRs context (Xu, 2014; Cheung et al., 2009; Filieri et al., 2015). Additionally, they ignored the influence of subjective norms and cultural values; though SNs have been found in many studies to have a strong influence on adoption intention (Taylor and Todd, 1995; Hsu and Lam, 2006; van Raaij and Schepers, 2008; Abbasi et al., 2015). While subjective norms found to have strong role in KSA's society (Alharbi et al., 2015; Almaghrabi et al., 2011), so including it would enhance the overall understanding. Moreover, the role of culture in ICT adoption has been neglected by

Erkan and Evans (2016), while culture has been pinpointed as something that affects both the rate of and reasons behind ICT adoption (Harvey, 1997; Krumbholz et al., 2000; Erumban and De Jong, 2006; Lee et al., 2013). Additionally, some studies have found that culture influences information adoption in the context of IS (Lee et al., 2010; Kim et al., 2011), and behavioural intention (Srite and Karahanna, 2006).

The current study purposely omits the component of attitude. According to Fishbein and Ajzen (1975), attitude can be defined as the degree to which the person has a favourable or unfavourable evaluation of the behaviour in question. Following Fishbein and Ajzen's (1975) definition, in this study attitude can be defined as the strength of a person's attraction or aversion regarding the destination and/or the prospect of visiting it. However, the current study considers only respondents who have read OCRs and who had previously read OCRs on tourism websites in order to choose their destination before their upcoming trip. Since it is highly unlikely that they would attempt to read those OCRs if they had no inclination to visit such a destination, including attitude as a construct would add no value for the investigation. Thus, the current research has not included attitude.

The current study has added new variables that related to tourism OCR literature: it examines source credibility as a two-factor construct comprising website quality and review provider credibility, and it examines the construct argument quality as a two-factor construct comprised of the quality of the argument and information sidedness.

Despite the popularity and versatility of IAM, it has been criticized for focussing only 'on the characteristics of information, which are quality, credibility, and usefulness. The influence of information, however, should not be limited to characteristics of information; consumers' behaviours towards information should also be considered' (Erkan and Evans, 2016, p. 59). However, the current study has added

social influences on the OCR reader in order to gain a better understanding of OCR influences, positing that OCRs influence tourist information adoption and visit intention.

As indicated earlier, Sussman and Siegal (2003) have found the framework provided by ELM to be well suited to eWOM studies. Many other researchers subsequently have adapted the ELM model to their investigations of eWOM, taking as important central route cues the constructs of argument quality (Cheung and Thadani, 2012; Chu and Kamal, 2008; Park et al., 2007a; Watts and Zhang, 2008) and information sidedness (Kamins and Assael, 1987; Kamins et al., 1989; Cheung et al., 2009; Cheung et al., 2012), and generally agreeing upon source credibility as the peripheral cue (Cheung et al., 2008; Watts and Zhang, 2008). IAM has been applied in studies examining the influence of OCRs on computer-mediated communication platforms with particular reference to eWOM (e.g., Cheung et al., 2009, Erkan and Evans, 2016). Elements of IAM are incorporated into the present research in the constructs of website quality, review provider credibility, argument quality, and information sidedness (see Chapter Three, Sections 3.3.1 – 3.3.4).

#### **4.4 Influence of social factors**

##### **4.4.1 Role of subjective norms in visit intention**

Social psychology research has taught us that social influences affect how we use and interpret IS, and that this effect is more or less pronounced for differing types of IS (Robertson, 1989). Social influence has been highlighted in various theoretical models, most notably in TRA (Fishbein and Ajzen, 1975; mentioned earlier) and is explained via the concept of subjective norms (SNs), referring to a ‘person’s perception that most people who are important to him think he should or should not perform the behaviour in question’ (Fishbein and Ajzen 1975, p. 302), in other words, refers to how



an individual is affected by the perceptions or opinions of significant referents, which may include friends, family, work colleagues, and so on.

However, in research involving subjective norms, results have been conflicting, with some studies finding that subjective norms have a significant influence on adoption intention (Taylor and Todd, 1995; Hsu and Lam, 2006; van Raaij and Schepers, 2008; Abbasi et al., 2015; Alharbi et al., 2015), whereas others report a non-significant influence (Davis et al., 1989; Mathieson, 1991; Chau and Hu, 2002; Lewis et al., 2003). The inconclusiveness of these findings may be because the impact of subjective norms varies according to whether the study sample comes from a collectivist or an individualist culture (see, e.g., Srite and Karahanna, 2006; Lee and Wan, 2010). Individualism-collectivism orientation (ICO) will be explained and discussed later in this chapter, under Hofstede's (1980) cultural dimensions, but briefly, it indicates the relationship between an individual and the group in which that individual claims membership (Hofstede, 2001).

The degree of trust in electronic commerce ('e-trust') can have a significant impact on consumer purchase intention, both of which may be affected by SNs (Chen and Dhillon, 2003; Zhang and Zhang, 2005; Yu et al., 2005). For example, Kim et al. (2009) examined the roles of subjective norms and e-trust in consumer acceptance of airline business-to-customer e-commerce websites using data from consumers who had accessed airline company websites in South Korea with the intention of purchasing airline tickets. The study found that subjective norms and e-trust were significantly related, and that both factors were determinants of consumer attitudes and behavioural intention. Hsu and Lam (2006) employed the Theory of Planned Behaviour (TPB) framework to behavioural intention regarding choosing a travel destination. They reported a strong direct influence for subjective norms on visit intention; specifically,

‘the intention was associated with perceived social pressure from important referents’ (p. 595).

#### **4.4.2 Role of subjective norms in the KSA context**

For the purposes of the present research, a model is required which includes subjective norms as a variable that influences behavioural intention. TRA (Fishbein and Ajzen, 1975), and TAM2 (Venkatesh and Davis, 2000) are two models that have been extensively validated in North American contexts. In geographically different socio-economic contexts, however, the influence of subjective norms on individual behavioural intention and IT acceptance could vary significantly (Lee and Wan, 2010). Accordingly, the objective of the present research has been to examine the influence of OCRs on tourist visit intention specifically within the KSA context. Therefore, the influence of subjective norms within the KSA context would need further investigation.

The role of subjective norms in the KSA setting is expected to be strong, as has been shown by recent research. Alharbi et al. (2015) found that subjective norms have a significant impact on citizens’ intention to engage in activities on e-government websites in a Saudi citizen population. Furthermore, Almaghrabi et al. (2011) conducted their study in KSA and found subjective norms to be a determinant of online shopping continuance. Moreover, research results from Al-Gahtani et al. (2007) indicate that among Saudi users, subjective norms positively influence intention to use computers. It is vital that subjective norms be an element in the framework of the present study. This is because, as Lee and Green (1991) have noted, subjective norms play an influencing role in a collectivist culture (collectivism as a concept is explained later in this chapter). Subsequent research supports this hypothesis, specifically, that in societies which score highly on the collectivism dimension, members place great importance on the opinions of referents in their group (Peace et al., 2003; Choi and Geistfeld, 2004). Hence, subjective norms are expected to have a significant impact in a collectivist

nation such as KSA, and to be a key variable influencing behavioural intention within the KSA context.

#### **4.4.3 Tourist visit intention in the context of OCRs**

In their survey of the literature on theories of travel decision-making, Sirakaya and Woodside (2005), found that intention was an integral part of the decision-making process. Warshaw and Davis (1985) define intention as ‘the degree to which a person has formulated conscious plans to perform or not perform some specified future behavior’ (p. 214). Ajzen and Fishbein (1980) contend that attitude affects behaviour solely via its influence on intention (Sirakaya and Woodside, 2005). Moreover, Fishbein and Ajzen (1975) posited that the intention to execute a given behaviour was the strongest predictor of that behaviour being actuated. Indeed, this is supported by research: in Sutton’s (1998) meta-analysis of the association between behavioural intention and behaviour, it was found that overall, intention predicted between 19 and 38 percent of variance in behaviour. From the aforementioned argumentation, it can be assumed that tourist visit intention would be the strongest predictor of actual destination visit(s).

Where and how consumers choose to seek out travel information has changed dramatically with the advent of Web 2.0 technologies and social media applications (social networking sites, blogs, online forums, wikis, comment threads, photo and video sharing, instant messaging, etc.). Tourists used to depend on brick-and-mortar travel agencies for information and for comprehensive services such as bookings and connecting them with on-site service providers (Filieri et al., 2015). But within a span of just a few years, the Internet became the favoured source of information for planning a travel for tourism purposes (Gretzel et al., 2007).

Hernández-Méndez et al. (2015) noted that the transformation of the Internet “into a space characterised by the participation and collaboration of users”, as the result

of which “a new concept called Travel 2.0 has emerged, which is revolutionising the tourism industry (p. 1003). Travel 2.0 has been defined as “the whole array of Web 2.0 tools specifically used within the tourism and travel industry” (Estêvão et al., 2014), but the concept has been described in relation to eWOM as “WOM applied to the twenty-first century using technology” (Hernández-Méndez et al., 2015, p. 1003). Travel 2.0 has given consumers the tools with which they can—independently of a travel agent—make use of the technologies and social media applications above-mentioned (as well as global positioning systems [GPS]/mapping) to search for, produce, and share information on travel and tourism, whether on travel destination websites or via travel-oriented social networks such as TripAdvisor. Whereas websites of travel destinations and hotels used to be quite static and not much different than a printed brochure in function, the addition of eWOM and OCRs has given much greater depth to the user’s experience and has become a valuable resource for consumers when making their travel and tourism decisions (Filieri and McLeay, 2013; Filieri et al., 2015).

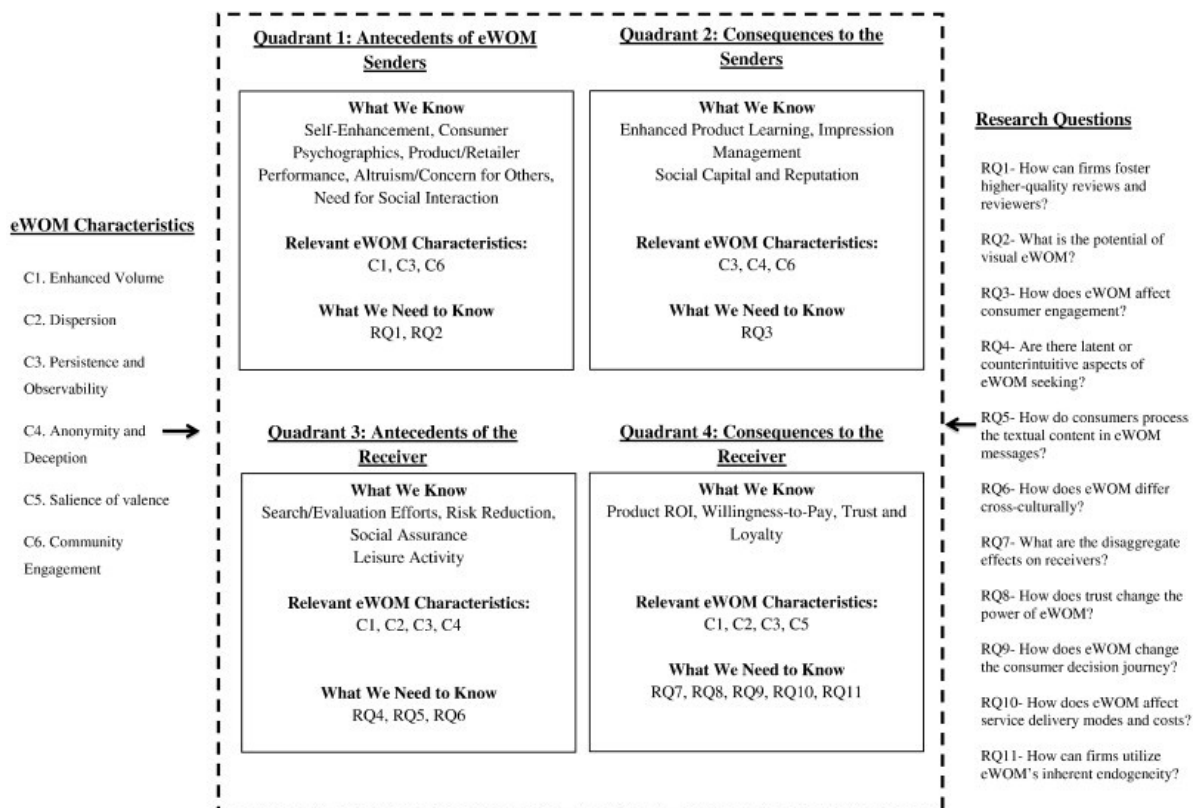
Research into the reasons people travel is not a new area of study, as tourism marketers and vendors seek to learn more about the factors which influence behavioural intention such as motive for travel and choice of destination. EWOM and OCRs can be useful in this regard. In a 2013 article, it was noted that Google figures indicated that more than 80 percent of people researched their holiday online, normally visiting 26 sites, and spending in excess of two hours searching to choose the right destination and deal (Trend, 2013). EWOM and online consumer reviews have been found to impact significantly on consumer behavioural intention (e.g., Bickart and Schindler, 2001; Park and Lee, 2009; Sparks and Browning, 2011; See-To and Ho, 2014; Chen et al., 2014). Barton (2006) highlights how online information can directly translate to purchasing decisions, given that eWOM is often found on platforms where an individual can directly or quickly purchase the product or service about which they are seeking

information. Thus, how OCRs translate to consumer behavioural intention is of importance for vendors and researchers alike. Previous research, as mentioned above, has found a direct relationship between OCRs and consumer behavioural intention. Bickart and Schindler (2001) asked consumers to gather information from two different sources over a 12-week period and found that potential consumers showed a greater interest in UCG (online forum) than they did in market-generated content, despite the fact that those who participated in the online forum condition performed fewer searching assignments than those in the market-generated content condition. Additionally, Vermeulen and Seegers (2009) found in their study that reading online reviews directly impacted hotel booking behavioural intention.

As previously mentioned, online reviews in the context of tourism and travel are increasingly being used to inform tourist destination image (e.g., Llodra-Riera et al., 2015), hotel booking intention (Xie et al., 2011), travel purchase intention (e.g. Chatterjee, 2001; Buhalis and Law, 2008; Duan et al., 2008), and itinerary refinement intention (Arsal et al., 2008). In their survey of 1,100 tourism consumers, Govers, Go, and Kumar (2007) found that eWOM was one of several sources of information which shaped pre-travel perceptions of tourism destinations. Litvin, Goldsmith, and Pan (2008) observed that in the tourism and hospitality industry eWOM is used for targeted analysis and management of the influence of marketing communications. Susilowati and Sugandini (2018) examined the causal relationship between eWOM, traditional WOM, perceived value, and perceived quality regarding vacation tourists' perceptions of a tourism destination, concluding that eWOM exerted a direct, significant influence on perceived quality of the destination (p. 318).

Previous literature has focussed on a number of characteristics of electronic word-of-mouth and OCRs that may impact consumer intention, including source characteristics (e.g. Cheung et al., 2009; Kusumasondjaja et al., 2012; Filieri, 2016),

message characteristics (e.g. Duan et al., 2008; Lee and Ro, 2016) and reader characteristics (e.g. Park and Kim, 2009a; Lee and Koo, 2012; Ketelaar et al., 2015). However, as mentioned at the beginning of this chapter, the influence of the individual's society and culture with respect to eWOM/OCRs, consumer information adoption and effects on behavioural intention has not been studied in any depth. King et al. (2014) observed that cultural differences in the transmission and consumption of eWOM constitute an area ripe for investigation. As online commerce becomes global in nature, retailers in Euro-centric regions have been expanding into such countries as China and India which are increasingly contributing to the demand side of global consumerism. Despite this, it is still not well understood how consumers from different cultures seek and use eWOM information and what this means for vendors and marketers (see Figure 4.2).



**Figure 4.2.** EWOM Framework.

Source: King et al. (2014).

The related theories and frameworks of TRA, TAM, and theory of planned behaviour (TPB) consider behavioural intention to be the antecedent of actual behaviour (Fishbein and Ajzen, 1975; Ajzen, 1985; Davis, 1989); therefore, behavioural intention is a vital component of this current research, as the aim of this study is to explore the influence of OCRs on visit intention. According to TRA, behavioural intention is decided by attitude and subjective norms (Fishbein and Ajzen, 1975; Madden et al., 1992; Zhang et al., 2014).

#### **4.4.4 Theoretical foundation for subjective norms and behavioural intention**

##### ***Theory of Planned Behaviour (TPB)***

Ajzen (1985) proposed the Theory of Planned Behaviour (TPB) to address a limitation of TRA (Fishbein and Ajzen, 1975), discussed below, by including the construct of ‘perceived control’. TPB takes into account beliefs, attitudes, subjective norms, and perceived behavioural control, in order to predict deliberate, planned behaviour (Ajzen, 1991, p. 184). Like the TAM theories, TPB considers both internal factors (e.g., motivation, attitude, etc.) and external ones (e.g., resources, skills, etc.). According to TPB, intention can only be translated into actual behaviour if that behaviour is under an individual's perceived control (Madden et al., 1992). Perceived behavioural control refers to a person’s perception of his/her ability to perform a given behaviour. Ajzen defines ‘volitional control’ as when an individual ‘can decide at will to perform or not perform the behavior’ (Ajzen, 1991, p. 182).

TPB was developed to predict behaviours in which individuals have ‘incomplete volitional control’. The present study investigates the influence of OCRs on tourist visit intention based on features from OCRs, subjective norms, and cultural values. In other words, this study assesses the role of OCRs, subjective norms, and cultural values on tourist visit intention after reading OCRs. Visiting a destination entails volitional

control: the behaviour of visiting a tourist destination is voluntary behaviour; therefore, TPB does not apply to this current research.

### ***Theory of Reasoned Action (TRA)***

Fishbein and Ajzen (1975) proposed the Theory of Reasoned Action (TRA), to explain the relationship between attitude and behaviour in an individual. The TRA model demonstrates that behaviour is preceded by behavioural intention, which in turn is preceded by attitude(s) and subjective norms (Fishbein and Ajzen, 1975; Madden et al., 1992). Recent research (Cheung and Thadani, 2012; Gunawan and Huarng, 2015) has employed TRA to explore the relationship between eWOM and purchase intention, and to investigate the adoption of advice (Sussman and Siegal, 2003) such as the information contained in OCRs (Cheung et al., 2008). Unlike TPB, TRA does well at predicting behaviours in which individuals have volitional control. As the aim of this study is to understand the influence of eWOM information on tourists' visit intention, rather than on any actual purchase/visit behaviour, this present research employs two components of TRA: subjective norms and visit intention.

Fishbein and Ajzen's (1975) definition of 'attitude' was used earlier in Section 4.3.3, but in the context of the current study attitude can be defined even more narrowly as 'the willingness to visit an attraction'. However, as explained in that same section, attitude is not included as a construct in the study model. This is because the sample for the present research contains only those respondents who had previously taken at least one tourism trip and had read OCRs on tourism websites with a view to selecting their destination for their upcoming trip; it is highly unlikely that they would have purposely read those OCRs if they had not been inclined to visit such a destination. Therefore, including attitude as a variable would not be of use in this study.



## **4.5 Cultural values**

According to King et al. (2014), cultural values impact not only decision-making, but also information-seeking by consumers. The current research proposes that in order to fully understand the role of subjective norms and their effect on OCR perceived usefulness, perceived trust, information adoption, and intention to visit a particular destination, one must consider the role of cultural values, since, as is aforementioned, cultural values are an influencing factor on SNs and subsequent individual behavioural intention (Srite and Karahanna, 2006; Shteynberg et al., 2009; Tam et al., 2012).

Therefore, the following section will further examine the construct of cultural values. The section begins by presenting the various definitions for culture. Then, cultural values are examined in the context of OCRs; thereafter, the role of culture in ICT is discussed. After that, the relationship between culture and tourism is examined, followed by an exploration of the influence of cultural values on intention to visit a destination. Thereafter, several cultural frameworks are presented, and justification is offered for determining the appropriate model of culture to implement in the current study, identified as Hofstede's model of cultural dimensions (Hofstede, 1980). Hofstede's cultural dimensions are discussed in some depth, and consideration is given to measuring Hofstede's dimensions at the individual level.

### **4.5.1 Definition of culture**

There have historically been varying definitions of culture posited by a number of researchers. Kroeber and Kluckhohn (1952) proposed an early definition of culture as, 'the historically differentiated and variable mass of customary ways of functioning of human societies' (p. 157). He later revised this in conjunction with another scholar to include a cross-discipline definition of culture as, 'transmitted and created content and patterns of value, ideas, and other symbolic-meaningful systems as factors in the

shaping of human behaviour and the artefacts produced through behaviour' (Kroeber and Parsons, 1958, p. 583). Ferraro (1998) comments that culture consists of everything that individual members have, do, and think in terms of their society.

One of the primary and most widely used definitions of culture can be attributed to Hofstede (1980), who defines culture generally as, 'the collective programming of the mind that distinguishes the members of one group or category of people from another' (p. 25). Additionally, Hall (1989) posits that culture is defined in terms of the lifestyle of a set of individuals, including their attitudes, behaviours, and material possessions, and that the individuals ascribed to a particular culture have a shared understanding of other members based on similar upbringings.

It can therefore be summarized that cultural values encompass a system of shared values that can act as a stimulus to inform ideas, events, and objects to which members attend, and toward the way they act and ascribe meaning (Trompenaars, 1993; Liu et al., 2001). Since people who hold differing cultural values may react to communications differently (Lam et al., 2009), we would expect that cultural values strongly influence the extent to which OCR information is adopted, and the extent to which information adoption affects consumer behavioural intention.

#### **4.5.2 Cultural values in the context of OCRs**

Cross-cultural effects on behavioural intention are not a focus of the present study; however, the review of the literature for this research has highlighted the need for more research on different cultures. The current research focuses on a single culture (that of KSA), but its findings should apply to any country which shares similar cultural values, such as other nations which share a common Arab-Islamic heritage. Although the role of cultural values is a key component in individual decision-making processes generally (Lee et al., 2010 Kim et al., 2011; King et al., 2014), and travellers' information search specifically (San Martin and Del Bosque, 2008), eWOM and OCR

research has not paid adequate attention to this relationship in the current literature. Lam et al. (2009) found that cultural values, as measured using Hofstede's (1980) original four dimensions, had a significant impact on consumer WOM engagement; this, however, was found in a traditional WOM context, not in an online communications context. Other research has focussed specifically on the individualism-collectivism facet of culture on eWOM effects (Lee and Choi, 2005; Luo et al., 2014). Luo et al. (2014) studied the effects of individualism-collectivism orientation on 274 participants from two prominent eWOM forums in China, finding that individualism-collectivism orientation moderated eWOM information credibility. Additionally, Lee and Choi (2005) deduced from an online survey that individuals on the ICO spectrum diverged in their general and specific attitudes towards web use.

Given the role of cultural values in information and communication technology (ICT) adoption, it is necessary for tourism vendors to understand the role of cultural values on OCR adoption and resulting behavioural intention. As has been specified, all individuals inhabit cultural environments that give prominence to certain norms, attitudes, behaviours, and practices, and individual behaviour tends to fall within this framework in which members have been socialized. It has been shown in research that differences in cultural values shape the way that individuals interact with their environment (Hofstede, 1980; Hofstede, 1984; Trompenaars, 1993; Hofstede, 2001). Therefore, it is useful to include the role of cultural values in a theoretical framework that deduces how individuals perceive and adopt information from OCRs, and how this impacts on behavioural intention. Such a framework could be of use not only in the tourism industry, as is the intention of the current research, but possibly across other industries in which OCRs play a major contributing role.

### 4.5.3 Role of culture in ICT adoption

Culture has been pinpointed as something that affects both the rate and reasons behind ICT adoption (Harvey, 1997; Krumbholz et al., 2000; Erumban and De Jong, 2006; Lee et al., 2013), primarily due to ICT implementation interpretation differences by those who hold different cultural values. For example, if Web 2.0 technologies are introduced by younger generations who have more education in the field and more experience with social media and the like, then cultural values may support reluctance to adopt Web 2.0 technologies by an older generation in societies that link status to age. Looking at the role of culture in shaping technology adoption, Watson et al. (1994) commented that if features of a particular technology are harmonious with cultural values, that feature will be appropriated, whilst features that are culturally discordant will be dismissed or reshaped.

Fischer et al. (2010) have pointed out that values can be held by social groups and by individuals within those groups, meaning that the cultural values of a nation are tied to the values of its individual members. Hofstede and Bond (1988) described culture as comprising those values which shape people's behaviour and their worldview. Hofstede's cultural dimensions have been applied to IS research (Leidner and Kayworth, 2006), and some of those studies have found that culture influences information adoption in the context of IS (Kim et al., 2011; Lee et al., 2010). Therefore, some scholars have asserted that cultural values play a key mediating role in technology acceptance (Srite and Karahanna, 2006; Udo et al., 2012); prompting still others to recommend that technology acceptance models include constructs that account for cultural values (Park et al., 2007b).

Empirical research has investigated the relationship between national culture and IT adoption. For example, Straub et al. (1997) found that existing technology adoption models did not predict IT use across all cultures, leading Straub and colleagues to

recommend the acknowledgment of cultural values in studying technology adoption antecedents. Erumban and de Jong (2006) explained the divergences in ICT adoption rates across cultures, commenting that Hofstede's cultural dimensions are key in explaining ICT adoption. In particular, they noted that uncertainty avoidance and power distance were especially important in explaining ICT adoption.

Al-Gahtani et al. (2007) used UTAUT; (Venkatesh et al., 2003) to explain IT adoption in a KSA context, with findings revealing that only some of the models' constructs successfully predicted IT adoption in a Saudi Arabian population. The construct of subjective norms was found to be an important factor in predicting IT adoption. Al-Gahtani and colleagues argued that members of cultures characterized by a high power distance dimension would be more likely to defer to authority and conform to the expectations of referent others. They also posited that low individualism scores for KSA may account for the relationship between subjective norms and behavioural intention. Thus, Al-Gahtani et al. (2007) concluded that cultural value dimensions are a key determinant in the relationship between subjective norms and behavioural intention, and are a successful predictor of ICT adoption as per findings from previous research (e.g., Straub et al., 1997; Straub et al., 2001). It would therefore be expected that cultural values would affect the rate of information adoption in an online review context.

#### **4.5.4 Culture and tourism**

From the scarcity of published research in this area, it appears that the role of cultural values in tourism is still an emerging area of interest for travel and tourism operators. It has previously been reported that culture specifically affects an individual's pleasure-seeking or leisure behaviour (Hirschman and Holbrook, 1982; therefore, it stands to reason that cultural values shape tourist behaviour (San Martin and Del Bosque, 2008). There are several studies that have examined cultural values in the role

of tourist behaviour. For example, Litvin et al. (2004) utilized the cultural dimension of uncertainty avoidance (Hofstede, 1980) in a sample of German and Japanese travellers, characterized as low and high uncertainty-avoidance cultures respectively. As predicted, they found that high uncertainty-avoidance cultures exhibited behaviours such as risk-reducing behaviours and pre-travel information searching. Other studies have also shown how cognitive perceptions of tourism destinations are affected by an individual's cultural origins. Rittichainuwat et al. (2001) found that individuals from Asia, Europe, and American societies had differing perceptions of Thailand, whilst Chen and Kerstetter (1999) found that international students from culturally heterogeneous countries perceived rural tourism areas in Pennsylvania, USA differently. Beerli and Martin (2004a) also noted that demographic characteristics affected cognitive and affective factors of destination image, highlighting the role that culture plays in forming a perception or image of a tourist destination.

The influencing role of culture in destination image has also been implicated in terms of cultural distance, defined as 'the degree of similarity between the tourist's cultural values and the culture of a tourist destination' (San Marin and del Bosque, 2008, p. 267) and perceived risk. It has been posited that those with different cultural values may perceive the risk of visiting a destination differently; more specifically, the more unfamiliar or novel a particular destination seems, the more risk a traveller will perceive, and this differs from culture to culture (Elsrud, 2001). Therefore, the more cultural distance there is between the traveller and the possible tourism destination, the less favourable the perceived image will be (San Marin and Del Bosque, 2008).

Additionally, culture has also been studied in terms of traveller's information-searching behaviour (Fodness and Murray, 1997; Vogt and Fesenmaier, 1998; Chen and Gursoy, 2000; Gursoy and Chen, 2000; Bieger and Laesser, 2004; Gursoy and Umbreit, 2004; Sparks and Pan, 2009). Gursoy and Umbreit (2004) investigated the effects of

national culture on European Union (EU) member travellers' search behaviour, with results indicating that information search behaviour of EU travellers was influenced by their national culture. This was consistent with previous findings highlighting the role of cultural values in tourist and traveller decision-making processes (Chen and Gursoy, 2000; Fodness and Murray, 1998; Gursoy and Chen, 2000; Vogt and Fesenmaier, 1998). Therefore, it stands to reason that the way in which tourists evaluate online consumer reviews and adopt the information to affect visit intention is influenced by espoused cultural values.

However, in terms of intention to visit a destination, the role of culture has been sorely overlooked; to the researcher's best knowledge there are only a handful of studies that examine culture in tourists' intention to visit a destination. Ng et al. (2007) focus their research on the role of cultural distance, not cultural values at the individual level. However, a much more recent study examines the impact of individual cultural values, in particular, collectivism, power distance, and indulgence, on hotel guests' positive emotions and positive eWOM intention (Wen et al., 2018). Thus, this research will examine the role of cultural values in tourists' intention to visit a destination.

#### **4.5.5 Cultural models**

As mentioned earlier, it is supposed that culture plays a role in the behaviour of consumers when they seek out touristic destinations. Several models of culture have been proposed that are frequently referred to in research that covers culturally-based observations. Six models of culture commonly discussed in the literature are those of Kluckhohn and Strodtbeck, Hall, Hofstede, Trompenaars, Schwartz, and GLOBE. Each of these models is briefly summarized here.

##### ***Kluckhohn and Strodtbeck***

Anthropologists Florence Kluckhohn and Fred Strodtbeck (1961) proposed a cultural model on which several later models are based. Their theory of culture is

founded on 'value orientations'. They assert that 'there are a limited number of problems that are common to all human groups and for which there are a limited number of solutions' (Nardon and Steers, 2009, p. 3). Employing theories from anthropology, they proposed five value orientations: human nature; human activities; and relationships with nature, people, and time.

According to Nardon and Steers (2009), Kluckhohn and Strodtbeck (1961) posited that 'there are important variations in how individuals relate to each other across cultures. They classified cultures in three types: individualistic, collateral, and lineal' (Nardon and Steers, 2009, p. 11). In individualistic cultures, the goals of the individual are prioritized over those of the group; individuals are expected to place personal interests over the interests of the community or other individuals. Collateral cultures are those in which people view themselves not as individuals first, but primarily as part of their social group, which is made up of 'laterally extended relationships'. In lineal cultures, the group is of primary importance, and 'the continuity of the group through time' is emphasized (Nardon and Steers, 2009, p. 11).

Kluckhohn and Strodtbeck's theory is still used in business and tourism research (e.g., Watkins and Gnoth, 2011). However, this model has been criticized for not clearly distinguishing between the referents of key terms like 'country', 'culture', and 'society' (Zaharna, 2000). As for the purposes of the current research, Kluckhohn and Strodtbeck's theory of variation in value orientations is intended for systematic analysis of cross-cultural differences and intra-cultural variations in basic values. KSA is not recognized as a multicultural society; therefore, this particular theory is not applicable to this study.

### ***Edward T. Hall (1976, 1981, 1990)***

As with Kluckhohn and Strodtbeck's theory, the model of culture proposed by Edward T. Hall (1976, 1981, 1990) comes from the field of anthropology, and is based



on ethnographic research in several societies around the world. Hall's model proposes three cultural dimensions: context, personal space, and time (Nardon and Steers, 2009, pp. 4 and 12). Hall's concepts of 'high context' versus 'low context' and 'monochronic' versus 'polychronic' cultures are still widely used in cross-cultural studies across many disciplines. 'High context' and 'low context' are roughly analogous to the concepts of individualism and collectivism found in Kluckhohn and Strodtbeck's model and other later theories. In a high-context culture, an abundance of contextual elements help participants to understand the "unwritten rules". This understanding is taken for granted, so misunderstanding may occur with an individual who does not know the 'rules' of the culture. In a low-context culture, by contrast, very little is taken for granted: more explanation is needed and expected, but there is less chance of misunderstanding, even in interactions with people who are not familiar with that culture (Würtz, 2006; Nardon and Steers, 2009). Hall's framework is often criticized for being outdated and not well developed (Würtz, 2006, p. 276). Hofstede's (1980) model of cultural dimensions (see below) is more comprehensive and incorporates elements of Hall's theory. Thus, for the purposes of this study, Hall's model is less attractive than Hofstede's.

### ***Hofstede's cultural dimensions***

Hofstede (1980) based his model of cultural dimensions on research analysing the values of workers in relation to their organizational contexts. The responses were amassed from a multi-national survey, covering approximately 120,000 employees based in 70 different countries. The workers were employed in over 40 different occupations, and spoke 20 different languages. The findings underlined cultural variations among a number of differing nations, and suggested the importance of cultural values in individual behaviours. Hofstede's (1980) model of cultural dimensions has been highly influential in research that takes into account cross-cultural factors (e.g., van Everdingen and Waarts, 2003; Yenyurt and Townsend, 2003; Lee et

al., 2010; Lowry et al., 2010; Lee et al., 2013; Abbas and Mesch, 2015). Key terminology, especially ‘individualist culture’ and ‘collectivist culture’, is attributed to Hofstede.

Hofstede’s (1980) model originally comprised of four dimensions: individualism vs. collectivism, masculinity vs. femininity, power distance, and uncertainty avoidance. A fifth dimension, long-term vs. short-term orientation, was later added to the model (Hofstede and Bond, 1988), and a sixth, indulgence vs. restraint, was added more recently (Hofstede et al., 2010). Each of Hofstede’s cultural dimensions will be considered in further depth below.

*Individualism vs. collectivism.* The individualism dimension is defined as ‘the degree to which people in a country prefer to act as individuals rather than as members of groups’ (Hofstede, 1994, p. 6). Collectivism can be thought of as the opposite of individualism. In individualistic societies, individuals tend to be conditioned to think in terms of ‘I’, whereas individuals in collectivist societies are integrated into more of a group-think culture (Hofstede, 1994).

Individuals from collectivist societies tend to be more heavily reliant on group opinions, as opposed to individualistic members who tend to act more autonomously (Lee and Green, 1991). Therefore, when individuals from collectivist cultures act or intend to perform a certain behaviour, they act in accordance with family, friends/colleagues and other relevant referents of subjective norms. For example, Alharbi et al. (2015) found that the factors of trust and subjective norms significantly impacted user e-participation intention using data obtained from Saudi citizens, a culture renowned for engendering strong relationships among family members. Additionally, Lee and Green (1991) highlighted the influencing role of subjective norms in a collectivist culture, whilst Luo et al. (2014) highlight the role of individualism/collectivism in an eWOM context. Fong and Burton (2008) also comment

that people from collectivist cultures engaged in more information-seeking via eWOM than did those from individualist cultures. Thus, considering collectivist cultural values, norms, and their influences on trust, usefulness and behavioural intention is of particular importance for researchers and marketers. Since KSA is a culture that exhibits strong collectivist values (Hofstede, 1980), the influencing role of cultural values (and subjective norms) is particularly applicable in the context of the current research.

*Masculinity vs. femininity.* Masculinity vs. femininity is concerned with the division of roles between genders in a society (Hofstede, 1983). Hofstede (1980) pays particular attention to the traditionally masculine roles of assertiveness and competitiveness, whilst in his description of this dimension female roles centre on home and child-oriented tasks, and involve nurturing behaviours. Cultures that score high on the masculinity dimension tend to maintain these traditional gender roles, whereas ‘feminine’ cultures tend to overlap roles. According to Hofstede, (1980) Arab countries, including KSA, project a strongly masculine culture. High masculinity scores are found in cultures that value qualities like assertiveness, and support personal economic success and achievement. Masculinity has also been implicated in intention to use e-commerce technology (Yoon, 2009) and intention to use ICT (Srite and Karahanna, 2006).

*Power distance.* The dimension ‘power distance’ is a measure of the acceptance in a society regarding imbalances in power, wealth, and political authority, and the extent to which members in less powerful positions accept the uneven power distribution (Hofstede, 1980). Hofstede’s original work asserted that employees from high power distance cultures are more deferential to authority and prefer autocracy. Contrastingly, low power distance cultures prefer a more collaborative employment environment (Hofstede, 1980).

KSA is characteristically a high-scoring culture in terms of the power distance dimension (Hofstede, 1980). Research has shown that individuals from high-scoring

power distance cultures are more likely to seek the opinions of others, and have a higher likelihood of relying on recommendations (Dawar et al., 1996). Western cultures that are typically low in power distance are more likely to utilize websites that primarily deal with marketer-to-consumer communications, whilst cultures high in power distance prefer websites that promote consumer-to-consumer interactivity (Cho and Cheon, 2005). It has also been indicated that power distance is an influencing factor on behavioural intention to use a technology (Srite and Karahanna, 2006).

*Uncertainty avoidance.* Uncertainty avoidance refers to the degree to which individuals in a society feel uncomfortable with uncertainty; in other words, it refers to the level to which members prefer structured or unstructured situations. Structured situations are those in which the rules for how to behave are made clear, possibly imposed by traditional values (Hofstede, 1994). High-scoring uncertainty avoidance cultures may be referred to as rigid, whereas low-scoring cultures may be more flexible (Hofstede, 1980). In cultures that exhibit high uncertainty avoidance, such as KSA (Hofstede, 1980), research has typically shown that trust is an important determinant in decision-making processes (Dawar et al., 1996). Individual members in high uncertainty avoidance societies are also less likely to accept the veracity of statements without supporting argumentation (Wong and Birnbaum-More, 1994). Srite and Karahanna (2006) found that individuals who espoused high levels of uncertainty avoidance were more likely to rely on social influences to determine the appropriateness of using technology. It is therefore likely that uncertainty avoidance is pivotal in the extent to which information is adopted and subsequent behavioural intention.

*Long-term vs. short-term orientation.* The fifth dimension added by Hofstede and Bond (1988) is based on the work of Confucius, distinguishing between Eastern and Western mindsets. Long-term oriented cultural values emphasize perseverance, ordering relationships by status, and delayed gratification in economic terms: that is, they are

thrifty. Those at the short-term end of the spectrum, contrastingly, tend to value respect for traditions, personal steadiness and stability, protecting one's social 'face', and respecting and reciprocating social obligations (Hofstede and Bond, 1988). KSA scores low on this dimension—in other words, it is short-term oriented (Hofstede, 2001)—and therefore, long-term orientation is not incorporated in the research framework.

*Indulgence vs. restraint.* Indulgence versus restraint is a sixth dimension added more recently to Hofstede's model (Hofstede et al., 2010). This dimension was developed from items and resulting data in the World Values Survey (Hofstede et al., 2010, p. 280). The indulgence–restraint dimension correlates negatively with uncertainty avoidance, power distance, and long-term versus short-term orientation, although these last two correlations are weak (p. 286). Indulgence versus restraint explains phenomena that the other five dimensions do not. Indulgence in this model refers to 'a tendency to allow relatively free gratification of basic and natural human desires related to enjoying life and having fun', whereas restraint 'reflects a conviction that such gratification needs to be curbed and regulated by strict social norms' (p. 281).

According to Hofstede et al. (2010) KSA scores 52 on this dimension, which is in the middle, and thus is neither firmly on the indulgence end nor on the restraint end of this dimension. The indulgence–restraint dimension is not cited as extensively in the literature as the first four dimensions, perhaps because Hofstede et al. (2010) only present scores for a limited number of countries. Nevertheless, from the above definition and within the study context, it can be understood that individuals in 'indulgent' societies would be more predisposed to adopt OCR information to gratify their desires, and not because they find it a necessity. However, this speculation is not within the scope of the current study, which as stated is examining the influence of reading OCRs on tourist visit intention. Thus, this dimension is not included in the current research.

### *Measuring Hofstede's dimensions at the individual level*

Researchers have applied Hofstede's cultural dimensions to studies of individual behaviour (e.g., Straub et al., 2002; Srite and Karahanna, 2006; Shin et al., 2007; Yoon, 2009), arguing that individuals within a shared culture do not all adhere to a specific cultural value to the same degree. Straub et al. (2002) assert that an individual's culture will be influenced and modified by his/her religion, ethnic identity, education, profession, and other factors, and this means that espoused cultural values can vary greatly from one individual to the next, within the same society. Indeed, recent studies in a variety of cultural settings globally seem to have empirically confirmed this hypothesis (Luo et al., 2014). Based on the foregoing, it is expected that in the eWOM context, a person's culture may also significantly affect the way in which OCR readers receive and process eWOM information.

Hofstede (1994) advises that the dimensions as derived from his original study are not appropriate for measuring individual level behaviour, since the dimensions are constructed for country-level analysis and therefore cannot measure individual-level behaviour, which he argues is theoretically distinct. However, Srite and Karahanna (2006) argue that, 'at the individual level of analysis culture can be treated as an individual difference variable' (p. 681). They cite their reasoning for this position as based on cultural and social identity research. Cultural identity can be described as the feeling of belonging to a group, or the extent to which one accepts the values and norms that are esteemed in their culture (Erikson, 1968). Cultural identity is comparable in definition to social identity, a concept originally proposed by Tajfel (1981; 1982), and which refers to the role of self-conception as a derivative of level of ascription to group membership. In other words, people define their identity based on the social groups to which they belong. However, cultural and social identity differ in that an individual awareness of belonging to a culture is not essential for the materialization of cultural

identity (Tajfel, 1982). Individual behaviours and perceptions may be influenced by culture, but individuals may not recognize that their cultural values have shaped their behaviour. It is possible for individuals to belong to more than one culture and thus identify with more than one culture (Howard, 2000; Karahanna et al., 1999). The extent to which members adopt the norms and values of the specific culture provides the mental framework through which they define their own personal philosophy, build relationships and make decisions (Karahanna et al., 2005).

Therefore, since Hofstede’s topology for cultural values does not allow for prediction of behaviour at the individual level, Srite and Karahanna (2006) developed four espoused national culture constructs which are measured at the individual level rather than at the national level in order to allow for the measurement and prediction of individual-level behaviour. These four constructs are: espoused uncertainty avoidance, espoused collectivism, espoused power distance and espoused masculinity, which will be used to define cultural values in this research. Table 4.1 below shows descriptions of Hofstede’s original four dimensions and what each of them represents in the Saudi context.

**Table 4.1:** Hofstede’s Cultural Dimensions (1980).

Dimension	Description	KSA Context
Individualism vs. collectivism	Individualism is defined as ‘the degree to which people in a country prefer to act as individuals rather than as members of groups’ (Hofstede, 1994, p. 6). Collectivism is the opposite of individualism. In individualistic societies, individuals tend to be conditioned to think in terms of ‘I’, whereas individuals in collectivist societies are integrated into a ‘group-think’ culture (Hofstede, 1994).	Hofstede (1980): Saudi Arabian culture exhibits strong collectivist values. Individuals from collectivist societies tend to be heavily reliant on group opinions (Lee and Green, 1991); when individuals from collectivist cultures intend to perform a certain behaviour, they act in accordance with family, friends/colleagues, and other relevant referents of subjective norms. Fong and Burton (2008): collectivist cultures engage in more

Dimension	Description	KSA Context
Masculinity vs. femininity	<p>Masculinity vs. femininity: the division of roles between genders in a society (Hofstede, 1983). Characteristics: masculine: assertiveness and competitiveness; feminine: preference for cooperation, modesty, caring for the weak, and quality of life. Cultures that score high in masculinity tend to maintain these traditional gender roles, whereas ‘feminine’ cultures tend to overlap roles.</p>	<p>information-seeking via eWOM than individualist cultures.</p> <p>Hofstede (1980): Arabic countries, including KSA, imply a strong masculine culture. KSA’s score of 52 implies presence of aspects of feminine dimension. Masculinity has also been implicated in intention to use e-commerce technology (Yoon, 2009) and intention to use ICT (Srite and Karahanna, 2006).</p>
Uncertainty avoidance	<p>‘Uncertainty avoidance’ refers to the degree to which individuals in a society feel uncomfortable with uncertainty; in other words, the degree to which members prefer structured or unstructured situations. Structured situations are those in which the rules for how to behave are made clear, possibly imposed by traditional values (Hofstede, 1994). High-scoring uncertainty avoidance cultures may be referred to as ‘rigid’, whereas low-scoring cultures may be more flexible (Hofstede, 1980).</p>	<p>Hofstede (1980): KSA scores high on this dimension, In cultures that exhibit high uncertainty avoidance, research has shown that trust is an important determinant in decision-making processes (Dawar et al., 1996). Individual members in high uncertainty avoidance societies are also less likely to accept the veracity of statements without supporting argumentation (Wong and Birnbaum-More, 1994).</p>
Power distance	<p>‘Power distance’ is a measure of the acceptance in a society regarding power, wealth, and political authority imbalances, and the extent to which members in less powerful positions accept the uneven power distribution (Hofstede, 1980). Hofstede’s original work purported that employees from high power distance cultures are more deferential to authority and prefer autocracy. Contrastingly, low power distance cultures prefer a more</p>	<p>KSA is characteristically a high-scoring culture in terms of the power distance dimension (Hofstede, 1980). Research has shown that high scoring power distance cultures are more likely to seek opinions of others, and have a higher likelihood of relying on recommendations (Dawar et al., 1996).</p>



Dimension	Description	KSA Context
	collaborative employment environment (Hofstede, 1980).	

*Source: Adapted from Hofstede (1980). See also: <https://www.hofstede-insights.com/country-comparison/saudi-arabia/>*

### ***Trompenaars' seven value dimensions***

Fons Trompenaars (1993) incorporates some of Hofstede's concepts in his own model of culture which he developed out of his long-term study of company managers. Trompenaars' model is based on work by sociologists Parsons and Shils (1951) as well as on Hofstede's dimensions, exploring variations in the value systems and interpersonal relationships across cultures (Nardon and Steers, 2009, pp. 4 and 12). Trompenaars (1993) combined some of Hofstede's dimensions in conjunction with Parsons and Shils' (1951) five-dimension model of culture to develop his model of seven cultural dimensions (universalism vs. particularism, individualism vs. collectivism, affective vs. affect-neutral communication style, specific vs. diffuse relationships, ascription vs. achievement, time orientation, and nature orientation). Five dimensions concern interpersonal relationships and social attributes; two dimensions relate to time management and society's relationship with nature (Nardon and Steers, 2009, p. 5).

Trompenaars' value dimensions share themes in common with Hofstede's dimensions, as both models take into account the distribution of power/authority, emphasis either on the group or on individuals, personal versus social control, the use of time, and the human's relationship with the environment (Nardon and Steers, 2009, p. 9). Although they are similar, Hofstede's model seems to account more fully for the features of Saudi culture and society than Trompenaars' model does.

### ***Schwartz's universal values***

The four models discussed so far have all come from the discipline of anthropology. In contrast, Shalom Schwartz (1992, 1994) brings his perspective as a social psychologist. He posits that the main differences between values expressed by various societies are found in the motivational objectives on which these values are based. Schwartz identified ten basic 'universal' human values, that is, values which are found in all cultures and represent needs common to all human individuals or societies. The ten values are: power, achievement, hedonism, stimulation, self-direction, universalism, benevolence, tradition, conformity, and security (Schwartz, 1992). Schwartz (1994) subsequently distinguished conceptually between individual and cultural levels of analysis. 'Individual-level dimensions reflect the psychological dynamics that individuals experience when acting on their values in the everyday life, while cultural level dimensions reflect the solutions that societies find to regulate human actions' (Nardon and Steers, 2009, pp. 5-6).

Although Schwartz' model has been applied to social behaviour, it is not effective with all aspects; the fact that it contains a large number of constructs makes it cumbersome and confusing. Furthermore, it is mostly relevant to qualitative classification theory, and it is not widely acknowledged worldwide. For these reasons, the universal values framework is not applicable to this study.

### ***GLOBE study: cultural dimensions***

A large meta-analysis aimed at identifying cultural dimensions worldwide was led by Robert House and an international team of researchers called the 'GLOBE' (Global Leadership and Organizational Behaviour Effectiveness) study (House et al., 2004). Collecting and comparing data in sixty-two countries, the main focus of this study was the influence of cultural differences on leadership processes. GLOBE identified nine cultural dimensions. Most of these dimensions have been identified in

previous cultural models (e.g., individualism-collectivism, power distance, and uncertainty avoidance), but other dimensions (e.g., gender egalitarianism and performance orientation) were new to models of culture (Nardon and Steers, 2009, pp. 6-7).

As with the Schwartz model, the large number of dimensions in the GLOBE model makes it unwieldy: multiple dimensions in the model might better have been merged into a single more general or unifying cultural dimension. Three of the nine cultural dimensions in the GLOBE model are already found in Hofstede's model; GLOBE's authors suggest that a group of independent dimensions are needed to account for certain behaviours, whereas Hofstede integrates these behaviours into a single cultural dimension. It seems more efficient and practical to focus on a small number of salient dimensions that account for most behaviour rather than on a larger set of features which are narrower in scope. Finally, the GLOBE model (House et al., 2004) divides the individualism-collectivism dimension into either institutional or in-group individualism-collectivism: 'institutional collectivism' is when a society values the collective distribution of resources and collective action, while 'in-group collectivism' is present when individuals have a sense of loyalty, cohesiveness, and pride in their social groups. While the quantitative foundations of this model are compelling, the focus and structure of the model are not optimally relevant to the present research. The focus of the GLOBE project was on how variations in cultural dimensions affect leadership behaviour and effectiveness, which is quite distant from the topic of the current study.

#### **4.6 An appropriate theory of culture for the research model**

Several models of culture have been proposed that are frequently referred to in research that covers culturally-based observations. However, after reviewing the literature on the cultural models proposed by Kluckhohn and Strodtbeck (1961), Hall

(1976, 1989), Trompenaars (1993), Hofstede (1980, 1994), Schwartz (1993, 1994), and House et al. (2004), it was decided that the most appropriate model to implement in the current study was that of Hofstede (1980). Hofstede's cultural dimensions are most commonly utilized in research, and, as described in the foregoing, certain aspects of Hofstede's model have also been incorporated into other models of culture, which strengthens the argument for the validity of the framework. Moreover, with particular pertinence to the current study, Hofstede's dimensions have been discussed in online review and in tourism research (Hu et al., 2018, Fang et al., 2013; Litvin et al. (2004).

In conclusion, key definitions of cultural values have been discussed, and Hofstede's model of cultural dimensions has been examined in depth, providing justification for its implementation in the current research. The role of cultural dimensions in tourism and OCR research has been presented. Hofstede's dimensions are appropriate for use in this research due to their various linkages with subjective norms, IAM constructs, perceived trust in online contexts, and in particular, to tourists' intention to visit a destination.

#### **4.7 Literature gaps**

As the public continue to rely less on television and more on online media as their source of information, and consumer trust in corporations has declined (Jalilvand and Samiei, 2012), eWOM has become an increasingly important marketing and branding tool for companies of all sizes and in many industries (Kang and Hustvedt, 2014). EWOM is especially important in the hospitality and tourism industry, whose intangible products are difficult to evaluate prior to their consumption. Choosing a tourist destination is considered a complex task as it includes many related aspects, products, services, and brands, which would make eWOM particularly useful. There has been a lot of research on eWOM in the context of behavioural intention (e.g., Senecal and Nantel, 2004; Duan et al., 2008; Park and Kim 2008; Xia and Bechwati, 2008;

Cheung et al., 2009; Park and Kim, 2009a; Kusumasondjaja et al., 2012; Lee and Koo, 2012; Ketelaar et al., 2015; Filieri, 2016; Lee and Ro, 2016), but little focus on eWOM or OCRs within the tourism context, let alone their impact on tourism destination choice. Social influence has been noted by many researchers (Hsu and Lin, 2016; Chen et al., 2012; Alharbi et al., 2015) as a key element that influences consumer intention but considering the role of social influence in the context of OCRs has been largely ignored. Moreover, research on OCRs has failed to account for the role of other key antecedents of behavioural intention in conjunction with subjective norms, such as trust. Given that previous research has found a significant relationship between trust and subjective norms (Kim et al., 2009; Alharbi et al., 2015), it is crucial for travel and tourism e-vendors to understand this relationship. This is particularly true for non-Western, collectivist cultures, where people tend to be more reliant on group opinions (Lee and Green, 1991), KSA is just such a culture, and as mentioned earlier it also scores high on uncertainty avoidance and power distance, which indicates an increased tendency to seek and accept advice from social media networks (see Table 4.1). Previous literature has focussed on a number of characteristics of eWOM and OCRs that may impact consumer intention, including source characteristics (e.g., Cheung et al., 2009; Kusumasondjaja et al., 2012; Filieri, 2016), message characteristics (e.g., Duan et al., 2008; Lee and Ro, 2016), and reader characteristics (e.g., Park and Kim, 2009a; Lee and Koo, 2012; Ketelaar et al., 2015). However, as mentioned earlier, the influence of the individual's society and culture has not been the focus of research in connection with eWOM/OCRs.

It should be noted that the current study is not aiming to examine OCRs influence in a cross-cultural context; rather, it examines OCRs in terms of their influence only in the KSA context. Furthermore, as stated earlier, there are very few studies that consider the role of OCR features in conjunction with both social influences of the

reader and subsequent intention. The inclusion of subjective norms in the research can be considered as particularly important for understanding OCRs and their impact on tourists' intention to visit a particular destination. It has also been commented that the information adoption model fails to account for behavioural intention (Erkan and Evans, 2016), whereas the current study considers it. Additionally, the present research considers two more factors, source credibility and argument quality, in order to provide a more comprehensive picture of these constructs in the context of tourism information adoption.

#### **4.8 Summary of the chapter**

In conclusion, the current chapter has presented a literature review regarding OCRs and key findings regarding features of OCRs that assist in explaining their impact on visit intention, namely: argument quality, source credibility, perceived information usefulness, perceived information trust, information adoption, and tourist visit intention. The justification for using the IAM framework, and the related justification for using constructs from TRA have been presented. Additionally, the roles of subjective norms and cultural values on information adoption and visit intention in the context of OCRs have been examined, and the relationship between culture and tourism has been discussed. Cultural models have been explored, and a justification for using Hofstede's model has been presented. Finally, the identified research gaps were presented. The next chapter discusses the conceptual model for the study and the development of the research hypotheses.

## **Chapter Five: Research Methodology**

## **5.1 Introduction**

This chapter draws on the previous chapters to build the proposed framework exploring the influence of reading OCRs on tourist visit intention. The first portion of this chapter explores the philosophical assumptions, the paradigm of inquiry, the research methodology, the research design, and the strategy of inquiry adopted in this study. Taking all these parameters into account allows for the selection of methods which are specific and appropriate to the study (Easterby-Smith et al., 1991). It is understood that the meta-theoretical stance and paradigm of analysis taken by the researcher influences the choice of methods (Creswell, 2012). ‘Paradigm’ has been defined as ‘a shared world view that represents the beliefs and values in a discipline and that guides how problems are solved’ (Schwandt, 2001). The researcher’s philosophical stance governs even seemingly technical decisions (Bryman, 2008) such as whether to gather data via a survey or from interviews.

The remainder of this chapter discusses and justifies the methods employed in this study, the data collection procedure, the research ethics and the instruments used to measure the variables included in the research model. Research methods refer to the set of methods and techniques available to the researcher to conduct a research (Kothari, 2004). This can include instruments such as questionnaires and interviews (Bryman, 2012).

## **5.2 Hypothesis statement**

The purported hypotheses in the current research have been formulated based on previous research that has posited particular findings. Hypothesis testing allows the implementation of statistical assessments to compute the likelihood that a given proposition between two variables is true; therefore, hypothesis testing is useful for the



aims of this research. The proposed hypotheses, as stated in Chapter Three, are as follows:

*H1: Website quality is positively related to perceived information usefulness.*

*H2: Credibility of review provider is positively related to perceived information usefulness.*

*H3: Argument quality is positively related to perceived information usefulness.*

*H4: Information sidedness is positively related to perceived information usefulness.*

*H5: Perceived information usefulness is positively related to perceived information trust.*

*H6: Perceived information trust is positively related to information adoption.*

*H7: Information adoption is positively related to visit intention.*

*H8: Subjective norms are positively related to perceived information usefulness.*

*H9: Subjective norms are positively related to visit intention.*

*H10: Cultural values are positively related to subjective norms.*

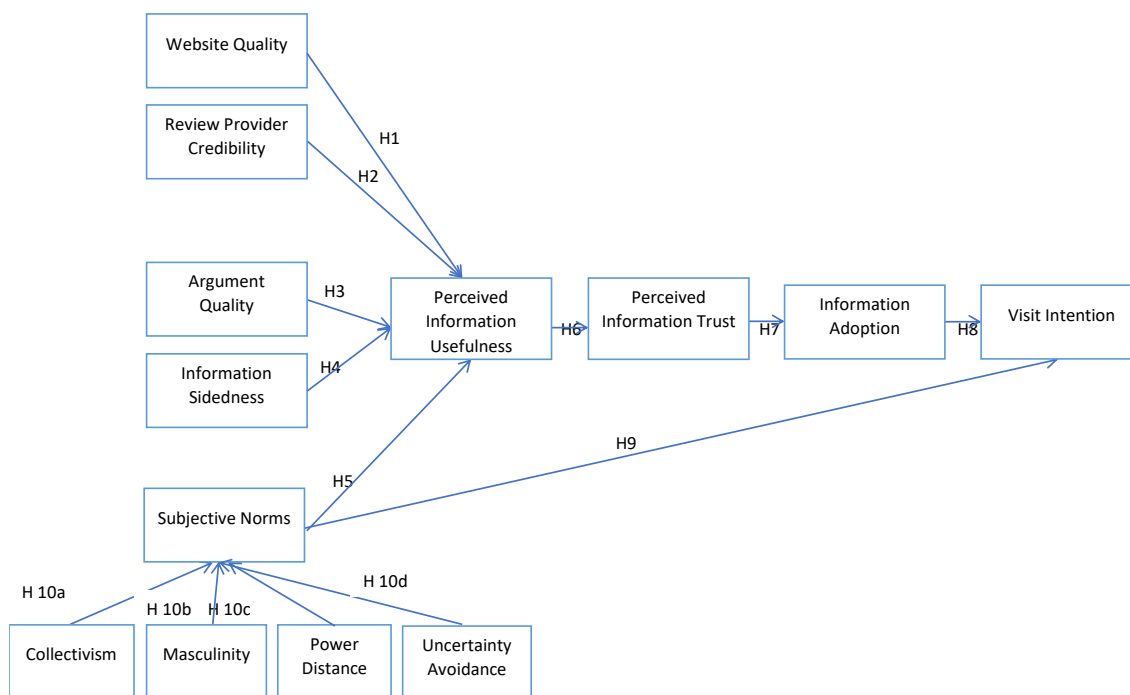
*H10a: Collectivism is positively related to subjective norms.*

*H10b: Masculinity is positively related to subjective norms.*

*H10c: Power distance is positively related to subjective norms.*

*H10d: Uncertainty avoidance is positively related to subjective norms.*

These hypotheses are tested in the context of Saudi Arabia. A generalization of the model would be applicable in any country or region; however, the outcome of the model may be specific to a country or region that has similar social and cultural characteristics.



**Figure 5.1.** Research Model: Online Consumer Reviews Influence Model (OCRIM).

### 5.3 Philosophical assumptions

As mentioned in the introduction to this chapter, by considering and adopting a philosophical stance, the researcher has some direction as to the selection and application of an appropriate methodology. In the current section, the philosophical underpinnings of the study paradigm are described, and the research philosophy, the paradigm of inquiry, and the research approach adopted in this study are justified.

#### 5.3.1 Research philosophy

The branch of philosophy that was developed in Europe (known as ‘Western’ philosophy) traces its roots back to the Greek philosophers Socrates, Plato, and Aristotle. Two major branches of epistemology, rationalism and empiricism, stem from those roots. While rationalism assumes that human knowledge can be gained independently of what is experienced via the senses, empiricism asserts that all human knowledge and concepts are derived via the senses (Markie, 2017). Auguste Comte, ‘the

founder of sociology', introduced positivism, which combines elements of both rationalism and empiricism. Positivism's ontological assumption is that there is one reality which is external, objective, and knowable. Positivism holds that knowledge cannot be real unless it is observable, and it makes a distinction between metaphysical and empirical knowledge (Heydt, IEP, n.d.; Bourdeau, 2018). A positivist paradigm assumes that science is the only basis for true knowledge, and that science is 'value-free': what is accepted as 'true' is based on precise observation and verifiable measurement. Positivism concentrates on 'facts' and the causes of behaviour (Kawulich, 2012).

Positivism was later superseded by neo- and post-positivism; post-positivism or logical empiricism rejects the concept that the researcher is independent of the subject being researched and that reality is external to the researcher, and instead emphasizes 'the need to take into account the context of justification and the social dimension of science' (Bourdeau, 2018, 'Introduction', para. 2). In contrast to positivism, post-positivism does not draw a sharp distinction between research in the social sciences and in the natural sciences, supposing that the research goals and methods are similar in both (Kawulich, 2012). A step further in this direction is phenomenology, a philosophy expounded by Edmund Husserl, which holds that knowledge is subjective, because reality is experiential: 'it is socially constructed and that there are as many intangible realities as there are people constructing them' (Kawulich, 2012, p. 56). In this paradigm, the focus of study is on attempting to understand human experiences, rather than on discovering facts and measuring phenomenon (Kawulich, 2012). Despite the subjective stance, objectivity is said to be attainable via the employment of multiple measures and observations, and by triangulation of the data (Kawulich, 2012, p. 55).

Whereas the positivist paradigm describes and predicts cause and effect relationships (Howell, 2013), in the post-positivist paradigm, antecedents determine end

results, which relationships can be explored via hypotheses and research questions (Creswell, 2012). In the context of tourism marketing research, accepting the post-positivist assumption that the researcher and the object of research are not independent of each other, in order to understand tourism consumers' behaviour, the researcher must take into account their interpretations and perceptions of reality. According to Jennings (2007), 'Traditionally, tourism economics and management research has applied western based epistemologies to examine the various patterns, components, sectors, activities, experiences, and peoples involved in the phenomenon of tourism from a positivistic or post-positivistic theoretical paradigm' (p. 10). Indeed, assuming that knowledge is subjective as stated earlier, applying Euro-centred epistemologies to examine tourism activities in non-Euro-centred societies may be problematic. Taking this limitation into consideration, this study aims to explore the impact of OCRs and social influences on local tourists in Saudi Arabia (a non-western culture) by gathering and analysing data from a targeted population, and then to present the findings in such a way as to be generalizable to any country or societies—an aim which can best be achieved through a post-positivist approach. In fact, such an approach is often able to provide generalizable findings across countries, industries, and organizations (Eriksson and Kovalainen, 2008).

Kawulich (2012) lists four major philosophical paradigms which underpin most research in the social sciences: positivist/post-positivist; constructivist/interpretive; transformative/emancipatory; and postcolonial/indigenous. She notes that positivism and post-positivism are the more conventional choices for social science research (p. 54). Riley and Love (2000), in their meta-analysis of research articles appearing in major tourism and travel academic journals during the last quarter of the twentieth century, reported that positivism and post-positivism were considered the main philosophical paradigms of such research appearing in tourism and travel academic

journals. Nunkoo (2018) has made mention of Riley and Love's study, but noted that while 'quantitative approaches in tourism and hospitality studies' have continued to predominate, 'researchers are now more receptive to other research approaches such as qualitative and mixed methods' (p. 3). The next section explores the paradigm of inquiry employed by the study in accordance with its post-positivist philosophy.

### **5.3.2 Paradigm of inquiry**

Creswell (2012) noted that a paradigm of inquiry is an important part of any research project. A coherent and cohesive research paradigm comprises ontology, epistemology, and axiology. The first two of these terms are discussed in more detail later in this section, and the third is dealt with in Section 5.5, but briefly, ontology refers to assumptions regarding the nature of social reality, epistemology refers to ways of knowing, and axiology refers to value systems (Kawulich, 2012, p. 51).

As mentioned above, post-positivism does not reject the fundamental assumptions of positivism; rather, it transcends the paradigm to incorporate the assumptions that knowledge is fallible and is open to revision. Thus, post-positivism assumes a more realistic perspective of empiricism, in which the researcher cannot be wholly detached from the research (Ryan, 2006). However, the admission of researcher attachment to the research does not preclude the implementation of quantitative methods; it merely advocates the implementation of such methods within a more complex research design (Adam, 2014). According to the post-positivist paradigm, knowledge is best understood through the analysis of causal relationships, and assumes that antecedents predicate outcomes, a relationship that is generally posited through the formation of hypotheses and research questions (Creswell, 2012).

Therefore, the present study follows a post-positivist paradigm, which considers the quality of the input data, an integrated approach, and the inclusion of context (Adam, 2014). It is also in line with the critical realists' view that 'reality can only be

known imperfectly because of the researcher's human limitations' (Kawulich, 2012, p. 55). Within the post-positivist paradigm, cause-and-effect relationships are an important focus. Such relationships are generally expressed through hypothesis and research questions (Creswell, 2012). Post-positivists believe that the background knowledge, theories, and hypotheses of the researcher can have a powerful influence on what is being observed and studied (Kawulich, 2012).

The attention paid to context in the post-positivist paradigm (Adam, 2014) means that such an approach is ideally suited to the attempt at understanding human behaviour and attitudes in a tourism context, in which the researcher must consider social interpretations and perceptions of reality. Other scholars (Stewart and Floyd, 2004; Gale and Beefink, 2006) agree that post-positivism is well suited to explore 'the complex nature of social science phenomena such as tourism visit decision-making' as it acknowledges the 'inability to fully represent people's lived experiences' (Gale and Beefink, 2006, p. 346). In line with the adopted post-positivist paradigm, the aim of the current research is to test a number of hypotheses and a theoretical framework constructed from existing theories that assumes causal relationships. More specifically, the research aims to evaluate tourist visit intention based on the extent to which they have adopted the information (as identified by information adoption approach) in an OCR after reading it. However, it is understood that the knowledge garnered is not infallible, and is open to revision.

According to Lincoln and Guba (2000), it is important to consider one's research philosophy in terms of its underpinning philosophical assumptions. Guba and Lincoln (1994) postulate that in order to define a research paradigm, one must consider the responses to three fundamental questions, which can be categorized under the following philosophies: ontology, epistemology, and methodology. These philosophical questions are intertwined, and are discussed in further depth here:

### *5.3.2.1 Ontology*

The ontological question asks, ‘What is the form and nature of reality and, consequently, what is there that can be known about it?’ (Guba and Lincoln, 1994, p. 108). Ontology, therefore, is concerned with the nature of being. Ontology can be broadly understood from two viewpoints: foundationalism/objectivism/realism, which is concerned with the ‘real world’ independent of our knowledge, and constructivism/relativism/anti-foundationalism, which posits that the world is a result of social construction (Furlong and Marsh, 2010). The post-positivist ontological position is critical realism, which holds that reality must be scrutinized with the most rigorous criticism in order to gain an understanding that is as close to reality as possible. Ontologically, the present study adopts a critical realist stance, operating according to the supposition that reality can only be understood in relation to chance variation, and thus imperfectly, as it is difficult to separate from factors such as culture and social influence (Guba and Lincoln, 1994; Howell, 2013). Therefore, this research reality cannot be totally understood in a positive way as the study recognizes the effect of perceived information trust, perceived information usefulness, and information adoption. The current study considers the impact of independent factors on tourist’s intention after reading OCRs. This reality is seen to be external to the researcher and thus can be observable and objectively measured through the tourists visit intention.

### *5.3.2.2 Epistemology*

The epistemological question is concerned with the relationship between the researcher and what is being researched, and so the key question is, ‘What is the nature of the relationship between the knower and what can be known?’ (Furlong and Marsh, 2010, pp. 185). Epistemology is therefore concerned with how objective relations can be understood in the social world. As mentioned earlier, the post-positive assumption is that the researcher is not completely independent of the object of research. Haddoud

(2015) explains it as follows: ‘the former had already developed a pre-existing knowledge from the review of literature; however the objectivity of the investigation can still be pursued with the quantitative measurement of the study's variables. The findings of this research are replicable but can still be fallible as a result of a different context’ (p. 136).

Additionally, with this knowledge that the researcher is not wholly detached from the research, the post-positivist epistemological stance is justified on the basis that an extensive and lengthy literature review has been conducted prior to the research commencement. Nevertheless, an attempt is made to explain social phenomena through causal relationships and hypothesis making, which will be critically analysed using multi-method quantitative analysis. This assumption also justifies the current research axiologically (see Section 5.5), upholding no assertions to a value-free enquiry.

#### **5.4 Research approach**

Positivism and post-positivism are the more conventional choices for social science research; they usually are accompanied by the following methodologies: quantitative, correlational, experimental and quasi-experimental, causal comparative, and survey (Kawulich, 2012, p. 54). Terre Blanche et al. (2006) explain that the research process goals primarily fall into one of three categories: exploratory, descriptive, and explanatory. Exploratory research is not intended for a final solution to a problem in research; rather, it explores the depth of a research question and intends to provide a better understanding of a problem with little comprehension (Saunders et al., 2012), and is usually associated with qualitative methods (Zikmund et al., 2013). The primary purpose of descriptive research is to describe certain aspects or behaviours of a particular phenomenon; it does not seek to explain how or why these behaviours appear or to interpret causal relationships. It is appropriate to implement when the researcher reaches the conclusion that the information to solve a problem is not known or does not



exist. Thus, descriptive research aims to describe, examine, and validate findings, reaching an appropriate conclusion (Fox and Bayat, 2008). Explanatory research is concerned with the analysis of cause-and-effect relationships and seeks to understand why a particular phenomenon occurs (De Vaus, 2001). It seeks to explain the impact of certain variables upon others. Since this research seeks to explain causal relationships between variables/constructs that have been established in previous work, this research process is defined under explanatory research.

The two most common approaches to research are deduction and induction. The deductive approach derives from deductive theory, which posits that reasoning is drawn from previously recognized knowledge in order to deduce hypotheses, which are then subjected to empirical analysis. Thus, the researcher states theoretical assumptions on the basis of relevant existing works in the form of hypotheses, which are generally formed into a model with which to understand or predict some aspect of behaviour or phenomena. Within the formed hypothesis or hypotheses, there will be constructs or ideas that must be convertible into researchable items. Thus, hypotheses must be decoded in such a way that they can be successfully operationalized (Bryman, 2015). In deductive reasoning, hypotheses explain how a dependent variable is influenced by one or more independent variables.

Conversely, an inductive approach starts with a specific level of focus in existing data, which is then analysed in an interpretative manner and formed into a general theory. Inductive reasoning is concerned with the formation of patterns, which is subjective to the researcher and is not measured in a quantifiable way (Bryman, 2015). With the inductive approach, researchers develop theoretical findings from empirical evidence, instead of starting with a theory or hypothesis (Eriksson and Kovalainen, 2008). Saunders et al., (2012) explain that the inductive approach investigates why a phenomenon is happening, whereas the deductive approach tries to

explain what is happening. In the social sciences, deduction is the approach most often employed in developing the foundations of theoretical knowledge (Eriksson and Kovalainen, 2008).

Deductive reasoning allies with a positivist philosophy and quantitative methods (Melkert and Vos, 2010). Since this research has generated hypotheses based on previous literature and prepared these hypotheses for empirical investigation, this research adopts a deductive approach. There are two particular reasons for adopting a deductive approach in the context of the current research, which are as follows:

(1) The study collects quantitative data from a wider audience of online review consumers (an audience that is familiar with online communication and reviews) in order to understand their information adoption approach and how these influence their visit intention. Quantitative research is about validating theories by investigating relationships between variables; various instruments can be used to measure these variables (Creswell, 2012).

Typically, data collected can be analysed using statistical techniques. This type of research generally relates to deductive reasoning.

(2) The rationale behind this approach is to provide a strong theoretical foundation for the formulation of the proposed model; it has previously been argued that there is a need for theoretically-based research in the context of OCRs (Cui et al., 2012).

The next issue to consider is the research methodology, which refers to a framework in which to conduct research within the context and underlying assumptions of a particular paradigm (Sarantakos, 2005). There are two types of research methodology which will be discussed in further depth below: qualitative and quantitative.

## 5.5 Research methodology

Methodology is an approach to systematic inquiry; it has been explained as a set of rules, principles, and methods comprising the reasoning underlying the researcher's decision to employ a particular method or set of methods (Kawulich, 2012). One research methodology may involve several research methods. The study at hand has employed a survey as its predominant methodology. The survey has been described as a positivist methodology that investigates a sample of subjects extracted from a population (Collis and Hussey, 2009). In survey methodology, the researcher interprets the data in the sample, drawing inferences and extrapolating from them with regard to the population from which the sample is taken (Gray, 2009). In accordance with the post-positivist approach adopted in this study, survey methodology should employ an objective and impersonal set of methods that mitigates bias. Surveys attempt to investigate causes and effects occurring between dependant and independent variables under controlled conditions (Gray, 2009).

The methodological question asks how the researcher can find out the information or phenomena that is the subject of study. Guba and Lincoln (1994) note that the methodological question is constrained by the answers to the ontological and epistemological questions. Moreover, they point out that the question of methodology cannot be reduced to a question of methods alone; rather, chosen methods must suit a predetermined methodology.

Given Adams' (2014) assertion that the post-positivist paradigm allows for the implementation of quantitative methods provided that the implementation of such methods be within a more complex model design, the survey questionnaire as an instrument of quantitative methodology is appropriate for a post-positivist approach, and is the methodology adopted in this study, as detailed in Section 5.7 below.

As mentioned earlier, the ontological, epistemological, and methodological questions are intertwined, and answers to one may constrain the answer to the others (Guba and Lincoln, 1994). It is also worth noting that Collis and Hussey (2009) identify the role of the axiological philosophical dimension in the identification of a research paradigm. Axiological assumptions refer to the role of ethics in research, encompassing the researcher's values in relation to the studied phenomena. Thus, it is important for the researcher to establish the position of this study in relation to these philosophical questions.

Bryman (2015) comments that qualitative and quantitative research styles differ not only in terms of their strategy, but also in their underpinning epistemological and philosophical assumptions. The qualitative method emphasizes subjective interpretation and rejects data quantification. It emphasizes an inductive and interpretive approach, with a view that social reality and phenomena are created by individuals; thus, they are ever-changing and should be interpreted as such. Conversely, quantitative methods embody the use of data analysis that allows results to be quantifiable and presented in numerical terms. The quantitative style emphasizes a deductive approach and aims to test theoretical assertions, incorporating the practices and assumptions of a positivist philosophical perspective (Bryman, 2015).

## **5.6 Research design**

When looking for a study design, there are three options: quantitative, qualitative, and mixed methods (Creswell, 2012). A quantitative research design and its related instruments are selected with the aim of mitigating error and bias; in a quantitative design, the researcher is expected to follow established procedures and provide a complete description of the sample, the data collection methods and procedures, and any statistical operations. A qualitative design is likewise concerned with ensuring that one's findings resulted from the data; in contrast with the quantitative

approach, however, the description of the data in a qualitative design often involves quotes from participants and other rich data to support the validity of the results (Kawulich, 2012).

This current study mainly uses primary sources of data to address its objectives. Secondary data sources such as media and government reports are also used to address the research objectives (e.g., SCTH reports). The research design encompasses the entirety of the process, driven by the research objectives. Identifying the research design entails identifying the blueprint for data collection, including geographical location, the measurement of data, and data analysis techniques (De Vaus, 2001). The research design process can be outlined in twelve steps, as shown in Table 5.1, which serves as a reference for designing this research.

**Table 5.1:** Research Process.

*Source: adapted from Miller and Salkind (2002).*

<b>Step 1</b>	<b>Identify research problem</b>
<b>Step 2</b>	Review literature and theory
<b>Step 3</b>	Formulate hypotheses
<b>Step 4</b>	Select research approach/style
<b>Step 5</b>	Concept measures
<b>Step 6</b>	Research location
<b>Step 7</b>	Research subjects
<b>Step 8</b>	Research instrument and method of data gathering
<b>Step 9</b>	Collect and code data
<b>Step 10</b>	Analyse data
<b>Step 11</b>	Present findings
<b>Step 12</b>	Writing up and formulating conclusions

The current research uses quantitative methods; this decision was based on the post-positivist paradigm. Guba and Lincoln (1994) comment that the ‘received view’ of science, identified first as positivism and transcending to the current post-positivism, aims to confirm or falsify a priori (deductive) hypotheses, which are most usefully stated as numerical propositions, or propositions that can be transformed to quantitative formulas expressing functional relationships. When the aim of the research is to predict or explain a behaviour by testing relationships between constructs, mathematical formulae are useful. Additionally, statistical methods of analysis allow the researcher to establish reliability and validity, and to make comparisons with previous findings based on statistical assessment techniques.

Since the present research aims to establish relationships between an array of constructs, expressed as priori hypotheses, it can therefore be justified that implementing statistical techniques is appropriate for the current research. In cases where establishing relationships between constructs and establishing a conceptual framework with which to understand and predict a behaviour is the aim of the study, qualitative methods are not productive (Collis and Hussey, 2009). The present study investigated the influence of OCRs on information adoption by tourists, which is expected to influence tourist visit intention, and this is the sort of research which is best served by quantitative, deductive methodology. Polit and Beck (2010) note that when conducting quantitative research, the extent to which the results can be generalized is a key factor in assessing the quality of a study. This is known as external validity and it is considered a standard in quantitative analysis; nevertheless, scholars acknowledge that external validity or generalizability is not easy to establish (Kerlinger and Lee, 2000; Shadish et al., 2002; Polit and Beck, 2010).

## 5.7 Use of survey method

A review of the prominent literature on both eWOM and tourism consumers worldwide shows that significant empirical studies have taken a quantitative approach, including the use of surveys (Beerli and Martin, 2004b; Jalilvand and Samiei, 2012; Zhang et al., 2014; Kim et al., 2017). Since a quantitative research has been identified and justified in the context of the current study, it is only necessary to examine data collection instruments that are affiliated with this style. Bryman (2015) notes that for many researchers, the data collection phase represents a pivotal moment in the research project. The instruments employed allow researchers to gather the data required to reach a conclusion about the phenomenon under investigation, particularly in regard to relationships between constructs, as is the case in the current research. Therefore, the need for a systematic and well-justified approach to data collection is paramount; an incompetent approach to this stage in the research process would most likely render the results inadmissible in terms of achieving the stated research objectives.

Survey is a commonly utilized approach across many spectrums of research, as it allows for the collection of data from a large number of people in a speedy and cost-efficient manner. Standardized questionnaires are often administered to the target sample, allowing for ease of comparison. Surveys allow for the collection and analysis of quantitative data, and the data gathered can be used to suggest possible reasons for particular causal relationships. Such findings are generally thought to be more generalizable than data gathered from qualitative strategies such as in-depth interviews (Saunders et al., 2012).

Survey data is often gathered via one or more of these methods: paper questionnaires, online questionnaires, telephone interviews, or face-to-face interviews (Collis and Hussey, 2009). For the present study, the survey data was collected through paper and online questionnaires. Given the continued global trend of increasing personal

and business access to the Internet, e-surveys are quickly becoming part-and-parcel of research methodologies. Benefits of e-surveys include faster response rates, decreased costs (compared to the cost of printing/ mailing paper questionnaires), and increased response rates (Jansen et al., 2006).

Therefore, since the research adopts a deductive approach and quantitative research style, a survey approach is the data collection method of choice. The questionnaire for this survey is designed to explore the impact of OCR features and subjective norms on perceived information usefulness, as well as the influence of subjective norms directly on visit intention. This allowed the researcher to address the first and second research objectives of the study. Additionally, it explored the influence of cultural values on subjective norms, which addresses the third research objective. Further, it considered the mediating influence of perceived information usefulness (PIU) on visit intention through perceived information trust (PIT) and information adoption (INFOA). This addressed the last two research objectives of the study. It is believed that the use of questionnaires for the aforementioned purposes is particularly relevant. The data obtained using this instrument is useful to explain the relationships between the investigated variables (Saunders et al., 2012). The method by which the data was analysed is discussed, and justification for this choice of statistical method duly provided, in Section 5.11 below.

## **5.8 Unit of analysis**

The unit of analysis refers to the major entity being analysed in the research, such as the individuals or group under study (Creswell, 2013). It is the most basic aspect of a research project, and is determined when identifying the research problem. The present research is interested in the unit of analysis at the individual level, since the aim of the research is to explore information adoption antecedents and subsequent individual behavioural intention. It is important to define the unit of analysis with the sampling



frame in the sampling procedure; this will be further discussed and identified later in this chapter.

## **5.9 Temporal dimension**

With regard to the timescale of the research, there are two types of research design: cross-sectional and longitudinal (Bryman, 2015). A longitudinal approach can be thought of as an extension of a survey design, where a sample is surveyed at two points in time (or more than two points in time), usually over a period of many years. It is best implemented when the research calls for investigation into the time order of variables. The reliability and replicability in comparison to a cross-sectional design is relatively similar, though due to the time order, it may be that there is more room to deduce causal inferences in this approach. However, longitudinal studies are minimally implemented in research, owing to the time and cost involved (Sarantakos, 2005).

Cross-sectional designs involve collecting data at a single point in time. This differs from longitudinal (or, indeed, experimental) designs. As such, a cross-sectional design does not involve variable manipulation to establish causal effects; rather, it is interested in patterns of association. This is not to say, however, that causal inferences cannot be established in cross-sectional research designs. De Vaus (2001) explains that in order to establish causal inferences from cross-sectional data one can establish a model based on priori reasoning. Therefore, the present research employs a cross-sectional survey approach. This approach is preferred because it enables a large amount of data to be collected in a short space of time and because the current study does not call for the investigation of tourist behaviour over several points in time.

## **5.10 Scaling**

An ordered categorical scale is used in research to assign units of analysis to categories of a variable (Bernard, 2012). Self-report scales typically ask the respondent

to either rank or rate the presented responses in association with the question asked. The Likert scale, which is employed in the current research questionnaire, was originally developed by Rensis Likert (1932) and has since become a staple of survey-based research in the social sciences, psychology, marketing, and other disciplines (Westland, 2015). The Likert scale is a bipolar unidimensional measure in which respondents are asked to indicate on an ordered numerical/categorical scale the extent to which they agree or disagree with the presented statement (Babin and Zikmund, 2015).

The use of the Likert scale is not without controversy. Scholars have questioned whether the ‘presumably continuous personal beliefs’ of respondents can be artificially forced into ordered categories (Westland, 2015, p. 2). More specifically, Jamieson (2004) raised two criticisms in particular: (1) the response categories are in rank order, whereas ‘the intervals between values cannot be presumed equal’; and (2) the mean and standard deviation are not suited to ordinal data (Jamieson, 2004, p. 1217).

Nevertheless, the Likert scale has retained its popularity as the measurement instrument of choice in survey research (McNabb, 2013; Monette et al., 2013), and it has reportedly been successfully implemented in research from which the questionnaire items have been drawn. As mentioned earlier, the present research adopts a post-positivist philosophy, which assumes that the truth of a reality cannot be wholly understood and is open to critical scrutiny (Collis and Hussey, 2009). Since this study examines the constructs of perceived information usefulness and perceived information trust as they relate to information adoption and subsequent visit intention, it is assumed that the ‘whole truth’ of this phenomenon cannot be known. Rather, attempts will be made to scrutinize these causal relationships via rigorous empirical testing, for which a 5-point Likert scale measurement ranging from ‘strongly agree’ to ‘strongly disagree’ is justified.

### **5.11 Target population**

The first stage in the sampling process involves targeting a population that suits the research objectives. For example, if a study aims to uncover information about the destination image of a particular place, the population is anyone who has visited that place; thus the sample should include a subset of that population (Saunders et al., 2012). Therefore, when identifying a target population, the researcher must have specific inclusion and exclusion criteria. Accuracy in identifying the sample is a necessity so as to be able to draw appropriate conclusions from a sample that is representative of the research objectives.

In order to identify an appropriate sample, one must consider the unit of analysis in the research. In this research, the unit of analysis is the individual potential tourist residing in Saudi Arabia who during the previous twelve months had participated in reading OCRs about one or more tourist destinations before their tourism trip. The suggested frame time was proposed in a similar tourism study, (Ayeh et al., 2013), in which data was collected via an online questionnaire from respondents who self-reported having searched online for travel information and had travelled for leisure within the year prior to the survey.

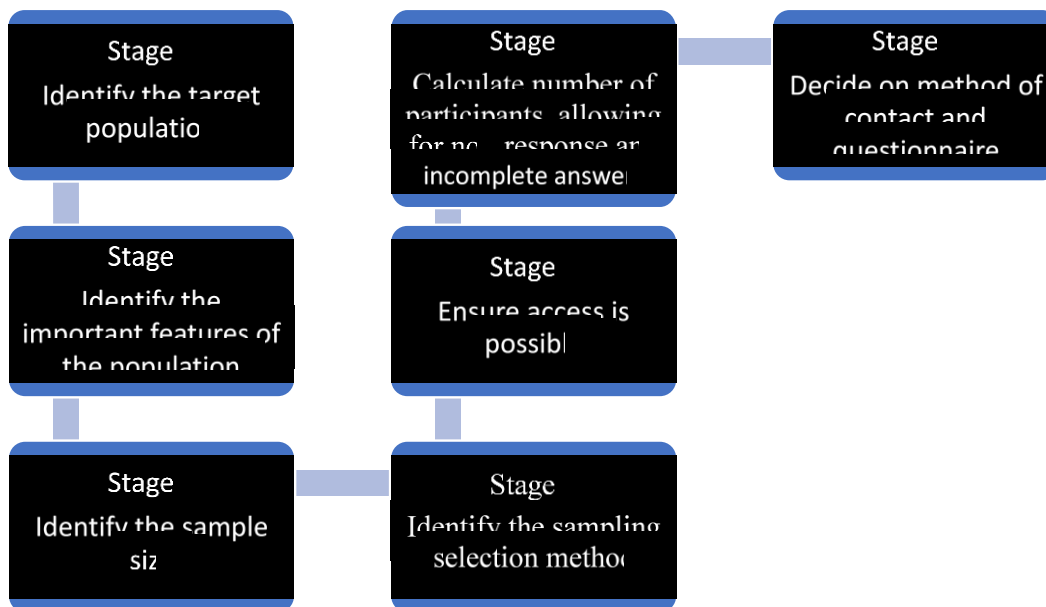
Additionally, in their examination of the impact of online reviews on hotel booking intention and perceptions of trust, Sparks and Browning (2011) reported that almost all of their sample (93%) had had experience with booking accommodations online and the majority (63%) indicated they had relied on reviews when making a hotel booking. Similarly, the sample in the current study showed that 75.41 percent of respondents were experienced in terms of using the Internet. Moreover, Jalilvand and Samiei (2012), in their investigation of the effect of eWOM on a tourism destination choice, reported on the trip purpose and the number of previous visits, which the current research has also considered. The present study found that 45.87 percent of respondents had taken

one to three tourism trips during the last year (numbers and percentages for all trips are detailed in Table 6.1).

Both genders were targeted and included in the sample. A minimum age of participation of 18 years was imposed. This was because the aim of the study is to assess OCR components and the OCR reader’s social influences that affect visit intention towards a particular tourist destination, and it can be assumed that anyone under the age of 18 in Saudi Arabia is unlikely to engage in independent travel solely for leisure purposes.

### 5.12 Sampling strategy

Identifying an appropriate sampling strategy is key in the research process. A sampling strategy encompasses identifying the target population, the qualifying features of the population necessary to partake in the work, the sample size and method of selection. Figure 5.2 is representative of the strategy used in the current research.



**Figure 5.2.** The Sampling Process.

*Source: Adapted from Cohen et al. (2013).*

### 5.12.1 Sample size and non-response rate

Data collection started in Saudi Arabia on 4 October 2017, when travel and tourism agents began to distribute the questionnaires in their agencies to their clients: potential tourists who visited these agencies to arrange upcoming tourism trips. As mentioned earlier, the collection of the data took around six months. Table 5.2 summarizes the number of questionnaires distributed and received back.

**Table 5.2:** Survey Administration.

Delivered questionnaires	Returns	Response rate (%)
550	471 (384 usable)	69.81%

As shown in Table 5.2, the response ratio of this investigation was 471 (of which 384 were usable) out of 550 delivered; the response rate, 69.81 percent, is considered a high rate of response. It is important to reiterate that the suitability of the questionnaire for the sample was clearly indicated in the covering letter and inside the questionnaire itself, It should be noted that in-person administration of the questionnaire resulted in a higher rate of completion and return than did online administration (the pilot survey was distributed and collected via email, WhatsApp, and SMS, as mentioned below in Section 5.20), and this is consistent with findings reported by others (McDonald and Adam, 2003).

### 5.13 Sampling frame

The sampling frame is a list of all those within a population who can be sampled; it defines the individuals who are to be the sample of the target population: in other words, those who are eligible and meet the inclusion criteria constitute the sampling frame. Fowler, Jr. (2014) outlines three characteristics of a sampling frame that a researcher should examine:

- 1) Comprehensiveness: to what extent the sampling frame represents the target population;
- 2) Probability of selection: the extent to which each individual is likely to be selected to take part in the research; and
- 3) Efficiency: the extent to which the sample meets the criteria for the larger target population.

The researcher distributed questionnaires in paper form. To arrange for distribution of the paper questionnaire, the researcher organized meetings with leaders of travel agencies in Jeddah who are members of the Saudi Arabian Airlines Organization and who offer flight reservations to consumers (see Appendix A.1, A.2, A.3). Additionally, the researcher met with leaders of tourism agencies which operate under the SCTH and which offer various tourism products and packages. The purpose of these meetings was to arrange for permission to distribute the paper questionnaires within their agencies to consumers who contact them to arrange reservations for flights, accommodation, and/or other tourism products. The questionnaires for this research were thus mainly distributed in paper format via these travel agents, to be filled by their customers: potential tourists.

### **5.13.1 Sampling size**

Determining the size of the sample necessary for the research is a crucial step in the overall sampling strategy, particularly since an inappropriate sample size can result in data that is of poor quality and inadmissible in terms of achieving the stated research objectives. Saunders et al. (2012) comment that sample size is governed by: the degree of accuracy necessary, including the level of certainty that data characteristics are representative of the target population and the margin of error which is tolerable in statistical analyses; the chosen statistical techniques to be utilized in analysing the data;

the size of the target population; and, to a lesser extent, any time restrictions that may apply to the research. Therefore, Saunders et al. (2012) argue, it can be said that sample size is a matter of both researcher judgement and mathematical calculation.

However, deducing sampling size by way of calculation based on the size of the target population is a difficult process, not least because there are innumerable situations in which the size of the target populations is not known, or could reach into the millions, such as in the case of the present study. Moreover, researchers have posited that one way of determining sample size is to rely on researcher judgement based on the comprehensive investigations that are necessary when conducting research, as this results in the researcher's in-depth familiarity with the subject at hand (Saunders et al., 2012). Nonetheless, it is also asserted that defining sample size should be well-justified and grounded in academic standards and/or previous theoretical propositions (Malhotra et al., 1996). Hence, this current research will justify the sample size based on sound reasoning rather than guesswork.

Sample size can be calculated through the employment of various statistical analyses designed for this very purpose. However, the majority of these take into account the size of the target population in their formulae, and since the size of the target population cannot be specified in this research, other methods shall be called upon. According to the General Authority of Statistics in the Kingdom of Saudi Arabia, the total population in 2016 was 31,742,308. According to Saunders et al. (2012) a sample size of 385 is deemed appropriate when the population constitutes of millions of people (at 95% confidence level and 5% margin of error) (Krejcie and Morgan, 1970; Sekaran, 2006). Also, Collis and Hussey (2009) draw attention to one risk of using small sample sizes: it might prevent researchers being able to carry out important statistical tests and establishing certain relationships among the proposed variables.

Certain types of analyses tend to require minimum sample size numbers in order to generate data that is sufficient. Literature which examines PLS-SEM in depth suggests that an approximate sample size can be calculated by assigning 10 cases per predictor or construct (Chin and Marcoulides, 2013). Research similar to this current study has also suggested that a sample size of 384 is considered appropriate (Erkan and Evans, 2016), based on previous research that has identified 384 as a sample size for when the target population reaches millions (at 95% confidence level and 5% margin of error) (Sekaran, 2006). This research has assumed that a sample size of 384 plus is sufficient to answer the objectives of the study.

Given the size of the sample and the explanatory nature of research, it was determined that PLS-SEM was an appropriate statistical tool for the resulting data, as shall be explained in Chapter Six. Briefly, however, the appropriateness of the sample size for running a robust PLS-SEM data analysis can be explained as follows: According to Pallant (2007), statistical power is not a concern with sample sizes larger than 100; nevertheless, PLS-SEM is reported to attain higher levels of statistical power than other statistical instruments (Hair et al., 2014b). Table 5.3 was adapted by Hair et al. (2014a) from Cohen (1992) as a guide to determining the sample sizes from which significant results may be produced.



**Table 5.3:** Sample Size Recommendation in PLS-SEM.

Statistical power of 80%				
Maximum number of arrows pointing at a construct	5% significance level			
	Minimum <i>R</i> -square			
	0.10	0.25	0.50	0.75
2	110	52	33	26
3	124	59	38	30
4	137	65	42	33
5	147	70	45	36
6	157	75	48	39
7	166	80	51	41
8	174	84	54	44
9	181	88	57	46
10	189	91	59	48

*Source: Adapted from Hair et al. (2014a).*

As mentioned, the size of the sample in the present study is 384. Following Cohen's rule of statistical power, the greatest number of arrows pointing toward a single construct is five; hence, the minimum sample size required to achieve a statistical power of 80 percent with a significance level of 5 percent, and to obtain an *R*-square of at least 0.25, would be 70 observations. The number of observations in the current study is well above the minimum required according to the rule of thumb described in Table 5.3. Thus, it is determined that the sample size is sufficient to run a robust PLS-SEM analysis.

### 5.13.2 Sample selection method

Sampling for this research involved four stages: (1) Identify an appropriate sampling frame; (2) reason an appropriate sample size; (3) decide on an appropriate sampling technique; and (4) ensure the sample is representative of the target population. A sample is usually selected via one of two methods: probability or non-probability

sampling. Probability or random sampling is most often associated with survey designs where inferences need to be made from the sample with regards to the research objectives. Each individual within the target population has an equal chance at being selected, as opposed to non-probability sampling where the units are selected at the subjective judgement of the researcher. In both probability and non-probability sampling, various methods are employed to identify the sample. Some basic probability sampling methods are simple random, systematic random, stratified random, and cluster, while common non-probability sampling methods include quota, snowball, and convenience sampling (Bryman and Bell, 2011).

Sampling often involves multi-faceted methods that are far more complex than would be apparent from their descriptions (Saunders et al., 2012). Of the sampling strategies mentioned above, the present research employed convenience sampling because it is relatively efficient in terms of time, cost, and effort. Using convenience sampling, researchers can make use of a pool of subjects—and the data resulting therefrom—that is easily available (hence the name of this method), such as when a university tutor recruits students from his/her classroom to participate in the tutor's research project. Furthermore, convenience sampling lends itself to purposive sample selection (Saunders et al., 2012), which matches the objectives of the current research. Di Pietro et al. (2012) examined a topic similar to that of the present research, as they investigated how social networks can become the main tool for achieving fast, detailed information in choosing a tourism destination; they used convenience sampling in their study. Additionally, Lam and Hsu (2006) tested the TPB with the addition of a 'past behaviour' variable on choosing a travel destination as a behavioural intention: they also used convenience sampling in their study. The current sample is restricted to Saudi residents who, prior to being included in this study, have used OCRs as a source of information before making travel decisions. Both men and women were included in the sample. The sample

participants were visitors to the tourism/travel agents who had come to arrange their upcoming tourism trips. The questionnaires were distributed to the agents first, and the agents were requested to ask their visitors to kindly complete the questionnaires during their visit.

#### **5.14 Survey constraints**

Conducting this research was impacted by several constraints, which are discussed next.

##### **5.14.1 Time**

During the course of this research project, the author was a full-time PhD researcher with sufficient time to dedicate to data collection. Nevertheless, in addition to the time it took to carry out the survey, a considerable amount of time was expended in travelling to and from the survey location, as the data had to be gathered in a country other than that in which the researcher resided. The data collection process in Saudi Arabia took approximately six months. At the beginning of this research project the researcher made personal contacts with travel agents within Saudi Arabia and other industry professionals who would be positioned to assist in obtaining as many survey responses as possible within the allotted time frame. Crucially, the researcher prepared and followed a clear timetable for each stage of the study; this was indispensable in ensuring the timely completion of this research.

##### **5.14.2 Cost**

Financial resources and projected costs are important factors to be considered in planning and executing a survey. Rea and Parker (2012) note that cost can be a formidable disadvantage of some types of surveys, especially paper questionnaires (whether mailed or distributed and collected in person) and personal interviews. For the present study, all expenses were borne by the researcher. The costs included the printing the questionnaires, questionnaire translations, and transportation (except for the airline

ticket from London to Saudi Arabia, which was covered by the Saudi embassy in London).

### **5.15 Survey design**

Although the current study takes a post-positivist stance, all but a few of the questions were close-ended with a limited set of proposed possible answers. This format allows for comparison of the data and also facilitates coding, tabulation, and interpretation of the data (Collis and Hussey, 2009; Zikmund et al., 2010; Bryman and Bell, 2011). As mentioned earlier, the chosen instrument for measuring the responses was a Likert scale. The advantage of the Likert scaling system is that it permits an assessment of the strength of the responses. Despite the criticism of the Likert system noted earlier, it has been observed that the Likert scale was more reliable than a categorical ('Yes or No') response system (Madu, 2003). Also, as indicated, because the Likert scale is ordinal, it is well suited to certain powerful statistical tools such as SEM (Monette et al., 2013; Collis and Hussey, 2009). Moreover, a major positive aspect is that Likert response items and scales are fairly straightforward for a researcher to prepare and respondents find them intuitively easy to answer (Ghuman and Aswathappa, 2010). The Likert system is typically presented with five-, seven-, or nine-point scales: the odd number allows for a mid-point neutral response (e.g., 'neither agree nor disagree'). It has been argued that a Likert scale without a mid-point would produce more accurate results (in which case the scales would have six, eight, or 10 points), provided it does not affect the validity or reliability of the responses; on the other hand, it has also been shown that 'as the number of scale steps is increased, respondents' use of the mid-point category decreases' (Westland, 2015, p. 8). However, Madu (2003) noted that there was only a slight incremental increase in reliability with scales of more than five points. To test this, Dawes (2012) compared scales with five,

seven, and 10 points; he found that 'none of the three formats is less desirable from the viewpoint of obtaining data that will be used for regression analysis' (p. 75).

Taking the foregoing into consideration, it was determined that for the purposes of the present study, a five-point scale was sufficient; this was the only scale used in the study questionnaire. The questionnaire was divided into three main sections and only section two included sub-sections (See Table 5.4). Part One of the questionnaire contained questions on respondents' use of the Internet and their travel experience; these questions allowed the researcher to identify the appropriate respondents for the study sample.

**Table 5.4:** Questionnaire Structure.

Sections	Sub-sections	Category of respondents	Variable(s) to be measured	Type of questions
Part 1: travel and internet use experience	-	Local tourists	-	Close-ended with multiple options
Part 2: Tourism OCR reading behaviour	OCR features	Local tourists	<b>Independent Variables:</b> WEBQUAL, RPC, ARGQUAL, INFOS,	Close ended with five Likert items and one open question
	Social influences		<b>Independent Variables:</b> SNs, Colvism, Masc, PwrDistnc, UncrAvo	
	Information adoption approach		<b>Independent Variables:</b> PIU, PIT, INFOA, VINT	
Part 3: demographic information	-	Local tourists	-	Close-ended with multiple options

Part Two of the questionnaire was dedicated to reading behaviour regarding tourism OCRs; it was divided into three sub-sections, namely OCR features, social influences, and information adoption approach. These sub-sections included questions designed to allow the researcher to measure the influence of the independent variables on tourism OCR reading behaviour. The first sub-section was dedicated to measure OCR features only. The second sub-section was dedicated to measuring social influences. The third sub-section was intended to allow the researcher to measure mediating and

dependent variables. All the questions in this section were closed-ended, using five-point Likert scales.

Part Three was dedicated to respondents' demographic information. All the questions were close-ended with multiple options to choose from. These demographics questions allow the research to report and discuss the characteristics of respondents involved in the study. The final version of the questionnaire and the covering letter are available in Appendix B.

### **5.16 Translation**

This section might well be listed under 'survey constraints', as conducting a survey in a second language (L2) with a questionnaire that has been translated from the first language (L1), and then having to translate the responses from L2 back to L1, is a challenging exercise. As noted by Saunders et al. (2012), terms which denote certain concepts in L1 can have an entirely different meaning in L2, and vice versa. For this reason, the researcher must ascertain that the questions and instructions maintain the intended meaning in both languages. In order to ensure that the questionnaire is translated accurately and appropriately, it is prudent to have the questionnaire 'back translated'. Back translation is the process of translating a questionnaire from L1 to L2 and then having a different translator translate it back from L2 to L1, and then comparing the results (initial text and back translation) in L1 (Zikmund et al., 2010). The back-translation process may need to be repeated several times in order to develop equivalent questionnaires, which, though time-consuming, is necessary to avoid erroneous results (Malhotra et al., 1996).

For the purpose of obtaining accurate responses, the questionnaire had to be provided in Arabic (the L2 in this case), which meant it was translated from English (L1), and then back-translated into English. The initial translation required that the translator be proficient L1 and a native speaker of L2. For the back-translation the

translator had to be a native speaker of L1 and proficient in L2. That is, the questionnaire was translated from English to Arabic by a native Arabic-speaking translator who also speaks and writes fluent English. The translated questionnaire was then translated back into its original format by a bilingual speaker whose native language is English, in order to point out any errors (see Appendix C, 1 & 2).

### **5.17 Ethical considerations**

Ethical concerns are part of any research project, but when the study involves human participants ('subjects'), there are particular issues to be addressed. Myers (2013) notes that ethical considerations are meant to protect both the researcher and the 'subjects' of the research. Research ethics means the practice of ethical consideration undertaken throughout all the stages of a research project (McNabb, 2013); this includes adopting and adhering to appropriate practices and behaviour vis-à-vis the rights of the individuals and communities being studied or who would be impacted by the research (Saunders et al., 2012). Research ethics make clear the difference between permissible and impermissible practices in research (Kalof et al., 2008).

Four aspects which come under the purvey of research ethics are truthfulness, thoroughness, objectivity, and relevance; these must be observed and adhered to in each phase of the research, from designing one's survey, to collecting and interpreting the data, to reporting one's findings (McNabb, 2013). Truthfulness entails that the researcher must not lie, be deceitful, or employ fraudulent practices. Thoroughness in this context means that the researcher must conduct the study in a systematic and in-depth manner and should not cut corners. Objectivity entails the ideal notion that the researcher should not be biased; however, in a post-positivist paradigm that includes a component of critical realism, it is assumed that bias exists, and therefore what is expected is that the researcher be aware of his/her possible biases and the influence this may have on the research project, and to take this into account while conducting the



research. Finally, relevance means that the research project should be useful and pertinent to the existing body of literature (McNabb, 2013).

Before a researcher sets out to conduct research within their chosen realm of investigation, they commit to be responsible in a number of ways, including: selecting modes of research; behaving responsibly towards the participants before, during, and after the research process; being responsible in terms of finding participants for the research; and being truthful in terms of the research objectives (Ryan, 2005). Regarding the present study, the researcher has made every effort to maintain these research ethics. This included taking steps to protect the rights and privacy of the respondents, ensuring anonymity and confidentiality by masking their identities in the documentation of the research and in the written work. For example, in the description of the sample, this researcher discussed the characteristics of the respondents and avoided providing information that could identify them individually (McNabb, 2013). All such ethical considerations were explained in email invitations, covering letters, and at in-person survey sessions, in order to inform and reassure participants. Informed consent is a particular ethical consideration that is an integral part of the research process, ensuring participant co-operation in the study. ‘Informed consent’ means that individuals must voluntarily participate in the study and that the researcher must explain in clear terms what is requested of the participants, what the purpose of the study is, and any risks or benefits that participation may involve (Kalof et al., 2008; Myers, 2013).

For the present research, participation was voluntary and this point was stressed in all communications with potential and actual participants; the purpose of the survey and any risks or benefits of participation were made clear in invitations via email and/or WhatsApp for the pilot survey and in the questionnaires for the actual data collection. Finally, in presenting the research the researcher has described the limitations of the study in order to inform readers and enable them to determine the level of credibility

that ought to be accorded to this study (McNabb, 2013). In general, the principle at the foundation of all ethical considerations is the avoidance of harm (Saunders et al., 2012). This researcher has taken care to incorporate this principle throughout the study. To that end, a covering letter was provided to all participants which contained, in clear and succinct language, the ethical issues mentioned above. The ethical approval application is attached in Appendix D. The researcher applied for ethical approval from the Faculty of Research Ethics Committee and obtained this approval prior to starting the data collection process.

### **5.18 Measurement variables**

This section considers the instruments chosen to measure the variables investigated in the present research. The measurements have been identified from highly ranked journals, and have been tested in generic eWOM/OCR consumer contexts.

Hence, the independent variables for this research are the external factors, as they are the variables causing the changes; the dependent variable is the intention to visit; and the mediating variables are perceived information usefulness, perceived information trust, and information adoption. These external factors affect intention through the mediating variables. With respect to tourist perceptions of information usefulness and trust, and then information adoption by the tourist, these are the variables through which the effect is explained and thus they are the mediating variables (Saunders et al., 2012). The questionnaire asked local tourists in Saudi Arabia a series of questions, requiring a response using a five-point Likert scale ranging from 1 (strongly disagree) to 5 (strongly agree). The items presented in Figure 5.1 recall the theoretical model proposed in this study.

#### **5.18.1 The independent variable**

As underlined and justified above with reference to Figure 5.1, the external factors are the independent variables. The measurement of these variables was sought

by combining a set of items used in previous studies in order to cover OCR features and social influences (Wu and Shaffer, 1987; Dorfman and Howell, 1988; Hofstede and Bond, 1988; Hofstede, 1991; Taylor and Todd, 1995; Zhang, 1996; Yang et al., 2005; Srite and Karahanna, 2006; Cheung et al., 2008; Hofstede et al., 2008; Cheung et al., 2009; Kim et al., 2009; Al Omoush et al., 2012; Luo et al., 2014; Filieri et al., 2015). The respondents were asked to identify their utilization level of the external factors through their previous reading of OCRs, on the five-point Likert scale above-mentioned (see Table 5.5). The items reflected the six external factors or variables which are: website quality, review provider credibility, argument quality, information sidedness, subjective norms, and cultural values.

Research has suggested that consumers' behavioural intention regarding a product or service are influenced by their perceptions of that product or service; in particular, studies have found that intention expressed via eWOM was directly (or indirectly, when mediated by the constructs of satisfaction and/or commitment) influenced by perceived quality of service (Nusair et al., 2011; Yang, 2017; Hu et al., 2018). Researchers in this area have tended to focus on the cognitive decision-making process while ignoring the role played by individual differences and their influence in the consumer's decision-making process (Serra Cantallops and Salvi, 2014; Yang, 2017; Hu et al., 2018). In an attempt to address this gap in the literature, the current research considers the impact of social influences.

**Table 5.5:** Items for Independent Variables in OCRIM.

Construct	Items	Source
<b>Website Quality</b>		
Website Quality (WEBQUAL)	1-Is easy to use 2-Has well-organized hyperlinks 3-Has customized search functions 4-Provided opportunities to interact with other customers 5-Has high speed of page loading	Filieri et al., 2015; Yang et al., 2005

	6-Is easily accessible from different media 7-Guarantees users' privacy	
<b>Review Provider Credibility</b>		
Review Provider Credibility (RPC)	1-People who left these reviews were trustworthy 2-People who left these reviews were reliable	Cheung et al., 2008; Wu and Shaffer, 1987
<b>Argument Quality</b>		
Argument Quality (ARGQUAL)	1-are convincing 2-are strong 3-are good 4-the online consumer review information makes persuasive arguments 5-The online review information effectively supports its arguments 6-The online review information makes reasonable arguments	Luo et al., 2014; Zhang, 1996
<b>Information Sidedness</b>		
Information Sidedness (INFOS)	1- includes both pros and cons on the discussed target 2-only has one-sided comments (positive or negative) 3-are biased toward one side or the other 4- includes both positive and negative comments	Luo et al., 2014; Cheung et al., 2009
<b>Subjective Norms</b>		
Subjective Norms (SNs)	1- People who influence my behaviour think that I should read online consumer reviews. 2- People who are important to me think that I should read online consumer reviews. 3- People whose opinions I value prefer that I should read online consumer reviews.	Kim et al., 2009; Taylor and Todd, 1995
<b>Cultural Values</b>		
Collectivism (Colvism)	1- Being accepted as a member of a group is more important than having autonomy and independence	Al Omoush et al., 2012; Dorfman and Howell, 1988;

<p>Masculinity (Masc)</p> <p>Power Distance (PwrDistnc)</p> <p>Uncertainty Avoid- ance (UncrAvo)</p>	<p>2- Being accepted as a member of a group is more important than being independent</p> <p>3- Group success is more important than individual success</p> <p>4- Being loyal to a group is more important than individual gain</p> <p>5- Individual rewards are not as important as group welfare</p> <p>6-It is preferable to have a man in a high level position rather than a woman</p> <p>7- In some jobs, a man can always do better than a woman</p> <p>8- While men solve problems with logical analysis, women solve problems with intuition</p> <p>9- It is more important for men to have a professional career and the opportunity for high earnings than it is for women to have a professional career</p> <p>10- Inequalities among people are both expected and desired</p> <p>11- People should respect those in authority because of their position</p> <p>12- People are better off not questioning the decisions of those in authority</p> <p>13- People in authority should take care of their subordinates as they would take care of their children</p> <p>14- People should avoid making changes because things could get worse</p> <p>15- It is better to have a known bad situation than to have an uncertain situation which might be better</p> <p>16- Work that has detailed standard operating procedures spelled out is preferable</p>	<p>Hofstede, 1991; Hofstede and Bond, 1988; Hofstede et al., 2008; Srite and Karahanna, 2006)</p>
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	17- Fear of ambiguous and unfamiliar situations is normal	
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### 5.18.2 The dependent variable

As highlighted above and from Figure 5.1, it can be seen that visit intention is affected indirectly by the influence of OCR features and social influences, indirectly as well by tourist perceptions of OCR information usefulness and trust, and directly by information adoption; hence, visit intention is the dependent variable (Saunders et al., 2012).

Reviewing the literature has revealed that behavioural intention is influenced by subjective norms in various ways. For instance, Hsu and Lam (2006) and Jalilvand and Samiei (2012) found subjective norms to have a strong direct effect on behavioural intention in choosing a travel destination, and Alharbi et al. (2016) reported that within a Saudi citizen population subjective norms had a significant impact on citizens' intention to engage in activities on e-government websites. Abbasi et al. (2015) found culture to have a moderating effect on the relationships between subjective norms, perceived usefulness, perceived ease of use, institute support, government support, and behavioural intention, while Akour et al. (2006) reported that perceived usefulness positively mediated the impact of power distance and ICO on intention to use the Internet, with no significant influence from uncertainty avoidance or femininity. A study on e-commerce in Italy (Capece et al., 2013) reported that power distance and individualism significantly impacted the relationship between trust and adoption intention.

The current study uses the visit intention to illustrate the influence of reading OCRs. The visit intention construct employed three items, namely, how likely it is that: (1) I [the respondent] will travel to the tourist attraction; (2) I [the respondent] will travel to the tourist attraction next time I need a trip; and (3) I [the respondent] will recommend traveling to the tourist attraction to my friends (see Table 5.6). This scale

was based on Erkan and Evans (2016), using Coyle and Thorson's (2001) conceptualization.

**Table 5.6:** Items for Visit Intention.

Items	Source
1- It is very likely that I will travel to the tourist attraction.	Erkan and Evans, 2016; Coyle and Thorson, 2001
2- I will travel to the tourist attraction next time I need a trip.	
3- I will recommend traveling to the tourist attraction to my friends.	

### 5.18.3 Mediating variables

This research explores the indirect impact on visit intention of specific features of OCRs (website quality, review provider credibility, argument quality, and information sidedness) and social influences in the form of subjective norms and cultural values. Based on the IAM and adapted from the PDA model, the present research looks at the mediating roles of perceived information usefulness and perceived information trust, and of information adoption. Hence, these constructs constitute the mediating variables.

As can be seen from Table 5.7 below, all the items used have been employed in previous studies, and they were found to be valid and reliable measurements in those studies. The respondents were asked to rate their perceptions of information usefulness and of information trust, and their intended information adoption with relation to the proposed areas. As before, the items were measured on a five-point Likert scale ranging from 'strongly disagree' to 'strongly agree'. The items for the perceived information usefulness variable were developed by Elwalda et al. (2016). The items for perceived information trust were developed by Pan and Chiou (2011). Regarding information adoption, those items were developed by Cheung et al. (2009; see Table 5.7).

**Table 5.7:** Items for the Mediation With OCRs.

Construct	Items	Source
<b>Perceived information usefulness</b>		
Perceived information usefulness (PIU)	1- online consumer reviews enhance my online tourist attraction choice effectiveness  2- before intending to visit a tourist attraction, I find using online consumer reviews useful	Elwalda et.al 2016
<b>Perceived information trust</b>		
Perceived information trust (PIT)	1- the information from the online consumer reviews is trustworthy  2- the information from the online consumer reviews is reliable  3- the information from the online consumer reviews is credible	Pan and Chiou, 2011
<b>Information adoption</b>		
Information adoption (INFOA)	1- to what extent do you agree with online consumer reviews  2- Online consumer reviews contribute to my knowledge about a tourist attraction.  3- Online consumer reviews make easier for me to choose which tourist attractions to visit.  4- Online reviews enhance my effectiveness in choosing which tourist attraction to visit.  5- They motivate me to choose a tourist attraction for my trip.	Cheung et al., 2009

### 5.19 Using PLS-SEM

Lowry and Gaskin (2014, p. 123) stress the importance of ensuring that ‘the application of statistical analyses is aligned with the theory being tested’. Structural



Equation Modelling (SEM) is a technique capable of analysing models which contain latent variables (Lowry and Gaskin, 2014), and has become one of the most useful, and most widely used, methods for complex data analysis in social science research. SEM involves multivariate methods using factor analysis and regression, allowing for the analysis of a network of causal effects—that is, ‘relationships among measured variables and latent variables as well as between latent variables...such as consumer perceptions, expectations, attitudes, or intention, and their influence on organizational performance measures’—simultaneously, rather than in a fragmentary fashion (Hair et al., 2016, p. xii).

Beginning in the 1970s, covariance-based SEM (CB-SEM) became the SEM method of choice (Hair et al., 2016). CB-SEM is appropriate for confirmatory analysis, in which the theory being tested has already been established, and has been noted to require very large sample sizes when being used on complex models. It also often results in factor indeterminacy, meaning that results often indicate more than one solution that is mathematically reliable. Thus, there is no way of establishing which one of the various solutions produced corresponds with the hypothesis under investigation (Lowry and Gaskin, 2014). As Fornell and Bookstein (1982) comment, ‘An infinite number of unobservables may bear the same pattern of correlations with observed variables and yet be only weakly or even negatively correlated with each other’ (p. 449). Furthermore, covariance-based measurement methods such as LISREL and AMOS impose limits on the examination of moderating effects due to their inherent assumptions (Helm et al., 2010).

First introduced by Wold (1974, 1980, 1982), Partial Least Squares is the second type of SEM (PLS-SEM), and incorporates various techniques, including principal components analysis, multiple regression, multivariate analysis of variance, redundancy analysis, and canonical correlation (Chin et al., 2003; Hair et al., 2011; Kock, 2014).

Therefore, PLS is a multi-technique statistical assessment. Lowry and Gaskin (2014) note that PLS-SEM is appropriate for models that propose higher-order constructs. As Hair et al. (2016) explain, higher-order constructs are those which are sufficiently complex as to ‘also be operationalized at higher levels of abstraction’ (p. 43). More importantly, PLS is appropriate when the aim of the research is prediction, in which a new theory is developed and tested, rather than testing and confirming a pre-existing theory (Hair et al., 2016).

The above factors should be considered when deciding whether to use CB-SEM or PLS-SEM:

Both methods differ from the statistical point of view, so neither of the techniques is generally superior to the other and neither of them is appropriate for all situations. In general, the strengths of PLS-SEM are CB-SEM’s weaknesses, and vice versa. It is important that researchers understand the different applications each approach was developed for and use them accordingly. (Hair et al., 2014a, p.18)

PLS-SEM has become an increasingly popular analytical tool in the social sciences (Henseler et al., 2015), including the field of marketing (Hair et al., 2012). Hair et al. (2016) note that the growing use of this modelling technique ‘can be credited to the method’s ability to handle problematic modeling issues that routinely occur in the social sciences such as unusual data characteristics (e.g. nonnormal data) and highly complex models’ (p. xiii). Since the turn of the millennium (corresponding with the expansion globally of relatively easy and convenient access to the Internet), there has been an explosion of scholarly interest in eWOM/OCRS, producing scores of studies on eWOM in relation to marketing in particular (Rosario et al., 2016). Recent studies in consumer behaviour in areas as diverse as health care and conspicuous consumption have investigated the effects of eWOM using PLS (e.g., Cheung et al., 2008, Cheung et al., 2009; Purcarea et al., 2013; Fang et al., 2014; Thoumrungroje, 2014; Zhang et al., 2014; Gunawan and Huarng, 2015).

The current study focuses on the influence of website quality, review provider credibility, argument quality, information sidedness, subjective norms, and cultural values on OCR readers' visit intention. There is little prior knowledge on how social influence is related to tourist visit intention in the context of OCRs, so the nature of the research is explanatory. Indeed, when the researcher aims to test which independent variables (website quality, review provider credibility, argument quality, information sidedness, and/or social influence) are significant predictors of the dependent variable of visit intention, then this research has to take an explanatory approach.

According to Hair et al. (2016), 'PLS-SEM is used when the goal is predicting key target constructs or identifying key 'driver' constructs. CB-SEM is used when the goal is theory testing, theory confirmation, or the comparison of alternative theories' (p. 23). While the main objective of the current study is to identify the above-mentioned key constructs that influence tourist visit intention in the context of OCRs, the research also aims to develop the Information Adoption Model (IAM) by incorporating social influences which represent subjective norms and cultural values, and further, by expanding it to include behavioural intention, since IAM stops at information adoption. It is therefore determined on the basis of the above that PLS is the most appropriate statistical tool for analysis of the data in this research. Hence, for the estimation of the model with empirical data, the partial least squares path modelling method (Wold, 1982; Hair et al., 2012) was applied using WarpPLS 2.0 software.

### **5.20 Piloting the survey**

As part of this research, a pilot test was conducted to analyse the questionnaire prior to its use in data collection. A pilot study is a small-scale version of a (planned) larger research project; it collects data from a much smaller number of participants, but the participants have the same characteristics as the target participants of the full study (Zikmund et al., 2012). Through the identification of a small group resembling the

sample to be studied, a pilot study aims to distinguish readability problems, unclear instructions, and questions that may cause discomfort to participants (Bryman and Bell, 2011; Cooper and Schindler, 2014). Zikmund et al. (2013) assert that pilot studies are vitally important to one's ability to clarify and refine research questions. By testing questions beforehand, the researcher can ensure that the questionnaire can be administered uniformly to a group of participants (Creswell, 2012); such methods are considered to be rehearsals for the primary study (Kothari, 2004). Moreover, a pilot test may be used to identify whether the questions have been fully understood, as it involves obtaining feedback from a small group of respondents with similar characteristics. Problematic content can then be removed prior to distributing the questionnaire to participants. Overall, by using a pilot study, the researcher can clarify and improve on the flow of content, allowing for increased reliability and validity (Saunders et al., 2012).

Using a select group of participants (colleagues and friends of the researcher known by the researcher to have travelled within the past few months and to have read travel-related OCRs prior to making their travel decisions), a mini-pilot study was completed for this study in order to gather feedback on clarity, readability, layout, and flow. Where negative criticism was received regarding specific items or features, the questionnaire was then revised accordingly to ensure a maximum number of completed and usable results. The layout and flow were also refined to prevent potential impediments to obtaining a full set of answers. For example, the explanatory introduction to question Q6 was amended and clarified, and questions Q10, Q12, and Q18, which requested additional information from the respondent, were clarified by adding the word 'optional' in brackets after each question.

After conducting the mini-pilot study and following the implemented changes, a revised version of the questionnaire was sent electronically via WhatsApp (a cross-

platform instant messaging application, widely used in Saudi Arabia, which allows smartphone users to exchange text, image, video and audio messages free of charge) to a small group of participants selected via parties, known to the researcher, who had recommended suitable participants known to them. The second pilot study was conducted with 48 participants in total (none of whom had participated in the first pilot study) and was used to revise and refine the questionnaire and prepare a final version for the intended study group. This pilot study was also carried out in Saudi Arabia; respondents were individuals living in Saudi Arabia who had stated that they read OCRs of tourist attractions as part of their travel planning.

The pilot survey included questions to clarify whether participants had travel experience in the past, and whether they had recently (in the past 12 months) used OCRs to inform their travel destination decisions, in order to ensure that the experience of using OCRs was recent enough to avoid the likelihood of inaccurate answers. All participants were familiar with and had previously used OCRs. Five participants were excluded from the study because at the beginning of the survey they stated that they did not read OCRs. Completed questionnaires were received from respondents over a period of seven days. Several comments were received which identified some spelling and formatting issues regarding the survey content. Following the feedback acquired, all noted issues were addressed and the document revised accordingly.

For the pilot test, the researcher had obtained contacts from social networking sites (e.g. Facebook, Twitter, and Instagram) and distributed the questionnaire via email or through SMS. WhatsApp also used to send e-messages to potential participants. The goal was that the initial set of contacts would identify and recommend additional qualifying participants. It was expected that both methods would ensure the data collected was derived from an appropriate sample frame in the context of the research objectives.

### **5.20.1 Content validity**

Content validity refers to the extent to which a measure accurately reflects the construct it is intended to measure (Collis and Hussey, 2009) is one of the first steps for evaluating a questionnaire: the first draft was checked with three academics (including the supervisors of this research) and three doctoral research students in the Business School (Plymouth University). The mini-pilot test was then conducted with eight Saudi participants (all of them seasoned travellers and four of them professionals in the field of tourism marketing and/or experts on the tourism industry). The researcher was present while they filled in the survey; eight completed questionnaires were duly received. This procedure ensures that the questions being used are clear, grammatically correct, hold the correct meaning, and not overly broad, and that the covering letter is explicit, brief, accurate, and targets the right group of people. By doing so, the most efficient and valid results are obtained during data collection; it also allows the researcher to remove unnecessary questions where appropriate. The amended questionnaire was then sent for verification to the same group of eight experts, who were asked to provide feedback with regards to its clarity, readability, layout, and flow. The resulting feedback was used to revise a version of the questionnaire for the next pilot study. As described earlier, the questionnaire translated and then back-translated in accordance with standard practice (see Appendix C, 1 & 2).

The questionnaire includes 33 questions and is split into three thematic sections: (1) travel and internet use experience (5 questions); (2) OCR reading behaviour (19 questions); and (3) demographic information (8 questions).

### **5.20.2 Construct validity and reliability**

Bryman (2012) explains reliability as ‘the consistency of a measure of a concept’ (2012, p. 169). One important factor contributing to reliability is stability:

measures ought to remain stable over a given period of time (2012). Thus, together with validity, reliability identifies whether the values precisely reflect the concept in question (Cooper and Schindler, 2003). There are several statistical techniques which can be used to test for reliability and validity, to be applied during data analysis. However, as part of the research stage, the author can ensure that the validity of the measures and constructs is maintained by relying on instruments that have already been used in a similar context and published in highly ranked journals, such *Journal of Tourism Management*, *Computers in Human Behavior*, *International Journal of Electronic Commerce and Information Management*, *Journal of Internet Research*, and *Journal of Interactive Marketing*. This in turn increases aspects of validity throughout. Table 5.8 identifies the sources of the relevant measurements for this study and each journal's grade based on the *Academic Journal Quality Guide* published by the Association of Business Schools (ABS, 2015).

**Table 5.8:** Sources Used in This Study.

Source	Journal	Grade
Filieri et al. (2015)	<i>Tourism Management</i>	4*
Kim et al. (2009)	<i>Tourism Management</i>	4*
Al Omoush et al. (2012)	<i>Computers in Human Behavior</i>	3*
Cheung et al. (2009)	<i>International Journal of Electronic Commerce</i>	3*
Cheung et al. (2008)	<i>Internet Research: Electronic Networking Applications and Policy</i>	2*
Erkan and Evans (2016)	<i>Computers in Human Behavior</i>	3*
Luo et al. (2014)	<i>International Journal of Information Management</i>	2*
Pan and Chiou (2011)	<i>Journal of Interactive Marketing (formerly JDM)</i>	3*
Elwalda et al. (2016)	<i>Computers in Human Behavior</i>	3*
Picazo-Vela et al. (2010)	<i>Computers in Human Behavior</i>	3*

During the pilot study, the author has the opportunity to identify whether certain constructs measure similar attributes – the level of correlation between values. One particular way of measuring reliability is through the use of Cronbach’s alpha coefficient. Cronbach’s alpha coefficient values vary from 0 to 1, where higher values indicate an enhanced reliability. According to Pallant (2007), 0.7 represents a satisfactory reliability. Field (2009) and Pallant (2007) agree that if the Cronbach’s alpha is less than 0.7, then the Corrected Item–Total Correlation values shown in the Item–Total Statistics should also be checked. Tables 5.9 and 5.10 show each variable used in the study with its Cronbach’s alpha for the influence of online consumer reviews.



**Table 5.9:** Cronbach's Alpha for the Influence of OCRs.

Constructs	Number of Items	Cronbach's Alpha
Website Quality (WEBQUAL)	7	.870
Review Provider Credibility (RPC)	2	.963
Argument Quality (ARGQUAL)	6	.971
Information Sidedness (INFOS)	4	.939
Subjective Norms (SNs)	3	.955
Perceived Information Usefulness (PIU)	2	.959
Perceived Information Trust (PIT)	3	.971
Information Adoption (INFOA)	5	.974
Visit Intention (VINT)	3	.975

**Table 5.10:** Cronbach's Alpha for Cultural Values.

Constructs	Number of Items	Cronbach's alpha
Cultural values	17	.973
Collectivism	5	.697
Masculinity	4	.965
Power distance	4	.944
Uncertainty avoidance	4	.944

As can be seen in Tables 5.9 and 5.10, the construct reliability results demonstrate that there is a correlation between the items measured in each construct. Using Cronbach's alpha coefficient, it can be seen that the cultural value construct of Collectivism is below 0.70. However, despite this adequate result, it was more practical to retain all items in the data collection, as the pilot study was not large enough to decide on construct measurements. Moreover, it can be concluded that all 13 constructs are reliable due to the distribution of the respondents' answers for each item/indicator.

This suggests that the participants have the ability to discriminate between all 13 concepts.

As identified previously, a pilot study can identify possible problems that may arise, and aids in addressing such issues prior to the final study. In this pilot, however, no substantial problems were found; most importantly, there were no negative remarks regarding the content of the questionnaire. This was not unexpected as none of the components are self-developed, but rather all have been pre-tested using previously published articles in highly ranked journals, as indicated above and in Table 5.8. Thus, it is believed that the questionnaire served its purpose well for the full survey of 384 participants.

### **5.21 Summary of the chapter**

This chapter has presented the methodological steps followed in this study. The research hypotheses were stated and the philosophical assumptions underpinning the present research outlined. It has been emphasized that the study adopted a post-positivist stance and approach. In fact, the author examined the influence of OCRs on tourist visit intention, which influence was clearly external to the researcher and thus was observable and could be objectively measured through the operationalization of the intervening variables. Despite this positivist point of departure, it is believed that this impact cannot be totally understood, for the author/researcher recognized as well the effects of PIU and PIT upon information adoption and then on visit intention.

Subsequently, various research approaches were introduced along with the justification for the chosen approach. Next, several research strategies were discussed, and the reason given for the survey strategy selected. The research methods and the instruments of the variables used in this study were presented. A positivist survey comprising a questionnaire to be administrated in person was used to address the research objectives set by the study. These would identify the interactions between the different variables of the

study. The study was conducted in Saudi Arabia, where the questionnaires were distributed via travel and tourism agencies. With respect to the item measurements used, these were extracted from past studies published in highly ranked journals, which enhances their validity and reliability. Additionally, pilot testing, analysis of the data, and ethical considerations were also presented. The following chapter presents the results and findings of this research.

## **Chapter Six: Data Analysis**

## 6.1 Introduction

This chapter presents the results of the quantitative analysis. Initial descriptive statistics of the sample are presented first. These data are taken from the responses to the questionnaire (Appendix B) and include profiles of respondents, distributions of the data, any missing values, and any outliers (as defined below). Using PLS-SEM (WarpPLS 5.0), the measurement and structural models are shown and described. As Hair et al. (2011, p. 141) explain, the measurement or ‘outer’ model investigates how well the latent variables in the research model are measured by assessing the reliability and validity of each of the first- and second-order constructs; the structural or ‘inner’ model evaluates the relationships between these variables by examining path coefficients, *p*-values, *R*-squared values, and effect sizes; in addition, the *t*-test is employed to check for non-response. All these analytical tools are to either confirm or dismiss the relationship hypothesized by the OCRIM model proposed in this thesis. The findings and conclusions at the end of this chapter summarize the results of the research.

## 6.2 Descriptive statistics

Before undertaking the inferential part of the analysis, it is important to perform a descriptive analysis of the data sample. As Zikmund et al. (2013) explain, a descriptive analysis allows the researcher to describe the basic characteristics of the investigated sample. This sub-section presents and discusses the sample characteristics, data distributions, missing values, and outliers. Sarstedt and Mooi (2014) define outliers as ‘values situated far from all the other observations that may influence results substantially’ (p. 99). They note that while outliers are often due to data collection or data entry errors, ‘exceptionally low or high values... [may simply be] part of reality’ (Sarstedt and Mooi, 2014, p. 100), that is, some outliers may accurately reflect the actual phenomena being recorded.

### 6.2.1 Characteristics of the sample

This section describes the demographic characteristics of the participants in the main survey. It also outlines the factors that influence tourist visit intention. It would have been useful to be able to compare this sample with the demographics of the target population (i.e., KSA residents who engage in travel for the purpose of tourism); however, despite a diligent search effort, no published data on this population was found.

The sample size is 384 potential tourists, all residing in Saudi Arabia. The sample consists of various local tourists who visited tourist or travel agency branches in the city of Jeddah between July and December 2017. The sample contains local tourists of diverse demographic origins, as Jeddah is one of the largest cities in Saudi, and it draws people from all over the country. The sample is made up of Saudi and non-Saudi tourists who live in the kingdom.

Of those who reported their gender, 49.73 percent ( $n = 191$ ) were male and 50.26 percent ( $n = 193$ ) were female, which indicates that the gender balance of the sample closely reflected that of the general population. The sample used in another study that examines a similar topic (Di Pietro et al., 2012) is also made up of almost equal numbers of male and female respondents. The majority (70.25%) of respondents were married. The average tourist was in the 35–44 (years) age range, which seems logical considering that in Saudi Arabian society, by this age the average individual would have started a family and would be financially independent (GASTAT, 2017). Moreover, Di Pietro et al. (2012), who examined how social networks work as a tool to achieve information for the choice of tourism destination, reported a similar average age range for their sample. At 51.56 percent, those who hold a bachelor's degree were the largest group among other education levels in the sample, a characteristic which has been reported by other studies that examine similar topics (Hsu and Lam, 2006;

Jalilvand and Samiei, 2012) . Within this sample, respondents tend to be experienced in terms of using the Internet: 75.52 percent of them had used it for more than six years, which indicates that they would make use of the Internet as at least one method of searching for information when choosing a tourist destination. 45.87 percent of the respondents had previously taken one to three trips for tourism purposes when they referred to OCRs. A previous study by Jalilvand and Samiei (2012) investigating the impact of eWOM on a tourism destination choice reported the following: 22.6 percent of their respondents had taken one tourism trip previously, and 11.5 percent of their respondents had taken two such trips, while only 8.1 percent of the respondents had taken three to five tourism trips.

All open questions were reviewed prior to starting the data analysis process. However, they contained little, if any valuable information related to the focus of this research, as most of the open questions were left empty, and the few respondents that did answer these questions filled them in with examples of tourism destinations. Of the respondents surveyed in the present study, 85.93 percent were Saudi; as for the non-Saudis, most of them had resided in the country for less than three years. Table 6.1 below presents the characteristics of the research sample.

**Table 6.1:** Demographic Statistics of the Main Sample.

Characteristics	Group	Overall sample <i>N</i> = 384	
		<i>N</i>	%
Gender	Male	191	49.73%
	Female	193	50.26%
Age	18-24	33	8.59%
	25-34	118	30.72%
	35-44	141	36.71%

	45-54	75	19.53%
	55-64	17	4.42%
	≥ 65	0	0.00%
Education	some high school	24	6.25%
	high school diploma	42	10.93%
	bachelor's degree	198	51.56%
	master's degree	72	18.75%
	PhD	5	1.30%
	Other	43	11.19%
Marital status	Single	79	17.96%
	Married	269	70.05%
	Divorced	36	11.45%
	Other	0	0.00%
Internet use experience	< 1 year	7	1.45%
	1 to 3 years	26	6.77%
	4 to 6 years	61	15.88%
	> 6 years	290	75.52%
Number of travel trips for tourism purpose during the previous 12 months	No travel	50	10.33%
	1 to 3 times	222	45.87%
	4 to 6 times	75	15.50%
	7 to 10 times	37	9.63%
	> ten times	0	0%
Citizenship status	Saudi	330	85.93%
	non-Saudi	54	11.16%
Length of residence in KSA	0 to 3 years	0	0.00%
	4 to 6 years	4	7.69%
	7 to 12 years	14	25.92%
	> 12 years	37	71.15%

### 6.2.3 Data distribution

Properties of the distribution scores are examined in order to identify the number of occurrences of each score (frequency distribution). Theoretically, there should be



normal distribution, in which the variables are distributed in a symmetrical pattern around the centre of each score, with the highest frequencies concentrated at the middle and lowest frequencies near the ends, (Field, 2009). This type of distribution results in the ‘bell curve’ shape when plotted on a graph (Pallant, 2007). As mentioned previously, PLS path modelling is a ‘soft-modelling’ technique that can be used where relationships between variables are complex and there are few assumptions that data is normally distributed; this is why it is frequently employed in business and marketing research (Hair et al., 2011). PLS-SEM is particularly useful when data distribution is skewed or otherwise exhibits non-normal distribution (Wong, 2011). In the present investigation there is no necessity for the data to be normally distributed; thus no test for normality need be performed.

#### **6.2.4 Non-response bias**

As mentioned in Chapter Five, the sample survey is a valuable tool for quantitative research because findings gathered in this way are usually more generalizable than data gathered via qualitative methods such as interviews (Saunders et al., 2012). The actual usefulness of the survey is nonetheless potentially diminished or even nullified by a factor known as ‘non-response bias’, which is the result when respondents to a survey differ in significant ways from those who did not respond to the same survey (Armstrong and Overton, 1977). Researchers disagree as to what percentage of responses versus non-responses would be considered sufficient to avoid non-response bias, but they generally agree that it is prudent to test for non-response bias so as to ascertain that the results are applicable to the larger population (Mat Roni, 2014),

A non-response bias analysis examines whether respondents of the study were different from non-respondents. Past research has shown that non-respondents behave similarly to late respondents or respondents who respond after a reminder. To test for

non-response bias, Mat Roni (2014) suggests two possible techniques: (1) small-scale post-hoc analysis, in which a small-scale survey is run after the main survey has been completed, and (2) splitting the data between early responses and late responses (p. 31). With the early and late response method, it is supposed that ‘subjects who respond less readily are more like [similar to] non-respondents’. ‘Less readily’ has been defined as answering later, or as requiring more prodding to answer (Armstrong and Overton, 1977, p. 398). Researchers have carried out their analyses with various ratios of early to late responses: Armstrong and Overton (1977) selected 53 of 112 items (47%), and Lambert and Harrington (1990) took 28 of 56 items.

As explained earlier, for the purposes of the non-response bias test, the late respondents are ‘stand-ins’ for non-respondents (Armstrong and Overton, 1977). That is, this comparison of early respondents to late respondents assumes that late respondents behave in the same manner as non-respondents. The *t*-test provides a basis upon which to compare the scores of two sample groups: in this instance, early and late respondents (Mat Roni, 2014, p. 47). Generally, it is recommended to use another type of test (such as the Mann-Whitney U test) when the dataset shows other than normal distribution (Mat Roni, 2014, p. 31). In the present study, the author does not have late and early respondents, as no reminders were used when collecting the data, thus, the analysis is unable to examine non-response bias.

### **6.2.5 Missing data and outliers**

Missing values are responses which have not been completed by the respondent, whether intentionally or unintentionally (Field, 2009). When using WarpPLS, any missing values are ‘filled in’ using the mean of the other values of that same factor (Kock, 2013). If more than 15 percent of the values in a dataset are missing, it is recommended for the researcher to consider removing such an observation (Hair et al., 2014). This is because if one simply replaces the missing values with means, variation

in the data will be decreased, which diminishes the prospect of obtaining significant and useful data (Hair et al., 2016). Therefore, with the present data, the researcher has removed all observations with missing values higher than 15 percent; this resulted in omitting 13 cases. The number of responses was thus reduced from 397 to 384 usable questionnaires, which, as mentioned in Chapter Five, Section 5.13.1, is more than enough for path analysis.

As mentioned earlier, outliers are responses or values which differ greatly from the rest of the values in the sample. Outliers can distort the mean and artificially increase the standard deviation (Field, 2009; Zikmund et al., 2013). According to Kock (2013), outliers may significantly affect the shape of the relationship between the data points. This is why many scholars recommend removing outliers from the dataset (Field, 2009; Saunders et al., 2012; Zikmund et al., 2013, p. 413). Despite this major concern, Kock (2013) asserts that deleting outliers may be the wrong decision, as the presence of outlying data points can more accurately portray the actual nature of the relationship; thus omitting them should only be done if the outliers are the result of errors in measurement. For the purposes of the current research, the WarpPLS software provides an effective way to deal with outliers without having to omit them from the dataset. WarpPLS software can rank the data in running the analysis, which reduces the value distances for the outliers; this avoids the problem of a decrease in the sample size, which would result from removing outliers.

### **6.3 Analytical statistics**

#### **6.3.1 Common method bias**

Common method bias is the result of variances in data produced by a measurement instrument rather than by the population being studied, as, for example, when the design of a questionnaire influences the response of the respondent (MacKenzie and Podsakoff, 2012). When common method bias occurs in the context of

PLS-SEM, it is caused, not by the study model, but by the measurement method used. According to Kock (2015), a ‘possible cause of common method bias is the implicit social desirability associated with answering questions in a questionnaire in a particular way, causing the indicators to share a certain amount of common variation’ (p. 3).

Researchers disagree about what constitutes common method bias and how to remedy it; some have questioned whether it even needs to be remedied (Richardson et al., 2009). Podsakoff et al. (2003) offer several recommendations aimed at preventing common method bias during the data collection phase. An important starting point is to understand the underlying mathematics which contribute to common method bias, and employing a model by way of illustration can aid in this (Kock, 2015). One method of identifying common method bias is via full collinearity assessment, proposed by Kock and his associates (Kock and Lynn, 2012; Kock and Gaskins, 2014) which examines the model for the existence of both vertical and lateral collinearity. Vertical collinearity is when two or more predictors measure the same construct (‘predictor-predictor redundancy’; Kock and Lynn, 2012, p. 547). Lateral collinearity describes a situation in which two or more variables which are supposed to be in a causal relationship actually measure the same construct (‘predictor-criterion collinearity’; Kock and Lynn, 2012, p. 547). Models containing multiple variables are tested for the presence of vertical collinearity, whereas such models are rarely assessed for the presence of lateral collinearity (Kock and Lynn, 2012).

If common method bias is determined to be present, it should be remedied by removing or reassigning the indicators and/or by removing or aggregating the latent variables, and/or by hierarchical analysis (Kock and Lynn, 2012). In order to avoid common method bias, the researcher conducted a statistical test for common method bias using Harman’s one-factor. According to Podsakoff et al. (2003), Harman’s one-factor is ‘one of the most widely used techniques...to address the issue of common

method variance' (p. 889). All the items were entered into principal component factor analysis. In this test, bias would be found if a single factor emerging from the factor analysis accounts for more than 50 percent of the variances in the model. As for the research model, the first factor accounted for only 32.97 percent of the variances, which is well below the critical 50 percent mark (See Appendix E). Hence, the Harman's test provides support for the absence of common method bias (Mattila and Enz, 2002; Lings et al., 2014).

In order to further ensure that common method bias was not present, following Podsakoff et al. (2003) and Williams et al. (2003) a common method factor, with indicators matching those of all the main constructs of the study model, was included in the PLS model. The variances of each indicator were substantively explained by the main construct and by the method. As shown in Appendix G, the results demonstrate that the average substantively explained variance of the indicators is .93, while the average method-based variance is .010. Thus the ratio of substantive variance to method variance is about 93:1. Given that the method variance is of such low magnitude and non-significant, it was concluded that the method is not likely to contaminate the study results obtained.

Earlier in this chapter, characteristics of the sample were presented, and the data was assessed for outliers, missing values, and errors in measurement; in the next section the research model is tested. As explained below, a PLS-SEM analysis should either confirm or reject the hypotheses of this study.

### **6.3.2 PLS-SEM analysis**

The present research employs Partial Least Squares (PLS), a form of Structural Equation Modelling (SEM) as the statistical tool to analyse the results of the study. SEM allows for the analysis of a network of causal effects simultaneously, rather than in a fragmentary fashion. PLS is one of two forms of SEM (the alternative method is

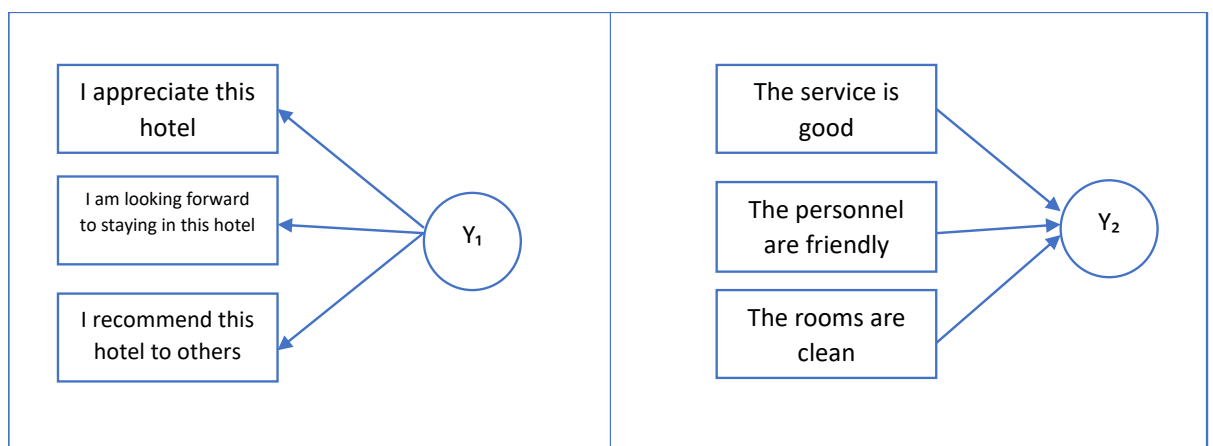
Covariance-Based SEM), and incorporates various techniques, including principal components analysis, multiple regression, multivariate analysis of variance, redundancy analysis, and canonical correlation (Chin et al., 2003). Lowry and Gaskin (2014) note that PLS is appropriate for models that propose higher-order constructs. More importantly, PLS is appropriate when the aim of the research is to build and test a new theory, rather than confirming a pre-existing theory.

Nitzl (2016) mentions the suitability of PLS-SEM for models which ‘reflect some established psychological processes’ via ‘measurement constructs such as behavioural intention, attitudes or subjective norms for a specific judgement and decision-making situation’ and that include structural constructs which allow for cause-and-effect hypotheses (2016, pp. 19–20). Although Nitzl is referring to the field of management accounting, his description equally fits the topic under investigation in the present study because of its focus on intent and its predictors. An important distinction to be aware of is the one between the measurement or ‘outer’ model and the structural or ‘inner’ model. The former describes the relationship between each latent variable and its indicator, whereas the latter explains relationships between latent variables. PLS-SEM follows a two-phase approach, assessing first the measurement model and then the structural model (Hair et al., 2011, p. 141). Thus, PLS provides a test of both external and internal validity. This is vital, as Hair et al. (2012) have noted that without reliability and validity assessments, the structural model would be biased and thus unreliable.

### **6.3.3 Determining nature of constructs**

Prior to employing the measurement model it is necessary to identify the nature of the constructs used in the study. As the variables are latent (inferred, unobservable), indicators are needed in order to establish that they are present, and variations in these indicators indicate variations in the latent construct (Henseler et al., 2009). Such

indicators are either reflective or formative. Reflective indicators of a latent construct are assumed to be caused by that same variable (Jarvis et al., 2003); they are also considered as equivalent and internally consistent, such that omitting one of these indicators would not alter the measurement of the construct (Mackenzie et al., 2011; Hair et al., 2012). Two decades ago, Diamantopoulos (1999) observed that reflective indicators were the measures of choice in business and marketing research, and this is still the case today (Hair et al., 2016). Formative indicators, on the other hand, are said to be the cause of the latent construct. They generally do not correlate with each other and thus are not interchangeable; removing one of the formative indicators could affect the measurement of the variable (Jarvis et al., 2003). Figure 6.1 below shows the differences between reflective and formative indicators.



**Figure 6.1.** Reflective vs. Formative Measurements.

*Source: Adapted from Hair et al. (2016).*

According to the above-mentioned criteria, all constructs in the current study are considered to be reflective. Moreover, the current research indicators are determined not to be interchangeable: that is, each item encapsulates a specific feature of the construct's domain. When examined together, the items 'construct' the meaning of the relationships

in the model and thus to omit an item might change the nature of the construct (see Hair et al., 2016). For instance, among the constructs of the present study, changes in the review provider credibility variable are reflected in changes in the indicators of trustworthiness and reliability.

#### **6.3.4 Measurement model of reflective constructs**

In order to analyse reflective constructs, the reliability of individual indicators and latent constructs must be evaluated, and convergent and discriminant validities (these two latter terms are explained below) must be measured (Hair, et al., 2014a). PLS-SEM is said to be able to analyse both reflective and formative measurement models (Hair et al, 2016).

##### *a) Individual item reliability*

In order to assess the reliability of individual items in reflective indicators, the correlation loadings of these indicators must be examined (Hulland, 1999). According to Lorho et al. (2006), ‘Correlation loadings are commonly used in bi-linear models to highlight relationships between the original variables of a dataset and the latent variables resulting from the model’ (p. 1). Initially, it was proposed that only indicators with loadings of .70 or higher should be retained, on the assumption that error variance ought to be substantially less than variance shared between an indicator and its construct. In empirical studies loadings of less than .70 are not uncommon. Therefore, the threshold for loadings is considered acceptable at .50 or above (Hulland, 1999; Kock, 2011). Nevertheless, this study aims for a threshold of .70 or above. Furthermore,  $p$  values for loadings of all items should be significant ( $p < .05$ ; Hair et al., 2014).

Hulland (1999) notes that a low loading value may be due to an indicator being used incorrectly or out of context, or simply the result of vague or ambiguous wording in the description of the indicator. The indicators’ loadings and their  $p$  values are presented in Appendix F. After deleting only one item with loadings below .70, almost



all the combined loadings of the retained indicators were greater than the .70 threshold, which means that the indicators used in the sample present a satisfactory individual reliability. The variable that was removed was power distance, which has the properties of a reflective construct and so omitting it would affect the measurement of the variable.

*b) Construct reliability*

Evaluation of the internal consistency of a variable is known as construct reliability (Hair et al., 2011). It assesses the extent to which respondents share the same understanding of the indicators of the latent variables. Reliability is assessed via composite reliability and by assessing Cronbach's alpha coefficients (Ruiz et al., 2008; Ketkar et al., 2012; Kock, 2011, 2013). A variable's reliability is considered satisfactory if it measures between .60 and .70 in exploratory research and between .70 and .90 in explanatory research. Using Cronbach's alpha, values of .70 and above are considered satisfactory (Mackenzie et al., 2011). Table 6.2 shows the composite reliability and Cronbach's alpha values for each construct in this study.

**Table 6.2:** Composite Reliability and Cronbach's Alpha.

Constructs	Composite Reliability	Cronbach's Alpha
WEBQUAL	.935	.918
RPC	.980	.960
ARGQUAL	.943	.927
INFOS	.934	.903
SNs	.959	.935
Colvism	.961	.949
Masc	.960	.944
PwrDistnc	.850	.753
UnCrAvo	.800	.669
PIU	.964	.925
PIT	.965	.945
INFOA	.922	.894
VINT	.935	.895

As evident from Table 6.2, both composite reliability and Cronbach's alpha coefficients are well above the threshold of .70 for most of the reflective latent variables, except for UnCrAvo which was .669. Hence, the reliability of the reflective measurement instruments utilized in this study is satisfactory. As for the relatively low value for UnCrAvo, it could mean that this item has relatively low internal consistency, or it may indicate that the uncertainty avoidance dimension is not a consistent measure of cultural values.

*c) Construct validity*

Construct validity is an evaluation of whether the indicators actually measure the latent construct as intended (Henseler et al., 2009); it measures the extent to which the

indicators represent the latent variable (Hair et al., 2010). Construct validity of reflective indicators is assessed by looking at two sorts of validity: convergent validity and discriminant validity (Hair et al., 2011). Convergent validity evaluates the degree of correlation between two indicators for the same construct (Hair et al., 2010; Hair et al., 2014). This is accomplished by examining how each indicator varies in relation to its latent construct via the average variance extracted (AVE) of the latent variable. An indicator is said to have good convergent validity with an AVE of .50 or above, meaning that the latent variable can explain more than 50 percent of the variance of its indicator (Henseler et al., 2009; Hair et al., 2011; Mackenzie et al., 2011; Peng and Lai, 2012; Schmiedel et al., 2014). Table 6.3 presents the AVE for each construct in this study, and shows that AVE for all reflective variables is higher than .50, an indication of the satisfactory convergent validity of the measurement constructs.

**Table 6.3:** AVE for All Constructs.

Constructs	AVE
WEBQUAL	.675
RPC	.961
ARGQUAL	.734
INFOS	.779
SNs	.886
Colvism	.833
Masc	.858
PwrDistnc	.605
UncrAvo	.506
PIU	.930
PIT	.901
INFOA	.705
VINT	.827

Discriminant validity complements convergent validity in that it evaluates how distinct from each other the indicators of two conceptually similar constructs are (Hair et al., 2014; Hulland, 1999). A latent variable is considered to be unique if it measures a feature not described by other constructs; this is strong discriminant validity (Hair et al., 2014). Two main criteria are commonly used to determine discriminant validity: indicator cross-loadings and the Fornell-Larcker test (Hair et al., 2016, p. 115). The first test compares the indicator's loading from its latent variable with loadings from other latent constructs; if the former is higher than the latter, that points to discriminant validity (Hair et al., 2011; Hair et al., 2014; Schmiedel et al., 2014). The Fornell-Larcker criterion requires that a latent construct shares more variance with its own indicators than with other indicators (Hulland, 1999; Henseler et al., 2009; Kock, 2011).

When this occurs, the square root of AVE of the latent variable will be higher than that of other variables (Hulland, 1999; Ketkar et al., 2012; Peng and Lai, 2012). Whereas the cross-loading test evaluates discriminant validity at the level of the indicator, the Fornell-Larcker criterion does so at the level of the latent variable (Henseler et al., 2009).

As shown in Table 6.4, the square root of AVE for each latent variable is greater than any other correlations for that same construct. Moreover, all the loadings of the indicators with their latent variables are higher than the cross-loadings, from which it can be inferred that the discriminant validity of each of the latent constructs is satisfactory.

**Table 6.4:** Square Root of AVEs.

	WEB-QUAL	RPC	ARG-QUAL	INFOS	SNs	Colvism	Masc	Pwr-Distnc	Uncr-Avo	PIU	PIT	INFOA	VINT
WEBQUAL	(.821)	.541	.699	.592	.546	.518	.127	.337	.337	.386	.436	.495	.495
RPC	.541	(.981)	.614	.524	.538	.551	.103	.306	.338	.293	.363	.478	.400
ARGQUAL	.699	.614	(.857)	.723	.660	.569	.079	.376	.447	.418	.428	.536	.422
INFOS	.592	.524	.723	(.883)	.600	.558	.035	.294	.383	.408	.428	.423	.446
SNs	.546	.538	.660	.600	(.941)	.630	-.011	.352	.364	.433	.464	.477	.413
Colvism	.518	.551	.569	.558	.630	(.913)	.099	.409	.495	.453	.493	.535	.571
Masc	.127	.103	.079	.035	-.011	.099	(.926)	.261	.062	.052	-.035	.021	.023
PwrDistnc	.337	.306	.376	.294	.352	.409	.261	(.778)	.398	.335	.434	.308	.337
UncrAvo	.337	.338	.447	.383	.364	.495	.062	.398	(.711)	.424	.411	.496	.373
PIU	.386	.293	.418	.408	.433	.453	.052	.335	.424	(.965)	.540	.521	.429
PIT	.436	.363	.428	.428	.464	.493	-.035	.434	.411	.540	(.949)	.520	.587
INFOA	.380	.478	.536	.423	.477	.535	.021	.308	.496	.521	.520	(.840)	.559
VINT	.495	.400	.422	.446	.413	.571	.023	.337	.373	.429	.587	.559	(.909)

***Collinearity test***

In addition to testing for construct reliability and validity, it is recommended to conduct a full collinearity test (Kock and Lynn, 2012). As explained earlier in this chapter, collinearity is when two or more indicators are highly correlated, thus resulting in redundancy between constructs (Hair et al., 2014). With PLS-SEM, it is advised to use the full variance inflation factor (VIF) for each predictor variable in order to measure full collinearity, and to check for common method bias as well (Kock and Lynn, 2012). Hair et al. (2016, p. 143) defined VIF as ‘the reciprocal of the tolerance (i.e.,  $VIF_x = 1/TOL_x$ )’. According to Hair et al. (2012), a full VIF of less than 5.0 would mean that no collinearity exists. Table 6.5 illustrates the full collinearity (full

VIFs). As can be observed, all VIFs are below the threshold of 5.0, which indicates an absence of both collinearity and common method bias between the constructs.

The results of the foregoing tests confirmed both validity and reliability of the model constructs. These results were expected, as all the constructs have been used in previous studies in similar research contexts.

**Table 6.5:** Full VIFs.

Constructs	Full VIFs
WEBQUAL	2.369
RPC	1.914
ARGQUAL	3.568
INFOS	2.411
SNs	2.332
Colvism	2.454
Masc	1.148
PwrDistnc	1.520
UncrAvo	1.612
PIU	1.715
PIT	2.070
INFOA	2.190
VINT	2.102

### 6.3.5 Structural model results

In the previous section, the measurement model was described and evaluated, including verification of the reliability and validity of each variable employed in the present research. In this section, the structural model is examined in order to describe and analyse the relationships between the constructs under investigation. An accurate

assessment of the structural model depends on a measurement model which is valid and reliable (Henseler et al., 2009). In evaluating the structural model, the following are all assessed: significance and relevance of the structural relationships,  $R^2$  values, effect sizes ( $f^2$ ), and Stone–Geisser’s  $Q^2$  (second quartile: the median of the data; Hair et al., 2014). These will all be addressed in the ensuing paragraphs.

### ***Model fit indices***

In PLS-SEM the model fit is described by three indices: average path coefficient (APC), average  $R$ -squared (ARS), and average variance inflation factor (AVIF). According to Kock (2011), model fit indices are satisfactory when  $p$  values of both APC and ARS are significant ( $p < .05$ ) and the AVIF is less than 5. Some researchers in the field are of the opinion that goodness-of-fit measures (GoF) are likely irrelevant for PLS-SEM (Hulland, 1999; Hair et al., 2013). Chin (1998) explains that this is because PLS-SEM involves formative as well as reflective indicators, whereas GoF measures only reflective indicators. Hair et al. (2014) concur with this view, and since the current study employs only reflective indicators, GoF is an appropriate measurement tool. Table 6.6 presents the model fit indices for the study model. It is clear from the data presented that the indices all match the criteria of the model fit.



**Table 6.6:** Model Fit Indices.

Indices	Results	Criterion
Average path coefficient (APC)	.260 $p < .001$	$p$ value less than .05
Average R-squared (ARS)	.332 $p < .001$	$p$ value less than .05
Average adjusted R-squared (AARS)	.325 $p < .001$	$p$ value less than .05
Average block VIF (AVIF)	1.685	Acceptable if $\leq 5$ ; Ideally $\leq 3.3$
Average full collinearity VIF (AFVIF)	2.099	Acceptable if $\leq 5$ ; Ideally $\leq 3.3$

***Path analysis (structural relationships)***

The results of the data analysis of the study sample are presented in Figure 6.2 in this section. The direction of the effects between the constructs and their  $\beta$  coefficients, with corresponding  $p$  values, are indicated via the arrows and the strength of these effects is described by the accompanying numerical expressions. ‘Endogenous’ variables are constructs explained by the relationships between functions within the model. The variance of endogenous latent constructs in the structural model is expressed by the  $R^2$  values (Hair et al., 2014), as explained below. The model shown in Figure 6.2 denotes the relationships hypothesized and proposed in Chapter Three, and are represented by the path coefficients ( $\beta$ ). The standardized values of the  $\beta$  coefficients range from -1 to +1: a value approaching +1 indicates a strong positive relationship; conversely, a value which approaches -1 indicates a weak or negative relationship (Hair et al., 2014).

With respect to the sample in the present study, Figure 6.2 illustrates that subjective norms (SNs) had the strongest impact on perceived information usefulness

(PIU) ( $\beta = .25, p < .01$ ), followed by the effect of website quality ( $\beta = .18, p < .01$ ) and of information sidedness ( $\beta = .14, p = .02$ ), while argument quality and review provider credibility were found to have non-significant influence on PIU. As for the influence of cultural values on subjective norms, collectivism had the strongest effect ( $\beta = .54, p < .01$ ), followed by the effects of power distance ( $\beta = .14, p = .02$ ) and uncertainty avoidance (UA) ( $\beta = .12, p = .03$ ), while masculinity was found to have non-significant influence on SNs. Perceived information usefulness had a positive significant effect on perceived information trust ( $\beta = .56, p < .01$ ). In turn, perceived information trust had a significant effect on information adoption ( $\beta = .53, p < .01$ ). Information adoption had a significant effect on visit intention  $\beta = .59, p < .01$ .

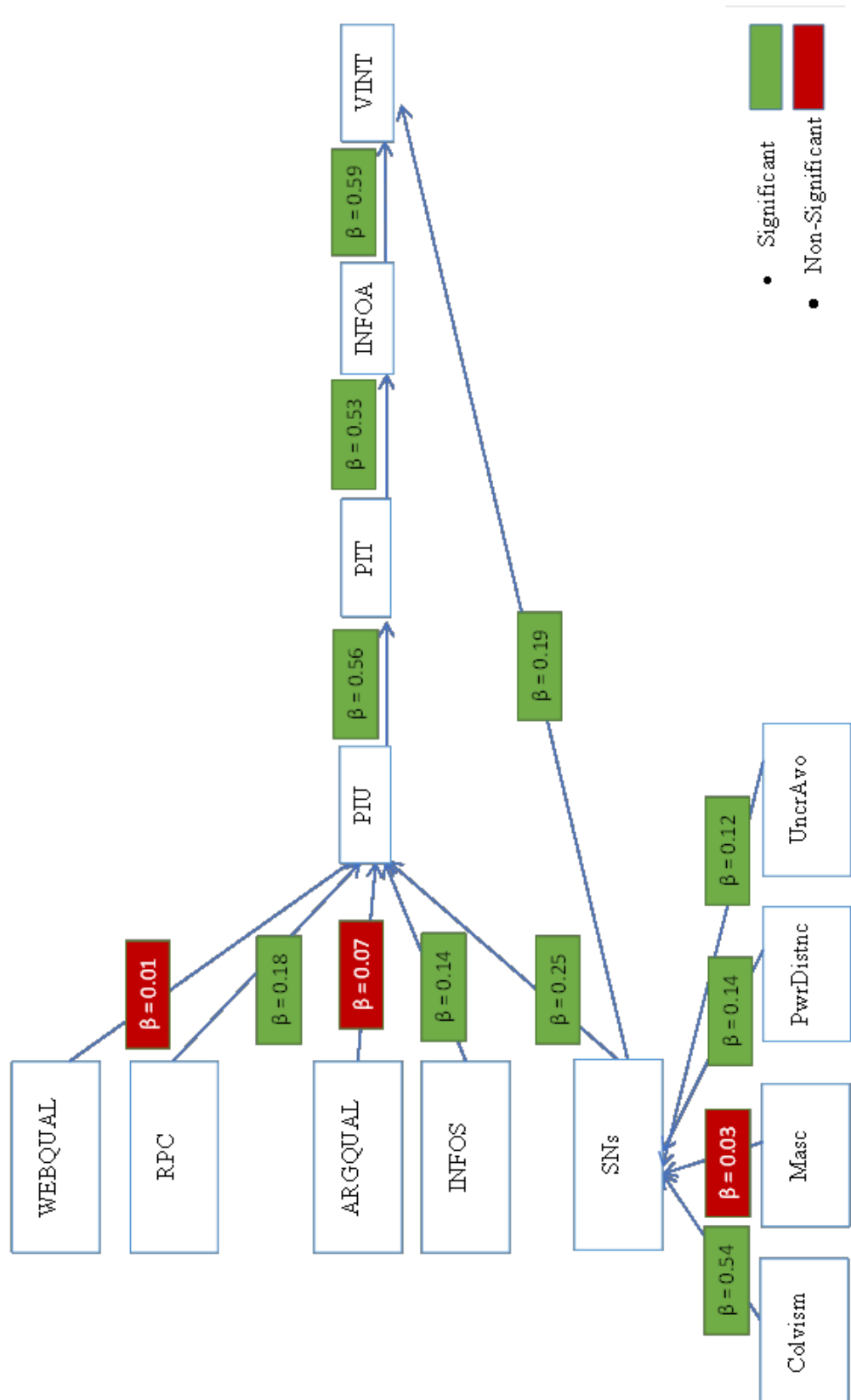


Figure 6.2. Path Model of the Study.

An important part of the assessment of the structural model is to evaluate the  $R^2$  coefficient (coefficient of determination) of the endogenous latent variables (Henseler et al., 2009); Hair et al., 2012). All  $R^2$  values should be reported in a PLS-SEM study (Hulland, 1999; Peng and Lai, 2012). Although prominent researchers in the field are in agreement that reporting  $R^2$  values is crucial, a meta-analysis of 191 articles published in four top marketing research journals between 1995 and 2007 found that 65 percent did not report  $R^2$  (Martinez-López et al., 2013).

$R^2$  has been defined as the ‘amount of explained variance of endogenous latent variables in the structural model’ (Hair et al., 2014, p. 93). Higher  $R^2$  values point to a stronger explanation of a latent variable by the constructs shown to have a direct effect on it (i.e., which have arrows pointing towards it) in the structural path model that describes this relationship. Researchers differ as to what is considered a satisfactory level for  $R^2$  values, and the criteria differ depending on the discipline. Hair et al. (2011) note that an  $R^2$  of .75 is high in success research, while .20 is viewed as high in consumer behaviour studies. Chin (1998) and Henseler et al. (2009) consider that values of .67, .33, and .19 to be high, moderate, and weak, respectively. Hair et al. (2011) stress that  $R^2$  values for the independent constructs in a structural model could be described as substantial (.75), moderate (.50), or weak (.25). Sarstedt and Mooi (2014) have observed that in scholarly research which focuses on marketing issues,  $R^2$  values of .75, .50, or .25 can, as a rough rule of thumb, be described as substantial, moderate, or weak, respectively (p. 211). Therefore, for the purposes of the current study, .75, .50, and .25 are as the markers for high, moderate, and weak  $R^2$  values. Table 6.7 summarizes all the coefficient values.

**Table 6.7:** Coefficient Values from the Path Model.

Relationship	Path Coefficient	<i>p</i> Value	<i>R</i> <sup>2</sup>	Description
WEBQUAL→PIU	.177	.003	.27	Positive, significant –weak
RPC→PIU	.006	.460	.27	Non-significant
ARGQUAL→PIU	.068	.146	.27	Non-significant
INFOS→PIU	.135	.017	.27	Positive, significant –weak
SNs→PIU	.247	< .001	.27	Positive, significant –weak
PIU→PIT	.559	< .001	.31	Positive, significant –weak
PIT→ INFOA	.532	< .001	.28	Positive, significant –weak
INFOA→ VINT	.593	< .001	.38	Positive, significant –moderate
Colvism→SNs	.535	< .001	.44	Positive, significant –moderate
Masc→SNs	-.026	.344	.44	Non-significant
PwrDistnc→SNs	.113	.039	.44	Positive, significant –moderate
UncrAvo→SNs	.122	.028	.44	Positive, significant –moderate
SNs→VINT	0.19	<.01	0.31	Positive, significant –moderate

In the sample and from Table 6.7, the interpretation of the *R*<sup>2</sup> values of the endogenous variables is as follows: predictions for website quality, information sidedness, subjective norms, and perceived information usefulness were statistically meaningful, but weak (*R*<sup>2</sup> = .27). Similarly, predictions for perceived information trust and adoption were statistically meaningful, yet weak (*R*<sup>2</sup> = .28). Predictions for perceived information usefulness and perceived information trust were also statistically meaningful, yet somewhat weak (*R*<sup>2</sup> = .31). However, predictions for information

adoption and visit intention were moderate in strength ( $R^2 = .38$ ), and predictions for collectivism, power distance, uncertainty avoidance, and subjective norms were also moderate ( $R^2 = .44$ ). Overall, these relationships can be considered as statistically meaningful. However, both review provider credibility and argument quality have non-significant influence on perceived information usefulness, so no prediction can be reported.

It may be useful at this point to compare the  $R^2$  values of other studies that assessed relationships similar to those in the present research: Cheung et al. (2009) reported an  $R^2$  value of .349 indicated that eWOM review adoption predicted perceived eWOM review credibility; Shen et al. (2013) found that with an  $R^2$  value of .627, source credibility and argument quality were determinants of information usefulness; and Filieri et al. (2015) reported an  $R^2$  value of .397 indicated that perceived trust in a website on the part of a customer predicted recommendation adoption.

According to Henseler et al. (2009), examining the effect size demonstrates the relative strength or ‘weight’ of a predictor variable within the structure of constructs. Peng and Lai (2012) describe effect size ( $f^2$ ; Cohen, 1988) ‘as the increase in  $R^2$  relative to the proportion of variance that remains unexplained in the endogenous latent variable’ (p. 473). Typical small, medium, and large values for effect size would be .02, .15, and .35, respectively (Cohen, 1988; Peng and Lai, 2012; Hair et al., 2014). Table 6.8 reports the values for the effect sizes.

**Table 6.8:** Effect Sizes within the Path Model.

Correlations	Effect Size	Description
WEBQUAL→PIU	.074	Small
RPC→PIU	.002	Small
ARGQUAL→PIU	.029	Small
INFOS→PIU	.056	Small
SNs→PIU	.111	Medium
SNs→VINT	.081	Small
PIU→PIT	.313	Large
PIT→INFOA	.283	Large
INFOA→VINT	.301	Large
Colvism→SNs	.343	Large
Masc→SNs	.002	Small
PwrDistnc→SNs	.044	Small
UncrAvo→SNs	.049	Small

Based on the results shown in Table 6.8, effect sizes for website quality, review provider credibility, argument quality, and information sidedness on perceived information usefulness were small, whereas subjective norms had a medium effect on perceived information usefulness. Subjective norms had a small effect on visit intention. It was noticed that each mediator had a large effect on the following one: perceived information usefulness had a large effect on perceived information trust, perceived information trust had a large effect on information adoption, and information adoption had a large effect on visit intention. With regard to cultural values, masculinity, power distance, and uncertainty avoidance all had a small effect on subjective norms, while only collectivism had a large effect.

Prominent researchers in the field recommend reporting Stone–Geisser’s  $Q^2$  measure (Henseler et al., 2009; Hair et al., 2012, 2014) which evaluates the predictive

relevance of a model (Peng and Lai, 2012; Hair et al., 2014). Predictive relevance means that a PLS-SEM model ‘accurately predicts the data points of the indicators in reflective measurement models of multi-item as well as single-item endogenous constructs’ (Hair 2013, p. 34). Stone–Geisser’s  $Q^2$  (Stone, 1974; Geisser, 1974) works to assess predictive relevance; it is often calculated using the ‘blindfolding procedure’ provided with PLS software (Peng and Lai, 2012). In the instructions on blindfolding, Smart-PLS describes  $Q^2$  as a cross-validated  $R^2$  (Ringle et al., 2005). In the present study,  $Q^2$  is used to evaluate the relevance between the indicators of endogenous variables and the indicators associated with the other constructs, predicting the dependent variables. If  $Q^2$  is greater than 0, the model is said to have good predictive relevance (Henseler et al., 2009). Exactly like the values for effect size,  $Q^2$  values of .02, .15 and .35 indicate weak, medium, and strong predictive relevance (Hair et al., 2014). Table 6.9 displays the  $Q^2$  values of the endogenous (dependent) variable for the sample.

**Table 6.9:**  $Q^2$  Values.

	SNs	PIU	PIT	Infoa	VInt
Q2	.439	.276	.314	.285	.383

As seen in Table 6.9, all the  $Q^2$  values are greater than 0. Moreover, subjective norms, perceived information usefulness, perceived information trust, information adoption, and visit intention all show strong predictive relevance. Subjective norms had the strongest predictive relevance, followed by visit intention, perceived information trust, information adoption, and perceived information usefulness, respectively.

***Direct and indirect effects (mediation test)***

The mediating roles of specific variables have been discussed in some detail in Chapter Three. A mediating variable explains the relationship between an independent



(exogenous) and a dependent (endogenous) construct (Frazier et al., 2004); According to Hair et al. (2014), a mediated relationship is an established, significant, direct relationship. Mediation is of two types: full/complete or partial. Full mediation is when a mediating variable affects a significant, direct relationship between dependent and independent variables (direct correlation) in such a way that the direct correlation is lost, but the indirect relationship remains significant. Partial mediation, on the other hand, occurs when, despite the addition of the mediating variable, the direct relationship remains significant (Kock, 2013).

Testing for the presence of a mediating effect involves accounting for the mediating construct in the relationship: if the indirect effect is significant and the significance of the direct effect is upheld, it is inferred that partial mediation has occurred. If, on the other hand, the indirect effect is significant while the direct effect is no longer significant, that result is due to full mediation. However, if the indirect effect is insignificant, the conclusion is that no mediation effect is present (Kock, 2013; Hair et al., 2014).

In order to measure the amount of the direct effect that is subsumed into the indirect relationship through mediating factors, the Variance Accounted for (VAF) is calculated via the formula in Figure 6.3 (Hair et al., 2014). For the purposes of the current study, and according to Hair et al. (2014), a VAF above 80 percent indicates a full mediation, a VAF between 20 percent and 80 percent is considered a partial mediation, and a VAF below 20 percent means that no mediation exists.

$$VAF = (P_{im} * P_{md}) / (P_{im} * P_{md} + P_{id})$$

Where:

*P<sub>im</sub>*: path between independent variable and mediator

*P<sub>md</sub>*: path between mediator and dependent variable

*P<sub>id</sub>*: path between independent and dependent variables

**Figure 6.3.** VAF Formula.

In the present investigation, perceived information usefulness, perceived information trust, and information adoption are hypothesized to be mediating the relationship between independent factors and tourist visit intention. Tables 6.10, 6.11, and 6.12 illustrate the various steps applied in this study to detect a mediating effect.

**Table 6.10:** OCR Constructs and Subjective Norms Influences on Visit Intention.

	Relationship	Path Coefficient	<i>p</i> Value	Nature
Direct (path between independent and dependent variables)	WEBQUAL→VINT	.24	<i>p</i> < .01	Significant
	RPC→VINT	-.029	.329	Non-significant
	ARGQUAL→VINT	.202	< .001	Significant
	INFOS→VINT	.140	.014	Significant
	SNs→VINT	.059	.180	Non-significant
Indirect (through PIU +PIT+INFOA)	WEBQUAL→VINT	.013	.342	Non-significant
	RPC→VINT	.000	.494	Non-significant
	ARGQUAL→VINT	.005	.438	Non-significant
	INFOS→VINT	.010	.378	Non-significant
	SNs→VINT	.019	.284	Non-significant

**Table 6.11:** Cultural Values and Visit Intention.

	Relationship	Path Coefficient	<i>p</i> Value	Nature
Step one Direct (path between independent and dependent variables)	Colvism→VINT	.394	< .001	Significant
	Masc→VINT	.039	.274	Non-significant
	PwrDistnc→VINT	.095	.068	Non-significant
	UncrAvo→VINT	-.041	.263	Non-significant
Step two Indirect (through SNs, PIU, PIT, InfoA)	Colvism→VINT	.009	.314	Non-significant
	Masc→VINT	.000	.491	Non-significant
	PwrDistnc→VINT	.001	.459	Non-significant
	UncrAvo→VINT	.001	.456	Non-significant

**Table 6.12:** Cultural Values and PIU.

	Relationship	Path Coefficient	<i>p</i> Value	Nature
Direct (path between independent and dependent variables)	Colvism→PIU	.123	.027	Significant
	Masc→PIU	-.036	.289	Non-significant
	PwrDistnc→PIU	.116	.034	Significant
	UncrAvo→PIU	.186	.002	Significant
Indirect (through SNs)	Colvism→PIU	.093	.021	Significant
	Masc→PIU	-.005	.461	Non-significant
	PwrDistnc→PIU	.020	.335	Non-significant
	UncrAvo→PIU	.021	.322	Non-significant

- ❖ Table 6.10 shows no mediation on the part of website quality, review provider credibility, information sidedness, argument quality, or subjective norms with visit intention.
- ❖ Table 6.11 shows a direct link between collectivism and visit intention, but no indirect link. Also, there is no mediation from collectivism, masculinity, power distance, or uncertainty avoidance with visit intention.
- ❖ Table 6.12 demonstrates significant direct links on the part of collectivism, power distance, and uncertainty avoidance with perceived information usefulness. There is, however, only a partial mediation between collectivism and perceived information usefulness.

**Table 6.13:** Path Model Relationships and Their VAFs.

Investigated relationship	Mediation type	VAF
Collectivism→PIU Through SNs	Partial mediation	50%

Based on the information in Table 6.13, it can be concluded that 50 percent of the effect of collectivism on perceived information usefulness is explained through SNs.

From the analysis displayed earlier in this chapter in Table 6.7, it is clear that website quality, information sidedness, and subjective norms had positive and significant effects on perceived information usefulness in the context of OCRs. Subjective norms had the strongest effect on perceived information usefulness, followed by website quality and then information sidedness; on the other hand, review provider credibility and argument quality had no effect. Subjective norms had a positive, significant effect on visit intention without the mediation of perceived information usefulness, perceived information trust, or information adoption.

For the mediations, perceived information usefulness had a positive and strong effect on perceived information trust, and perceived information trust had a positive and significant effect on information adoption. Finally, information adoption had a positive and significant effect on visit intention.

Regarding cultural values, the analysis reveals that collectivism, power distance, and uncertainty avoidance had positive and significant effects on subjective norms, while masculinity had no effect. Collectivism had the strongest effect on subjective norms, followed by uncertainty avoidance and then power distance. From Table 6.13 it is noted also that collectivism is related to perceived information usefulness, both directly and through subjective norms.

#### **6.4 Summary of the results and hypotheses testing**

From the foregoing analysis it is evident that some hypotheses were supported, while others rejected. Table 6.14 recalls and tests the hypotheses set out in Chapter Five, Section 5.2. First, it was revealed that website quality, information sidedness, and subjective norms had a positive and significant influence on perceived information usefulness (PIU), while both review provider credibility and argument quality had no influence, hence accepting H1, H4, and H5, and rejecting H2 and H3. Second, it was found that all mediating factors had positive and significant influences; PIU had positive and significant influence on perceived information trust (PIT), PIT had positive and significant influence on information adoption (INFOA), and INFOA had positive and significant influence on visit intention (VINT), hence accepting H6, H7, and H8. Third, subjective norms had direct, positive, and significant influence on visit intention, hence accepting H9. Fourth, the results found that all cultural values had positive and significant influence on subjective norms, except for masculinity, which had no influence, hence accepting H10a, H10c, and H10d, and rejecting H10b. Table 6.14 summarizes the research hypotheses and whether each is supported or rejected. The next chapter will pick up on each of these results and discuss them in relation to what was established in the literature review.

**Table 6.14:** Summary of the Results and Hypotheses Testing.

Hypothesis	Supported
H1: Website quality is positively related to perceived information usefulness.	Yes
H2: Review provider credibility is positively related to perceived information usefulness.	No
H3: Argument quality is positively related to perceived information usefulness.	No
H4: Information sidedness is positively related to perceived information usefulness.	Yes
H5: Subjective norms are positively related to perceived information usefulness.	Yes
H6: Perceived information usefulness is positively related to perceived information trust.	Yes
H7: Perceived information trust is positively related to information adoption.	Yes
H8: Information adoption is positively related to visit intention.	Yes
H9: Subjective norms are positively related to visit intention.	Yes
H10: Cultural values are positively related to subjective norms	
H10a: Collectivism is positively related to subjective norms.	Yes
H10b: Masculinity is positively related to subjective norms.	No
H10c: Power distance is positively related to subjective norms.	Yes
H10d: Uncertainty avoidance is positively related to subjective norms.	Yes



## **Chapter Seven: Discussion**

This chapter discusses the results reported in Chapter Six. Here, the results are jointly discussed and linked to the stated research objectives of this study. However, prior to doing so, the next section will briefly recall the research gaps along with the research model and the research objectives.

### **7.1 Research gaps, research model, and research objectives**

OCRs in a tourism context have been considered extensively in relation to their impact on consumer behavioural intention (e.g., Duan et al., 2008; Cheung et al., 2009; Park and Kim, 2009a; Kusumasondjaja et al., 2012; Lee and Koo, 2012; Ketelaar et al., 2015; Filieri, 2016; Lee and Ro, 2016; Chang and Wang, 2018). Previous literature has concentrated on a number of traits of eWOM and OCRs that may impact consumer intention, including source characteristics (e.g., Cheung et al., 2009; Kusumasondjaja et al., 2012; Filieri, 2016), message characteristics (e.g., Duan et al., 2008; Lee and Ro, 2016), and reader characteristics (e.g., Park and Kim, 2009a; Lee and Koo, 2012; Ketelaar et al., 2015). Research has tended to focus on the cognitive decision-making process (Serra Cantallops and Salvi, 2014; Yang, 2017), while ignoring the influence of the individual's society and culture on the decision-making process.

Previous studies have indicated that culture has a strong impact on consumers' information processing and decision-making (McGuinness et al., 1991; Park and Lee, 2009). Considering the increasing reliance of consumers globally on online platforms and social networking sites, researchers and commercial enterprises alike must strive to understand and to take into account the role that cultural differences may play in consumers' reactions to various online recommendations (Campbell et al., 2014; King et al., 2014).

As discussed in Chapter Four, Section 4.2.4, research has found a significant relationship between trust and subjective norms (Kim et al., 2009; Alharbi et al., 2016);

thus, it is vital for travel and tourism enterprises to understand this relationship. The relationship between subjective norms and trust is particularly strong in non-Western, collectivist cultures, where people tend to be more reliant on group opinions (Lee and Green, 1991). Saudi Arabia is considered a collectivist culture, and it also scores high on uncertainty avoidance and power distance; these factors indicate an increased tendency to seek and accept advice from social media networks (see Table 4.1 in Chapter Four). Moreover, few studies have considered the role of OCR features combined with social influences on the reader and their subsequent behaviour (Knoll and Proksch, 2015). The inclusion of subjective norms in the research is particularly important for understanding OCRs and their impact on tourists' intention to visit a particular destination. It has already been noted that IAM fails to account for behavioural intention (Erkan and Evans, 2016), and this construct is part of the present study. Additionally, the research considers new factors of source credibility and argument quality, in order to provide a more comprehensive picture of these constructs in the context of tourism information adoption.

Despite the fact that subjective norms have been found to influence behavioural intention (e.g., Shimp and Kavas, 1984; Vijayasarathy, 2004; Hsu and Lin, 2008; Casalo et al., 2010), previous OCR research has failed to account for the roles of other key predictors of behavioural intention like trust, for instance, in conjunction with subjective norms.

Cultural values influence cognition and emotion in individuals (Markus and Kitayama, 1991). Recent studies in hospitality and tourism (e.g., Schoefer, 2010; Mazaheri et al., 2011; Mazaheri et al., 2014; Carpenter et al., 2013; Kitayama and Park, 2014; Buzova et al., 2016; Cheng et al., 2016a; Cheng et al., 2016b; Weber et al., 2017) have begun to acknowledge the influence of individual cultural values on consumer attitudes and purchase behaviour. Considering, for instance, that hotel guests often come

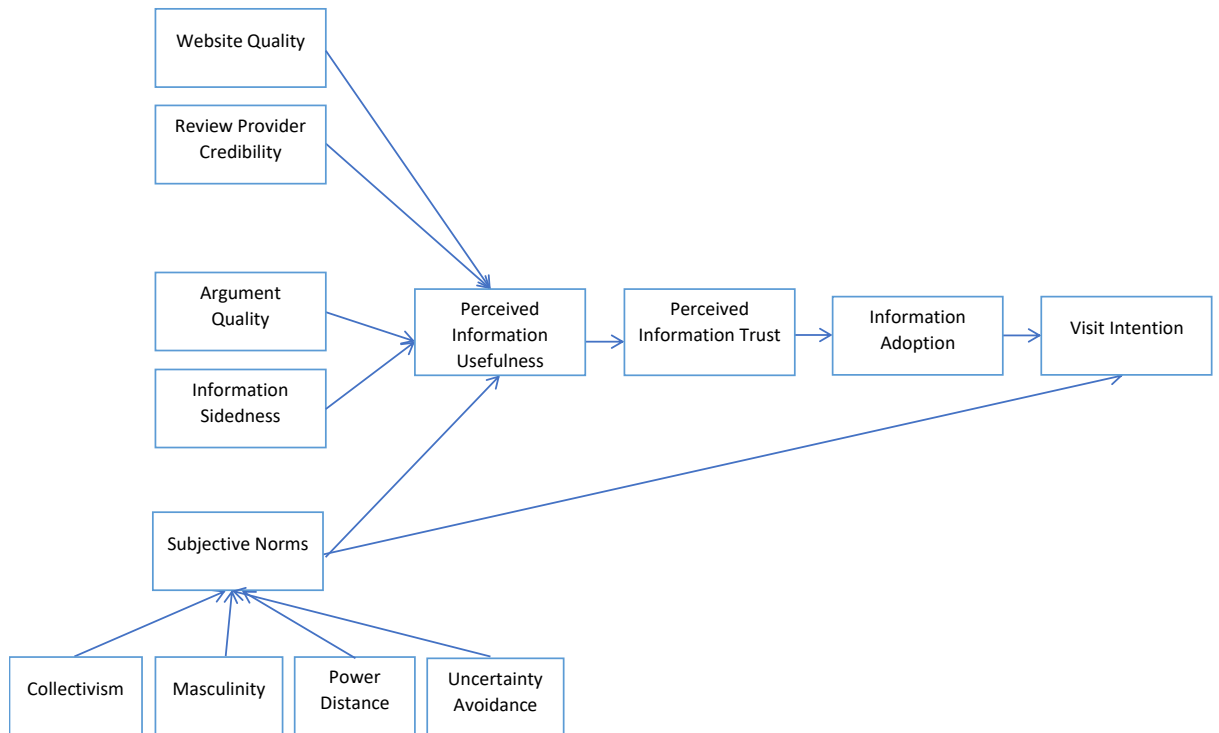
from diverse cultures and countries, it seems to be common sense that hoteliers should have some knowledge of the important role of cultural differences in the behaviour and attitudes of their customers (Wen et al., 2018).

The relationship of cultural values to attitudes and behaviour is relevant to marketing in general, more so than ever as markets become increasingly globalized (Soares et al., 2007). According to Fan et al. (2018), cultural differences play a significant role in source credibility; however, other research (Luo et al., 2014) has found no direct link between espoused cultural values and source credibility.

Studies on the well-documented collectivist Chinese culture assert that because members of that culture are likely to view themselves as interdependent and part of a social network (Hofstede, 1980; Hui and Triandis, 1986; Triandis, 1994), individuals' decisions and behaviours tend to be influenced by the opinions of others in their social networks, which often leads to 'herd behaviour' (Moss and Vinten, 2001; Sun et al., 2004). Furthermore, collectivists are less likely to trust out-group members (Björkman and Kock, 1995; Chen et al., 2002); Chinese consumers, for instance, tend not to trust online reviews by 'experts' (Vuylsteke et al., 2010). This data from the literature on Chinese culture can be relevant to Arab—and specifically Saudi Arabian—culture, which, as has been previously established, ranks as highly collectivist.

According to Lam et al. (2009), positive word-of-mouth (WOM) increases repeat business for hospitality enterprises. Some studies have looked at eWOM in the context of behavioural intention (e.g., Park and Kim 2008; Senecal and Nantel, 2004; Xia and Bechwati, 2008), but there has been little focus on eWOM or OCRs within the tourism context, let alone on their impact on tourism destination choice. The present study aims to investigate the influence of OCRs, posted on tourism websites, on the OCR reader's intention to visit a tourist destination, and to explore the social factors that influence the OCR reader. This study assesses the influence of OCR information

and social influences on tourists' visit intention through its tested model, OCRIM. The OCRIM is developed by integrating several well-known models and theories: namely, Sussman and Siegal's (2003) IAM, Fishbein and Ajzen's (1975) TRA, Hofstede's (1980) cultural model.



**Figure 7.1:** Research Model: Online Consumer Reviews Influence Model (OCRIM).

Alongside these models, a set of research objectives were developed to address the shortcomings identified in the tourism eWOM/OCR literature. Since this chapter links the study's findings to the research objectives, it would be useful to recall these objectives:

- 1) To explore the influence of OCR features on perceived information usefulness;

- 2) To investigate the influence of subjective norms on perceived information usefulness;
- 3) To explore the influence of subjective norms on visit intention;
- 4) To examine the influence of cultural values on subjective norms; and
- 5) To evaluate the indirect influence of perceived information usefulness on visit intention.

The subsequent sections are structured as follows:

The first discusses the influence of OCR features on tourists' perceptions of OCR information usefulness; the relationship between perceived information usefulness and four OCR features (website quality, review provider credibility, argument quality, information sidedness) is examined, and the set of hypotheses regarding the roles of website quality, review provider credibility, argument quality, and information sidedness as regards tourists' perceptions of information usefulness (H1, H2, H3, and H4). This addresses the first research objective.

The second section discusses the influence of subjective norms on tourists' perceptions of OCR information usefulness (H5). This addresses the second research objective. In addition, the direct influence of subjective norms on visit intention is assessed (H9). This addresses the third research objective. The third section discusses the influence of cultural values on subjective norms, which relates to hypotheses H10a, H10b, H10c, and H10d. In so doing, the fourth objective is addressed.

The fourth and final section discusses the indirect influence of tourists' perceptions of OCR information usefulness on visit intention through their perceptions of OCR information trust and subsequent information adoption. This addresses the fifth research objective. The related hypotheses are H6, H7, and H8.

## **7.2 Influence of OCR features on perceived information usefulness**

One of the main aims of the present study is to explore the influence of OCR information on tourists' perceptions of information usefulness. This section discusses these features as related to tourism OCRs, respectively: website quality, review provider credibility, argument quality, and information sidedness.

### **7.2.1 Website quality and perceived information usefulness**

This study has proposed that website quality is positively related to the perceived usefulness of OCR information (H1). The empirical results of this study support the direct positive impact of website quality on perceived information usefulness; therefore, H1 is accepted. This finding is not surprising, as seminal work in IS by DeLone and McLean (1992) found that information quality and 'system quality' were important predictors of perceived information usefulness.

Furthermore, this relationship is suggested by more recent studies in different research contexts (Yang et al., 2005; Filieri et al., 2015). Filieri et al. (2015) stated that if website quality is high and satisfying, consumers consider their information useful. Members of collectivist cultures tend to form attitudes about individuals on the basis of both dispositional traits (i.e., personality traits that result in a tendency to assess and respond to situations in a stable, consistent—and thus predictable—manner) and contextual factors. However, members of individualist cultures form attitudes about individuals solely on the basis of dispositional traits (Cousins, 1989). Thus, it can be said that the quality of the website that offers OCRs would influence Saudi tourists' perceptions of information usefulness. This implies that website quality as a construct is found to be significant within the OCR context when the study is conducted in a collectivist culture such as Saudi Arabia.

### **7.2.2 Review provider credibility and perceived information usefulness**

This study proposed that credibility of the review provider is positively related to tourists' perceptions of OCR information usefulness (H2). The empirical results of

this study showed that the influence of review provider credibility on perceived information usefulness was not statistically significant; therefore, H2 is rejected. This result was surprising. According to Ko et al. (2005), information is more likely to be seen as reliable and therefore useful when the source is highly credible, and thus the transfer of knowledge is facilitated. Additionally, previous studies (Hass, 1981; Kruglanski et al., 2006) suggest that information about the message source, such as that provided by self-disclosure, enhances the perceived usefulness of the message.

Earlier research found that individuals from a collectivist culture are inclined toward conformity in general (Ritchie and Phares, 1969). An even earlier study found that individuals from an individualist culture were more successfully convinced than were those from a collectivist culture to change their smoking behaviour after receiving information from a respected expert—in the form of the now-famous report by the U.S. Surgeon General (James et al., 1965). In their discussion of this case, Pornpitakpan and Francis (2000) posit that individualists would likely explain their own behaviour as the result of personal effort and not caused by external, unexplainable events, and thus would be inclined to accept and respond to the information presented (Pornpitakpan and Francis, 2000).

Furthermore, collectivists tend to be less trusting of those not from their own in-group (Björkman and Kock, 1995; Chen et al., 2002); Chinese consumers, for instance, tend not to trust online reviews by ‘experts’ (Vuylsteke et al., 2010), and instead place their trust in members of their own in-group (Qi, 2008; Fan et al., 2018). Indeed, Fan et al. (2018) reported that purchase intention was positively influenced by OCRs from in-group members. This suggests that OCRs from within the in-group would be viewed as more trustworthy and would thus have stronger influence over the Saudi OCR reader than OCRs posted by experts or other out-group members. Additionally, as Lee et al. (2013) have asserted, people espousing a collectivist culture are more inclined to be



convinced by information received from in-group members, even if that information is subjective and not objective, and this would influence how they form their behavioural intention.

The foregoing implies that people from collectivist cultures would not put great emphasis on source credibility, while those from individualist cultures would tend to credit their own efforts for any positive changes in their behaviour and not attribute such changes to ‘the will of God’ or other unexplainable factors. Pornpitakpan and Francis (2000) point out that since the majority of studies of this sort are carried out in ‘Western’ countries, the finding may not be applicable to non-Western cultures. Moreover, the non-significant degree of influence could be a result of the inability of the OCR readers to evaluate review provider credibility (which would otherwise be evaluated via the review provider’s apparent expertise and trustworthiness). However, from the current study’s results, it can be assumed that when the review provider is from the in-group rather than an out-group he/she would be perceived as more credible (Tajfel and Turner, 1986; Metzger and Flanagin, 2013, p. 218). As Metzger and Flanagin (2013) have stated, “...people are inclined to believe information and sources if others do so also, without much scrutiny of the site content or source. People tend to automatically trust sites and sources that are [...] recommended by known others.” (p. 215).

In summary of the foregoing discussion, it can be said that when it comes to collectivists, they would not tend to put more attention on the influence of review provider credibility without considering the social influences. Thus, Saudi tourists who hold collectivist values would not be influenced by the information in the OCR source if the reviewer is from a different culture. Therefore, anonymous OCRs would not influence Saudi tourists either, as these reviews do not include personal identifying details about the review providers such as their profiles and/or their photos. As a result,

review provider credibility as a construct would not influence perceived information usefulness unless the impact of social influence is considered.

On the other hand, the results of the present study are in line with results of a study by Cheung et al. (2008) on consumers from Hong Kong; according to Hofstede (1980), with a score of 25 Hong Kong is a collectivist culture, and thus comparable to Saudi Arabia for the purposes of this analysis. Cheung et al. (2008) found that information usefulness was not a significant predictor of source credibility:

Any user can freely register and post comments without any signature or authorization check. It was left up to users to discern from individual signatures the source of the comment. Source credibility may prove to be more helpful in determining information usefulness when there is more indication of who the poster is and who they represent. (Cheung et al., 2008, p. 242)

### **7.2.3 Argument quality and perceived information usefulness**

This study proposed that the quality of the argumentation is positively related to tourists' perceptions of OCR information usefulness (H3). The empirical results of this study showed that argument quality had a statistically non-significant influence on tourists' perceptions of OCR information usefulness; therefore, H3 is rejected. The non-significant influence in the present analysis may not be in line with the empirical literature. Sussman and Siegal (2003) assert that argument quality is a key determinant for perceived usefulness; in particular, researchers have found that information quality in eWOM reflects the credibility and usefulness of the information (Cheung et al., 2009). According to Cheung et al. (2013), the higher the information quality, the more useful it is perceived to be; this is particularly true for computer-mediated communication (Cheung et al., 2008; Saeed and Abdinnour-Helm, 2008). Cheung et al. (2008) reported that perceived information usefulness played a significant role in whether or not readers followed up on the advice provided in OCRs.

The non-significance of influence of argument quality on perceived information usefulness may be due to the fact that the respondents in this study were from a sample

which, as previously mentioned, is a collectivist culture that scores high on the cultural dimensions of uncertainty and power distance (Hofstede, 1980). According to the Elaboration Likelihood Model (ELM), the central route processes arguments related to information and requires time and effort to scrutinize information. These factors indicate that argument strength would have a greater effect for people from an individualist culture than for those from a collectivist one (Pornpitakpan and Francis, 2000). This study also postulates that people from a high-power distance, high uncertainty avoidance, collectivist culture such as Saudi Arabia will not be greatly influenced by argument strength and quality.

According to Hofstede (1980), people from a culture that scores high on the individualism scale tend to place a greater value on their own principles, beliefs, and attitudes (Srite and Karahanna, 2006). It follows then that they would trust their own judgement when making decisions (Hsu, 1983; Triandis, 1995), and thus, they would evaluate the quality of the argument and consider that factor when making decisions. Conversely, this implies that consumers from a collectivist culture would not put heavy emphasis on argument quality, and tend to not to rely on argument quality. Moreover, as discussed in the preceding section, higher levels of power distance and uncertainty avoidance predict that consumers from such a culture will rely on personal rather than impersonal sources of information about products (Dawar et al., 1996). Thus, Saudi tourists are willing to conform to other (known or in-group) individuals' opinions found in OCRs, instead of following their own judgement.

Dawar et al. (1996) investigated interpersonal information exchange through the rubric of Hofstede's dimensions. They found that power distance was a predictor of consumers' preference for personal over impersonal avenues for obtaining product information. They reported that their results indicated that in 'countries with high levels of uncertainty avoidance or power distance' people had 'a greater tendency to seek

product information from personal sources rather than impersonal sources such as *Consumer Reports*' (p. 510). Similarly, Lee and Green's (1991) study based on Fishbein's model of persuasion indicated that individualist North Americans were influenced more strongly by their own personal attitudes, which means they would consider argument quality and would evaluate it. Collectivist Koreans, on the other hand, were more heavily influenced by social norms than by their own personal attitudes, meaning that they would be influenced by social norms more than by other factors (such as argument quality) that would depend on personal attitude.

#### **7.2.4 Information sidedness influence on perceived information usefulness**

This study has proposed that information sidedness is positively related to the perceived usefulness of OCR information (H4). The empirical results of the data analysis support the direct positive relationship between information sidedness and perceived information usefulness; therefore, H4 is accepted. The significance of this result is in accordance with a number of earlier empirical studies. Previous research indicates that consumers perceive two-sided eWOM information (e.g., reviews which provide both positive and negative evaluations) as more believable than one-sided content, which they may consider to be potentially biased (Willemsen et al., 2011; Zehrer et al., 2011; Cheung et al., 2012). Two-sided eWOM information thus might be perceived as more useful, but only if the user is able to determine that the information is reliable (Cheung et.al, 2012).

Interestingly, some studies have found that consumers are more influenced by negative reviews than by positive ones. Moreover, consumers will consider a positive review which counters a negative review to be more useful than a negative review which contradicts a positive one. Willemsen et al. (2011) cite studies indicating that eWOM 'provides a nuanced view of the positive and/or negative qualities of the object under review and contributes more to the perceived usefulness of eBay and YouTube comments than numeric ratings' (p. 21).

Although the results come in line with some previous studies, it does not come in line with the results of the previous section in this present study, where argument quality was found not to influence perceived information usefulness. One explanation could be that in a collectivist culture (such as Saudi Arabia), trust is so highly valued that it is found to be even more influential than usefulness (Gefen and Heart, 2006).

As explained in Chapter Four, Section 4.2, information sidedness (where both positive and negative evaluations are provided) is considered more credible than one-sided information, as the former offers the eWOM reader a more comprehensive ‘picture’ and thus tends to be regarded as unbiased information (Cheung et al., 2012; Luo et al., 2014). Moreover, providing negative assessment regarding aspects or features of a product or service enhances the source credibility (Bohner et al., 2003).

Overall, to summarize the influence of OCR features on perceived information usefulness, the strongest influence on perceived information usefulness was from website quality, following by information sidedness. On the other hand, the influences from both argument quality and review provider credibility were non-significant. The following section will discuss the influence of subjective norms on perceived information usefulness, and on visit intention.

### **7.3 Influence of subjective norms on tourists’ perceptions of OCR information usefulness and visit intention**

This section discusses the study’s results in terms of the following: direct influence of subjective norms on perceived information usefulness; and direct influence of subjective norms on visit intention. This section thereby addresses the second and third research objectives.

#### **7.3.1 Subjective norms influence on tourists’ perceptions of OCR information usefulness**

This study proposed that subjective norms have a direct, positive influence on perceived information usefulness (H5). The empirical results of this research showed

that subjective norms had a significant influence on perceived information usefulness, so H5 is accepted. This result is expected, as it confirms findings by many previous studies in behavioural sciences that subjective norms exert a significant influence on perceived usefulness and behavioural intention (Venkatesh and Davis, 2000; Yi et al., 2006; Schepers and Wetzels, 2007; Kim et al., 2009; Abbasi et al., 2015). Specifically, the TAM2 (Venkatesh and Davis, 2000) discussed in Chapter Four, Section 4.3.1, allows for the hypothesis that subjective norms can influence behavioural intention indirectly via the internalization process.

This particular result of the present study is in accordance with results of earlier studies (Taylor and Todd, 1995; Buttle and Bok, 1996; Yi et al., 2006), indicating that subjective norms are a key predictor of perceived information usefulness, attitude, and intention. For people from cultures which score high on the individualism scale, individual needs are prioritized over the goals of the group; therefore, perceived usefulness is likely to have a stronger influence than subjective norms. Conversely, for those from cultures which are highly collectivist, an individual is expected to follow the community's lead; therefore, consumers from these cultures are more likely to be influenced by subjective norms (Bontempo and Rivero, 1990; McCoy, 2002; Parboteeah et al., 2005). Thus, it can be said that Saudi tourists would consider the information in OCRs to be useful when it is provided by in-group individuals; hence, anonymous reviews would not be perceived as useful because it is unknown whether the review provider is from the in-group or an out-group.

### **7.3.2 Direct influence of subjective norms on visit intention**

This study proposed that subjective norms are positively related to tourists' visit intention (H9). The empirical results of this study support the mentioned relationship, thus accepting (H9). This result is not surprising, as previous research supports the relationship between subjective norms and behavioural intention.

TPB (Ajzen, 1985) includes subjective norms as a determinant of intention; in UTAUT (Venkatesh et al., 2003), social influence as derived from subjective norms is a key predictor of user intention. Pavlou and Fyngenson (2006) reported that subjective norms influence users' intention to purchase online. However, past research has also shown mixed results regarding the influence of subjective norms on behavioural intention. A number of studies reported that the effect of subjective norms on behavioural intention was significant (e.g., Venkatesh and Davis, 2000; Pavlou and Fyngenson, 2006; Hsu and Lin, 2008; Cheung et al., 2011), whereas others (e.g., Lewis et al., 2003; Shih and Fang, 2004; Abbasi et al., 2015) reported non-significant results for this relationship. Thus, Saudi tourists' visit intention would be influenced by the opinions of other people who are relevant to them, that is to say, members of their own in-group.

#### **7.4 Influence of cultural values on subjective norms**

The current study proposed that cultural values are positively related to subjective norms (H10). As this study has adopted Hofstede's (1980) model of cultural dimensions, the cultural values of relevance are collectivism, masculinity, power distance, and uncertainty avoidance. Specifically, the study proposed that: collectivism is positively related to subjective norms (H10a); masculinity is positively related to subjective norms (H10b); power distance is positively related to subjective norms (H10c); and uncertainty avoidance is positively related to subjective norms (H10d). The empirical results of this study found significant data regarding the influences of collectivism, power distance, and uncertainty avoidance on subjective norms; therefore, H10a, H9c, and H9d are accepted. On the other hand, the results showed non-significant results for the influence of masculinity on subjective norms; hence, H9b is rejected.

It was expected that cultures with a largely collectivist orientation and high levels of uncertainty avoidance and power distance would exhibit a stronger influence

by subjective norms on intention to visit a destination, as a handful of previous studies have found. Alharbi et al. (2015) found subjective norms to have greater influence than the trust on e-participation from Saudi Arabia. Srite and Karahanna (2006) investigated the dimensions of masculinity/femininity, individualism/collectivism, power distance, and uncertainty avoidance, and found that higher cultural values were related to the degree to which subjective norms influenced intended behaviours.

As expressed previously, cross-cultural research also incorporating Hofstede's cultural dimensions has shown that subjective norms have a stronger influence on individuals from highly collectivist cultures; thus subjective norms are likely to affect adoption intention and decision making (Lee and Green, 1991; Choi and Geistfeld, 2004; Lee and Wan, 2010). Saudi Arabia is considered a highly collectivistic culture, in which the behaviour of an individual is affected by subjective norms received from people who are considered important to that individual (Hofstede et al., 2010). For example, Al-Fulih (2002) shows that Saudi culture is active in the social lives of citizens and engenders strong relationships among family members.

Furthermore, Srite and Karahanna (2006) found that ICO works to moderate the relationship between subjective norms and adoption intention; and Yoon (2009) also reported that ICO has a moderating effect on the relationship between trust and the individual consumer's intention to use e-commerce. Therefore, family, friends, colleagues, and social media influence are relevant referents of subjective norms (Straub et al., 2002; Srite, 2006; Srite and Karahanna, 2006) for the purposes of this study investigating the intention to visit a tourist destination.

With respect to the positive significant influence of power distance on subjective norms, as described in Chapter Four, Section 4.5.5, power distance is a measure of the acceptance in a society regarding power, wealth, and political authority imbalances, and the extent to which members in less powerful positions accept the uneven power



distribution (Hofstede, 1980). In such a cultural environment, individuals are less open to new ideas and products (Yeniyurt and Townsend, 2003); thus they tend to follow the opinions of other individuals in their in-group. This could explain why local tourists in Saudi Arabia with high power distance scores would follow other tourists' destination recommendations via OCRs.

Regarding the positive significant influence of uncertainty avoidance on subjective norms, the finding was expected, as previous studies have reported the same result. Srite and Karahanna (2006) found that only uncertainty avoidance consistently moderated the relationship between subjective norms and intention to adopt. Uncertainty is reduced through the influence of reading other tourists' OCRs. Individuals from a society scoring high on uncertainty avoidance would rely more on other tourists' OCRs, and this points to the importance of subjective norms as an influence on Saudi tourists.

As mentioned in Chapter Four, Section 4.5.5, high uncertainty avoidance cultures exhibit behaviours such as risk-reducing behaviours and were reported to search for information prior to travel (Litvin et al., 2004). In such a cultural environment, individuals are likely to demand more details in order to avoid an ambiguous situation, so it was expected that the study sample would rely more on other tourists OCR information to reduce the uncertainty.

The non-significant result for the influence of masculinity on subjective norms was not expected. According to Hofstede (1980), Saudi has a score of 52 on the masculinity dimension, which is considered a moderate score, as it is just above the midpoint of 50 (halfway between a fully 'feminine' score of 0 and a fully 'masculine' score of 100). This score indicates that Saudi society/culture has particular characteristics which are associated with the feminine dimension. For example, certain values espoused by Saudi society as being part of their Islamic tradition are the same as

described by Hofstede as being characteristics of the feminine dimension: a preference for cooperation, modesty, caring for the weak, and quality of life (see Table 4.1). Moreover, Bjerke and al-Meer (1993) assert that Arabs are closer to the feminine end of the M/F dimension, the reason being that Arab individuals place an emphasis on establishing friendly relationships with other individuals. ‘Those in a feminine culture “work to live”, whereas in a masculine society, the belief is that a person “lives to work” (Hofstede, 2010)’ (Obeidat et al., 2012, p. 515).

In his model, Hofstede examined ‘Arab world’ values, and these countries included Saudi Arabia, Kuwait, United Arab Emirates, Egypt, Iraq, Lebanon, and Libya. However, researchers in various social sciences (Lamb, 1987; Ali and Wahabi, 1995; Sidani and Gardner, 2000) have questioned the practice of forcing all Arab countries together under one cultural umbrella. Cultural differences can be quite stark between and even within any of the Arab nation-states. Others (Wilson, 1996; Dedoussis, 2004) argue that many Arabs share a foundational set of beliefs and attitudes, and that these shared values cut across national and social classes. There are compelling arguments on both sides of this issue, which in turn would affect the relationship under investigation between masculinity and subjective norms.

One possible explanation for the non-significant influence of masculinity on subjective norms is that a score which is closer to the masculine end of the scale may lessen the role of subjective norms. Research by Steenkamp et al. (1999) and Dwyer et al. (2005) indicates that masculine cultures tend to experience higher rates of new product diffusion, suggesting that they communicate more with out-groups. In other words, if, in the process of deciding whether or not to try a new product, individuals from a culture that ranks fairly high on the masculinity dimension tend to communicate more with those outside their in-groups, this would suggest that subjective norms might not play a key role in such a situation. Moreover, Lam et al. (2009) expect

that people who value masculinity are more aggressive and therefore are more likely to voice their pleasure or displeasure about new products to those with whom they have weak ties (i.e., out-group).

Additionally, according to Hofstede's model, cultures scoring higher on masculinity value competitiveness, assertiveness, and achievement; hence, it can be inferred that in situations where competition is a factor (such as the marketplace, whether traditional or online), individuals would not place as much emphasis on subjective norms, as they would do for non-competitive achievement related factors, such as perceived information usefulness. Srite and Karahanna (2006) argued that because PIU is closely related to achievement of work goals and advancement, the higher the degree of masculinity, the higher the effect of PIU on IT adoption. Therefore, individuals from a highly masculine culture would not consider subjective norms as important as other achievement related factors, and would not be more influenced by review providers simply because the OCR writer was from their in-group.

To summarize this section, it can be said that local Saudi tourists are influenced by subjective norms while they are reading OCRs, and that is due to the cultural values they hold: particularly, collectivism, power distance, and uncertainty; however, masculinity was found not to influence subjective norms. The following section will discuss the indirect influence of perceived information usefulness on visit intention, through perceived information trust and information adoption.

### **7.5 Indirect influence of perceived information usefulness on visit intention**

The current study proposed that tourists' perceptions of OCR information usefulness have an indirect influence on visit intention through perceived information trust and information adoption. Particularly, this study proposed that perceived information usefulness is positively related to perceived information trust (H6),

perceived information trust is positively related to information adoption (H7), and information adoption is positively related to visit intention (H8).

The empirical results of the study show that perceived information usefulness had a significant influence on perceived information trust, hence confirming H6. This result implies that tourists consider the information about OCRs trustworthy when they find it to be useful. This result is in accordance with the findings in other published research (Gefen et al., 2003a; Elwalda et al., 2016; Cheung et al., 2013).

Research has shown that when it comes to technology adaption, perceived usefulness and ease of use influence trust in online commerce (Koufaris and Hampton-Sosa, 2004; Awad and Ragowsky, 2008). Lan and Chen (2014) assert that when the information on the company's website is clearly and simply communicated, confusing or ambiguous signals are minimal, thus resulting in greater consumer trust in the online vendor. A number of studies have shown that perceived ease of use influences perceived usefulness, which in turn is a key predictor of perceived trust (e.g., Taylor and Todd, 1995; Wöber and Gretzel, 2000; Chen et al., 2002; Kim et al., 2003; Morosan and Jeong, 2008; Kim et al., 2009). Other researchers report a slightly different arrangement of these constructs, in which perceived usefulness is a key antecedent of perceived trust, or in other words, trust is the mediator between perceived ease of use and perceived usefulness (Gefen et al., 2003a; Koufaris and Hampton-Sosa, 2004; Kim et al., 2009; Elwalda et al., 2016). In their study investigating users' adoption of information from Wikipedia, Cheung et al. (2013) reported that trust is an important determinant of information adoption and that trust 'fully mediated the relationship between information usefulness and information adoption' (2013, p. 502). Similarly, research in the field of information science has suggested that trust plays a mediating role between information quality and information usage (Kelton et al., 2008).

In their case study examining the roles of subjective norms and trust with regard to technology adoption, Lee and Wan (2010) reported that potential users who did not trust the efficacy of the e-ticketing mechanism were not as willing to rely on it and thus unlikely to perceive it as useful. Conversely, trust in the simpler process of e-ticketing implies that such trust influences perceived usefulness: 'If travellers trust that e-ticketing produces a valid ticket, they will perceive that it is useful' (Lee and Wan, 2010, p. 44). Furthermore, research has suggested a positive relationship between source credibility and perceived usefulness (Cheung et al., 2009; Filieri et al., 2015).

In terms of the relationship between perceived information trust and information adoption, the empirical results support a direct positive influence of perceived information trust on information adoption; therefore, H7 is accepted. This finding is not surprising, as it has been suggested by previous researchers. Perceived trustworthiness of an OCR has been found to be a key antecedent of information adoption and behavioural intention (Cheung et al., 2009). Readers are more likely to adopt and act on information from OCRs if they believe that the information is credible (McKnight et al., 2002b). As mentioned, trust has been found to be the moderator between perceived usefulness and adoption intention (Lee and Wan, 2010, Cheung et al., 2013). This is consistent with earlier findings, in which perceived usefulness was reported to be more influential than other adoption factors (Gefen et al., 2003a; Davis, 1989).

The empirical results of this study support the positive, direct influence of information adoption on visit intention, hence confirming H8. Tourists are more likely to have stronger visit intention when they have the positive influence of information adoption from OCRs. This result of the study is consistent with findings from previous research (e.g., Cheung and Thadani, 2012; Cheung et al., 2009). Information adoption has been of interest to previous researchers as a factor affecting consumer purchase intention, for example, consumers who engage and adopt eWOM information are more

likely to have purchase intention as a result (Cheung and Thadani, 2012). Sussman and Siegal (2003) explain the concept of information adoption as ‘an information-adoption-based view of knowledge transfer assumes that, just as people form intentions toward adopting a behaviour or a technology, they similarly form intentions toward adopting particular advocated ideas and behaviours’ (p. 50). Therefore, influences that are noted in behavioural or technology adoption can also be used in the understanding of information, opinion or message adoption.

## **7.6 Conclusion**

In this chapter, the results and findings of both OCR constructs and social influences conducted in this research were discussed. As regards the influences of OCR constructs on perceived information usefulness, it was found that only review provider credibility and argument quality have non-significant influences on perceived information usefulness, whereas website quality and information sidedness have significant influences on perceived information usefulness. Thereafter, the impact of subjective norms on perceived information usefulness and visit intention were discussed. Subjective norms were found to have positive significant direct influence on perceived information usefulness, and visit intention; however, the influence on visit intention was the stronger. Then, the influences of cultural values on subjective norms were explored: all cultural values found to have positive significant influence on SNs, except for masculinity. Finally, the indirect influence of perceived information usefulness on visit intention, through perceived information trust and information adoption was discussed. All the hypothesized mediating relationships were found to have positive significant influences.

The next chapter concludes this study by briefly recalling the findings obtained in this research, addressing the research aim, objectives, and questions, and highlighting

the implications drawn from these results. It will also acknowledge the study's limitations and identify potential areas of further research.

## **Chapter Eight: Conclusion**



## **8.1. Introduction**

This chapter concludes the thesis by providing an overview of the research. For this purpose, the next section revisits the research aim and objectives, and discusses the achievement of each objective. The findings are linked to the research objectives set out in Chapter One. Section 8.3 presents the theoretical and practical contributions of the research. Finally, research limitations and future research directions are highlighted in the last section of the chapter.

## **8.2. Main conclusions**

The public continues to rely less on traditional television and print media, and to depend more on online media as their source of information; at the same time, consumer trust in corporations has declined (Jalilvand and Samiei, 2012). In such an environment, eWOM, and OCRs in particular, have become increasingly important marketing and branding tools for companies of all sizes and in many industries (Jalilvand and Samiei, 2012; Kang and Hustvedt, 2014). EWOM is especially important in the hospitality and tourism industry, whose intangible products are difficult to evaluate prior to their consumption (Yoo and Gretzel, 2009; Cox et al., 2009; Fotis et al., 2012).

Choosing a tourist destination is a complex task, as it includes many related aspects, products, services, and brands. Hence, eWOM can be a particularly useful tool to assist prospective tourists in making purchasing decisions. Since early on in this millennium, eWOM in the context of behavioural (e.g., purchase or visit) intention has been the focus of research (e.g., Senecal and Nantel, 2004; Park and Kim, 2008; Xia and Bechwati, 2008). Potential tourists, while reading OCRs of tourist destinations, may be affected by multiple factors alongside the information presented (such as how the

information is presented). This leads to varying degrees of information adoption and subsequent visit intention.

Social influences have also been noted by many researchers (Chen et al., 2012; Alharbi et al., 2015; Hsu and Lin, 2016) as a key element that influences consumer behavioural intention. However, there has been little attention on the role of social influences in the context of OCRs or on social influences within the tourism context, let alone on their impact on tourism destination choice. What this study therefore has done is look at tourists who reside in Saudi Arabia, where social influences are expected to be stronger than in Euro-centred ('Western') countries. According to Hofstede's (1980) cultural dimensions, Saudi Arabia exhibits a high degree of collectivism. Indeed, social influence has been noted to have a strong influence on consumer intention in Saudi Arabia (Alharbi et al., 2015; Almaghrabi et al., 2011). A cursory review of the behavioural intention models in common use has revealed that the majority of these models were developed in either Euro-centred or East Asian cultures, thus there is a need for a model which is culturally appropriate for the region that is the subject of the current research. A focus on the relationship between social influences and OCRs in a 'non-Western' context is timely. It is supposed, however, that whereas the OCRIM model itself could be applied to any country or region, the strengths of the relationships that it describes will vary depending on the cultural dimensions characteristics of the locale in question.

The study aimed to investigate the influence of OCRs, posted on tourism websites, on the OCR reader's intention to visit a tourist destination, and within this context to explore the social factors that influence the OCR reader. The findings will provide a better understanding of the formation of tourist visit intention as influenced by OCRs, especially in collectivist cultures where, to date, few studies have been conducted on technology adoption specifically with OCRs. The study builds and

extends recent research in this area (e.g., Zhu et al., 2016; Tseng and Wang, 2016; Erkan and Evans, 2016), whereby the findings of this research have significance for a number of user groups, including marketers using online channels for tourism and travel products, the managers of tourism destinations, and tourism policy makers.

To achieve the study's overarching aim, five objectives were established. **The first objective** was to identify the influences of OCR features (in terms of website quality, review provider credibility, argument quality, and information sidedness) on perceived information usefulness. The obtained results revealed that both website quality and information sidedness influence tourist perception of OCR information usefulness, with website quality exerting stronger influence than information sidedness on perceived information usefulness. Furthermore, both review provider credibility and argument quality have non-significant influence on tourist perception of OCR information usefulness. The research model of this study, Online Consumer Reviews Influence Model (OCRIM), was developed based on the integration of IAM, the related components of TRA, and Hofstede's cultural model, and was validated through PLS-SEM. It must be stressed here that according to OCRIM, social influence constructs are not moderators, but rather they are construed as independent variables. Nevertheless, these results suggest that website quality and information sidedness should both be considered carefully when the population is characterized by strong subjective norms and high scores on certain cultural dimensions (collectivism, power distance, and uncertainty avoidance, in particular), as these social influences were found to impact perceived information usefulness.

**The second objective** of the research was to identify the influence of subjective norms on perceived information usefulness. Subjective norms were found to have strong direct influence on tourist perception of OCR information usefulness. Indeed, subjective norms were the variable with the strongest influence on perceived information

usefulness. Such results suggest that when the culture with which the tourism consumer identifies exhibits strong subjective norms, it would be expected that subjective norms would exert a strong influence on tourist perception of OCR information usefulness.

**The third objective** of the research was to identify the influence of subjective norms on visit intention. Subjective norms were found to have strong influence on tourist visit intention. However, subjective norms' direct influence on tourist visit intention was stronger than their in-direct influence through perceived information usefulness, perceived information trust, or information adoption. Such results suggest that subjective norms' direct influence on behavioural intention is stronger than their indirect influence; or in other words, PIU, PIT, and INFOA mediate only weakly, if at all, the relationship between SNs and behavioural intention.

**The fourth objective** of the research was to examine the influence of cultural values on subjective norms. The findings have tested and confirmed the significant and positive influence of three of the four cultural dimensions, namely, collectivism, power distance, and uncertainty avoidance, on subjective norms; only masculinity was found to have non-significant influence. These results confirm that the cultural values of the OCR reader influence tourist visit intention through subjective norms and information adoption.

**The fifth objective** of the study was to explore the indirect influence of perceived information usefulness on tourist visit intention through perceived information trust and information adoption. This research proposed a theoretical model in order to examine the indirect influence of perceived information trust on tourist visit intention. The proposed model was validated through a survey of 384 tourists who reside in Saudi Arabia. In this regard, the study has confirmed that the impact of perceived information usefulness is more likely to be indirect than direct. The present research has found that PIU of OCRs indirectly influences tourist visit intention via PIT

and information adoption. This finding indicates that when the information found in OCRs is perceived as untrustworthy, it would weaken the influence of PIU on visit intention, to the point that it might have no influence at all, and the same would apply for information adoption. Moreover, there is full mediation from the moderating variable in this relationship. It could therefore be concluded that, in the case of a collectivist culture that also scores high on power distance and uncertainty avoidance, perceived information usefulness influences tourist perception of OCR information trust, leading to information adoption, which would then influence visit intention. The foregoing confirms the appropriateness of the suggested information adoption approach.

The study results show that the influence of OCR information depends not only on features of OCR information, but also on the tourist's social influences regarding OCR information. Both factors have an important role on visit intention; they therefore should be evaluated together while considering the influence of OCR information on tourist visit intention. To date this has not happened.

### **8.3 Contributions and research implications**

The findings of this thesis have significance for a number of industries and research areas, including online marketing, tourism, and hospitality. However, as the aim of this research was to investigate the influence of OCRs, posted on tourism websites, on the OCR reader's intention to visit a tourist destination, and to explore the social factors that influence the OCR reader in Saudi Arabia, the findings are more related to tourists who come from Saudi Arabia and any similar cultures. The following discusses the theoretical and practical implications of this research.

#### **8.3.1 Theoretical level**

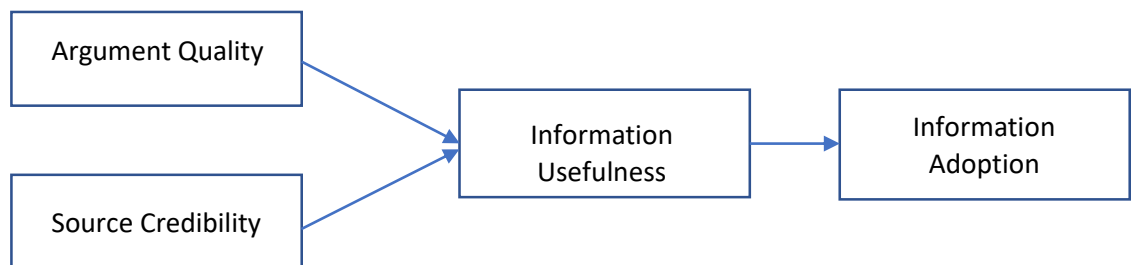
The major contribution of this study is that it has proposed and developed a comprehensive theoretical model that explains how OCRs, together with social influences, shape tourist visit intention in relation to visitor destinations in an Arab,

specifically Saudi, context. This extends other recent work in this area (Tseng and Wang, 2016; Zhu et al., 2016; Erkan and Evans, 2016), which has to date not considered subjective norms or cultural values (this is outlined in further detail below). That is, the OCRIM model identifies the influence of reading OCRs on tourist visit intention. OCRIM was developed by integrating the Information Adoption Model (IAM: Sussman and Siegal, 2003; see Figure 1), related components of the Theory of Reasoned Action (TRA: Ajzen and Fishbein, 1980), and Hofstede's (1980) cultural framework. The IAM explains how information from the characteristics of OCRs is adopted; however, it has been noted that IAM fails to account for behavioural intention (Erkan and Evans, 2016). As behavioural intention is a construct of the present study, TRA components were incorporated in order to explain how the consumer intends to behave towards the information.

Social influence has been noted by many researchers as a key element that influences consumer intention, yet the role of social influence in the context of OCRs has largely been ignored. Furthermore, recent studies in hospitality and tourism (e.g., Schoefer, 2010; Mazaheri et al., 2011; Carpenter et al., 2013; Mazaheri et al., 2014; Kitayama and Park, 2014; Buzova et al., 2016; Cheng et al., 2016a; Cheng et al., 2016b; Weber et al., 2017) demonstrate a growing awareness of the role of cultural values on consumer attitudes and purchase behaviour. Therefore, OCRIM has extended IAM by adding cultural values, which are antecedents of subjective norms (Srite and Karahanna, 2006). Hence, four specified cultural values from Hofstede's (1980) model of cultural dimensions were adopted and incorporated into the research model, in order to examine how cultural values influence tourists' information adoption.

As discussed in Chapter Four, Section 4.2.4, online environments are often perceived to be uncertain and impersonal; tourists and other consumers may not trust online vendors and would be concerned that any transactions over such sites are risky.

Hence, in order for e-commerce to succeed, trust must be built and established between online merchants and their customers. Research has indeed shown that trust is a vital influencing factor in consumer behaviours (McKnight and Chervany, 2001), and in particular, it is an essential component in online behavioural intention and purchase decisions (Gefen et al., 2003b; Cheung et al., 2009). By seeking and evaluating reliable information about products and services which they are interested in purchasing, consumers are trying to reduce the perceived risk involved (Bettman, 1973). Thus, evaluating the trustworthiness of eWOM as a reliable source of information plays a vital role in consumer purchase intention (Lau and Ng, 2001). Therefore, to account for this component, OCRIM added to the information adoption process from IAM the construct perceived information trust (PIT) as a consequence of the perceived information usefulness (PIU) construct and an antecedent of the information adoption construct. Perceived information trust is adopted from the PDA model (Elwalda et al., 2016).

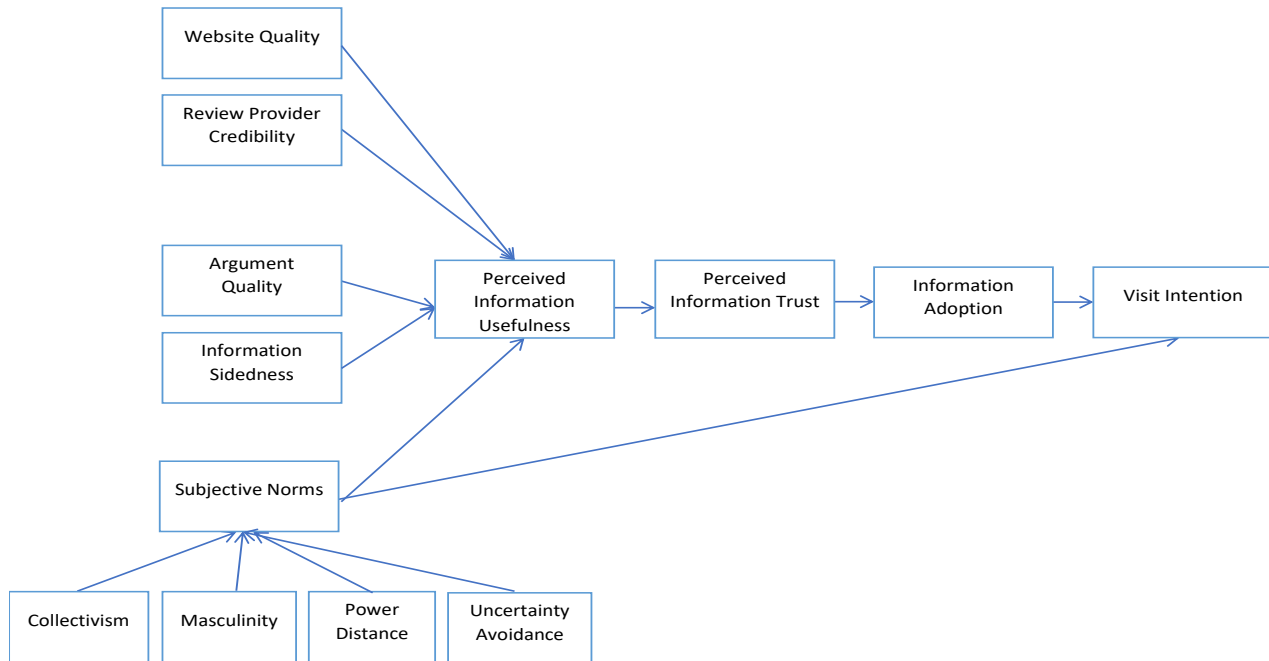


**Figure 8.1.** Information Adoption Model (IAM).

*Source: Sussman and Siegal (2003).*

The model introduced in this study (OCRIM; Figure 8.2), highlights the assessment of cultural and social influences as antecedents to perceived information

usefulness and thus to perceived information trust of OCRs, which we expected to impact information adoption and then, visit intention.



**Figure 8.2.** Research model: Online Consumer Reviews Influence Model (OCRIM).

The IAM model was originally developed to investigate how knowledge workers are influenced to adopt the advice that they receive in mediated contexts, and it offers a framework for understanding knowledge transfer using computer-mediated communication. Borrowing a concept from the Elaboration Likelihood Model (ELM) of informational influence (Petty and Cacioppo, 1980), the IAM model proposed that the argument quality construct be conceptualized as a central route, while the source credibility construct is considered as a peripheral route to influencing a person's attitude (see Chapter Four, Section 4.2.1). As this research examines the influence of OCRs in the context of tourism, the independent constructs from IAM needed to be redefined in relation to the context being investigated. Reviewing the literature pertaining to OCRs for the present study, it was found that two constructs which represent source credibility were relevant to the scope of this research: website quality and review provider



credibility. Hence, the OCRIM research model has developed new independent constructs that are relevant to OCRs in the tourism context.

Filieri et al. (2015) reported that website quality is an important determinant of trust and customer satisfaction for consumer-generated media (CGM) websites. Previous research in e-tourism has also found that website quality has a direct and positive influence on customer satisfaction (Bai et al., 2008). Two important antecedents of user-perceived usefulness and ease of use are information quality and system quality (Yang et al., 2005). The relationship between source credibility (i.e., review provider credibility) and information adoption has been highlighted in the context of eWOM (Watts and Zhang, 2008; Cheung et al., 2009; Yoo et al., 2009; Filieri et al., 2015). Moreover, researchers have noted that the relationship between source credibility/review provider credibility and information usefulness in online interactions is a positive one (Sussman and Siegal, 2003; Jin et al., 2009; Ayeh et al., 2013). Argument quality has also been found to influence the adoption of information (Sussman and Siegal, 2003; Cheung et al., 2008; Lee and Koo, 2012; Shen et al., 2013; King et al., 2014). In the context of eWOM, both argument quality and information usefulness of online reviews were reported to influence purchase intention (Park et al., 2007a; Lee and Shin, 2014).

Research highlights that consumers perceive two-sided eWOM information (e.g., reviews which provide both positive and negative evaluations) as more believable than one-sided content, which later they may consider potentially biased (Willemsen et al., 2011; Cheung et al., 2012). Moreover, in eWOM literature, two-sided review information is said to be perceived as more useful, but only if the user can recognize whether or not the information is reliable (Cheung et al., 2012).

The model proposed in this study offers a more comprehensive approach by considering the social background and behaviour of the tourist, together with OCR

features, within the same framework. The OCRIM framework thus brings a new approach to information adoption by extending IAM, and provides new insights to researchers in fields such as tourism and IS. In addition, the framework highlights social influence as an antecedent of behavioural intention within the context of tourism OCRs, which is an important finding that contributes to the related literature. Furthermore, few studies have considered the role of OCR features combined with social influences on the review reader and the reader's subsequent behaviour (Knoll and Proksch, 2015), although recent studies in hospitality and tourism (e.g., Schoefer, 2010; Mazaheri et al., 2011; Mazaheri et al., 2014; Carpenter et al., 2013; Kitayama and Park, 2014; Buzova et al., 2016; Cheng et al., 2016a; Cheng et al., 2016b; Weber et al., 2017) demonstrate a growing awareness of the role of cultural values on consumer attitudes and purchase behaviour.

This study contributes to UGC literature by empirically examining the relationship between OCR features and consumer behaviour. Moreover, this research contributes to the eWOM/OCR literature by clarifying an uncertainty regarding the role of subjective norms on behavioural intention. Some earlier researchers (Mathieson, 1991; Davis, 1989) found no significant effect of subjective norms on adoption intention, whereas Taylor and Todd (1995) reported that subjective norms are a key predictor of adoption intention, thus their finding indicates a significant effect. Indeed, a substantial number of studies have shown significant results for the influence of subjective norms on behavioural intention (e.g., Shimp and Kavas, 1984; Vijayasarathy, 2004; Hsu and Lin, 2008; Casaló et al., 2010). In particular, Jalilvand et al. (2012) report findings confirming that subjective norms are a significant, positive antecedent construct of intention to travel.

From reviewing the eWOM/OCR literature, it was noted that the mentioned relationship had not yet been empirically tested or explained cogently within the OCR

context. While some studies have looked at eWOM as it relates to behavioural intention (e.g., Erkan and Evans, 2016; Park and Kim, 2008; Senecal and Nantel, 2004; Xia and Bechwati, 2008), very few of them have focussed on eWOM or OCRs while considering the impact of social influences in the general context of tourism, much less on the specific question of their impact on tourism destination choice. This study strikes at the heart of this issue, providing both a model that helps explain the relationship between subjective norms and visit intention as well as testing this relationship within the context of OCRs. Thus, these findings should be of particular interest to researchers in the domains of eWOM and behavioural intention. Finally, this study provides a greater understanding of OCRs within the tourism context by identifying the features of OCRs found on tourism websites, and also, by examining the social influences on tourist visit intention.

### **8.3.2 Practical level**

This research offers significant practical implications for tourism managers because it explains the impact of OCR features together with social influences on tourist visit intention. As Jalilvand et al. (2012) have observed, in the tourism industry, visit intention regarding a particular destination predicts tourists' final choice of that destination, and this is the case whether or not they have previous travel experience with that destination. It has been demonstrated that reading OCRs influences tourist visit intention; therefore, those in a decision-making role in the tourism industry ought to pay close attention to eWOM, and to OCRs in particular. These tools can be of great benefit in improving the pre- and post-travel experience for the tourism consumer.

Tourism vendors might consider ways to persuade potential travellers to participate in online forums by sharing their experiences, posting reviews, and posing questions to the online community regarding tourist destinations. This would increase the number of OCRs about a certain destination, and the more reviews that can be found

regarding a particular destination, the faster and farther this information is apt to spread, increasing the likelihood that the destination in question will be selected for tourism trips. Studies have shown that a high volume of OCRs on an eWOM platform increases trust on the part of the reader (Duan et al., 2008; Metzger and Flanagin, 2013; Zhao et al., 2015; Lee and Ro, 2016), and perceived trustworthiness of an OCR has been found to be a key antecedent of information adoption and behavioural intention (Cheung et al., 2009). Readers are more likely to adopt and act on information from OCRs if they believe that the information is credible (McKnight et al., 2002b), and trust has been found to be the moderator between perceived usefulness and adoption intention (Lee and Wan, 2010; Shen et al., 2013). It goes without saying that managers of tourist destinations would be well advised to employ their own worldwide web venues in order to develop and promote online tourism communities. Online users who find a welcoming and useful forum are more likely to frequent such a site, where they feel free to give and receive advice and to share opinions and experiences regarding travel destinations (Jalilvand et al., 2012).

Furthermore, tourism managers (destination marketing managers) ought to review the OCRs found on their sites, and should track and pay attention to tourists' opinions, so that they can learn from the reviews and improve the tourism services that they offer. This could be a useful opportunity for tourism managers to link the relationship between tourists' social backgrounds and their chosen destination, which could guide managers to build more efficient marketing strategies. In fact, it would be advantageous for tourist destination management to take this a step further and respond promptly and helpfully to queries, concerns, and even general reviews posted by readers, as Ye et al. (2011) reported that responses from hoteliers to the queries of potential guests resulted in increased bookings.

The number and variety of available tourist destinations continue to increase at an ever-faster rate, resulting in greater and more intense competition in this market. Therefore, tourism managers must find more effective marketing strategies in order to make their destination stand out from the online crowd. One strategy is to implement a hospitality management system, and include a programme that rewards tourism consumers who not only visit their destination but then write and post a review describing their experiences. By motivating customers to contribute (positively, it would be hoped) to the body of OCRs about that destination, this would increase the visibility and positive image of that destination on the Web.

Gaining a better understanding of consumers via online reviews can be beneficial, not only to the tourism industry in Saudi Arabia, but to any service industry in any country, and it should be of interest to marketing managers and researchers. To take a broader view, the relationship of cultural values to attitudes and behaviour is relevant to marketing in general, and more so than ever, as markets become increasingly globalized (Soares et al., 2007). This study has valuable implications for marketing practice, especially for tourism marketers, as this research provides marketers with a frame of reference to understand the influence of OCRs on tourist visit intention. In the context of the tourism industry, OCRs are useful for decision making regarding travel destinations, because they provide tourists with indirect experiences (Park et al., 2007a). This is especially true because tourism products are intangible, and tourism services cannot be directly assessed before the consumption experience. Therefore, the determinants provided by this study allow marketers to understand the dynamics of OCRs, hence allowing them to develop more effective marketing strategies.

It has been revealed from the results of this research that social influences impact tourist visit intention through perceptions of information usefulness and trust. Therefore, marketers will be able to develop more successful sales platforms online by

considering the social factors which influence their consumers. Luo et al. (2015) note that potential users and consumers visiting an e-vendor from across the globe subscribe to a range of cultures with a variety of ICOs; hence, it would make sense for these e-vendors to ‘identify their [customers’] espoused ICO, and then, based on their ICO values, adopt different eWOM marketing strategies to affect their cognitions and motivate their purchase intentions’ (p. 454).

This study’s results indicate that review provider credibility and argument quality had no significant influence on visit intention in the case of Saudi Arabia, whereas in studies done on other cultures these constructs were reported to have a significant influence. For example, a study conducted in a single Chinese online community on traveling, the perceived credibility of the source was found to influence information adoption decisions (Watts and Zhang, 2008). Additionally, a study conducted in North America found that argument quality influenced information usefulness (Sussman and Siegal, 2003). Therefore, marketers should know their target consumers and where they come from, so that they are able to design their sales strategies more efficiently.

#### **8.4. Limitations and future research**

As in all such studies, several limitations should be acknowledged. First, although the sample size (384) proved to be sufficient to conduct a robust statistical analysis, a larger sample would probably enhance the results. Second, while this study has focused on the influence of perceived information usefulness in the context of OCRs, their antecedents are still under-examined in the literature on OCRs and tourism. It would be crucial to identify factors influencing tourist perception of information usefulness; thus, future works exploring the factors influencing perceived information usefulness in relation to OCRs would be highly useful to the tourism field.

Third, this research has adopted a non-probability sampling technique known as convenience sampling; hence, it has been conducted with participants who have visited local travel agents. Although the sample consists entirely of potential tourists who read OCRs, they may not precisely reflect the whole population of individuals residing in Saudi Arabia who travel for the purpose of tourism. As explained in Chapter 5, Section 5.13.2, convenience sampling is useful in purposive sample selection (Saunders et al., 2012), and this aligns with the objectives of the current research. Although convenience sampling has been used extensively by previous studies in contexts similar to that of the present study (see Chapter Five, Section 5.13.2), an important limitation of the technique is that it involves generalising the results of a relatively small sample to the larger population. As mentioned in Chapter Six, Section 6.2.1, ideally, one would compare the demographics of the study sample with those of the target population (i.e., tourists residing in Saudi Arabia), but despite a diligent search effort, no published data on this population was found.

Fourth, as this research has depended on a sample from a single country, it would be optimal if future studies explore the generalizability of these findings across cultures. In addition, future research investigating the impact of OCRs and social influences on using eWOM and intention to visit a destination would provide both researchers and practitioners with a more comprehensive picture of the individual and societal factors which predict intention to visit a destination.

Fifth, the present study adopted a post-positivistic approach, and employed quantitative questionnaires as the method of data collection. The responses provided sufficient data with which to explore the indirect influence of OCRs by identifying the relevant factors within the tourism context, as well as the impact of social influences using Hofstede's cultural values. However, relying on a post-positivistic approach alone could not provide a full explanation of how these factors influence visit intention. Thus,

to arrive at a more complete explanation, an interpretive approach could be incorporated into the research methodology. Hence, future studies could adopt a qualitative methodology using in-depth interviews to uncover how these factors influence tourist information adoption and visit intention, and which factors exert the most influence on tourist visit intention, as well as identifying possible other factors that may influence the relationship not previously identified .

Sixth, this study has provided evidence on behavioural intention in the tourism context in an emerging economy located in a geographical region thus far highly neglected in the tourism literature. Hence, it is recommended to conduct additional studies in this region, because other countries nearby that share many cultural characteristics with KSA are believed to offer great potential for future tourism development. Finally, the research model of the current study, OCRIM, was developed based on the integration of IAM and related components of TRA, together with Hofstede's cultural model. Future research could develop OCRIM by adding more variables, or it could test the current model within different research contexts.

Seventh, based on a thorough literature review, the comprehensive approach adopted in this study attempted to include the most important factors of OCRs that would influence consumer behavioural intention. However, some factors such as message characteristics (e.g., message volume), which could be important predictors of visit intention yet may have been neglected by the literature, could have been included in this study but were excluded because of the time constraint. Future research could comprise additional factors of OCRs that might also influence tourist visit intention.

Eighth, a longitudinal study would bring an enhanced insight about the indirect effects of perceived information trust; hence, future studies could consider a longitudinal approach in order to acquire more comprehensive insight into evaluating the influence of OCRs on tourist visit intention.



## **Appendices**

## Appendix A: Letters from tourism and travel agents.

A.1.

 **CONTINENTS VISITOR**  
زائر القارات

رقم: 2017\77  
تاريخ: 2017\11\30

الى من يهمه الأمر

السلام عليكم ورحمة الله وبركاته  
نفيدكم بأن / أريج عبدالعزيز الهيمية المبتعثة لدرجة الدكتوراه في جامعة بليموث البريطانية قامت بزيارة شركة زائر القارات للسياحة والسفر والخدمات التجارية في مدينة جدة خلال الفترة من 1 أغسطس 2017 الى 29 أكتوبر 2017, وذلك بهدف جمع المعلومات المتطقة بموضوع دراستها للدكتوراه

المدير التنفيذي  
حسين بن هندي السلمي



E-mail : info@evisitor.com      جدة البحر الشمالية - ت : ٠١٢٢٨٨٢٢٨      سجل رقم : ٤٠٣٠٣٢٢٩٨١

A.2.



الى من يهمه الامر

السلام عليكم ورحمة الله وبركاته،،،

نفيدكم بان الاستاذة / اريج عبدالعزيز الهيمية المتبعتة لدرجة الدكتوراه في جامعة بليموث البريطانية قامت بزيارتنا وتوزيع الإستبيان بتاريخ 4 اكتوبر 2017م الى تاريخ 15 ديسمبر 2017م ، وذلك بغرض جمع البيانات اللازمة المتعلقة برسالة الدكتوراه الخاصة بها.

محمد صدقة دمنهوري

مدير علاقات الضيوف للأمتعة بالإنابة



A.3.



شركة العطلات الوطنية  
National Vacation Co.

الي من يهमे الامر

السلام عليكم ورحمة الله وبركاته

نفيدكم بان الأستاذة / اريج عبدالعزيز الهميمة المتبعتة لدرجة الدكتوراه في جامعة بليموث البريطانية ، قامت بزيارتنا شركة العطلات الوطنية - وكالة عطلات للسفر و السياحة بجدة . بتاريخ ٠٤ اكتوبر ٢٠١٧ م الي ١٥ ديسمبر ٢٠١٧ م ، وذلك بغرض جميع البيانات اللازمة المتعلقة برسالة الدكتوراه الخاصة بها .

مدير الوكالة  
سمير عبده نجم

إحدى شركات



منتجعات القابضة  
Resorts Holding

Vacation.Com.sa

## **Appendix B: Research Questionnaire.**

### **ONLINE CONSUMER REVIEWS QUESTIONNAIRE**

Dear Sir/Madam,

Thank you for taking time to complete this survey. Your answer is important to us. This survey is part of a PhD project on "the influence of online consumer reviews" with Plymouth University, UK. Please rest assured that your responses will be treated anonymously. Responses will be analysed at an aggregate, not individual level. The collected data will be used for academic purposes only. The survey is comprised of 3 parts. Part 1 is about your travelling and internet using experiences, part 2 is about your online consumer reviews reading behaviour, part 3 is about demographic information.

The approximate time to complete this questionnaire is 10 minutes but please take all the time you need. Your participation is voluntary, and you may withdraw from the questionnaire at any time. Please note, once you have submitted your responses we would not then be able to extract the data you submitted given the anonymity of responses. I really appreciate your participation, in this important study. Thank you for your cooperation, and for any queries or further information about this study, please do not hesitate to contact me.

Yours faithfully,

Arej Alhemimah

Doctoral Programme Member

Plymouth Business School, Plymouth University

Email: [Arej.Alhemimah@Plymouth.ac.uk](mailto:Arej.Alhemimah@Plymouth.ac.uk)

**Instructions:**

In the first part of the survey please think about reading online reviews on tourist attraction, on any travel websites before your tourism trip.

Where travel websites mean, any website offering information or/and photos on tourist attractions and provides online consumers reviews.

Where tourist attraction means - a place of interest where tourists visit, typically for its inherent or exhibited natural or cultural value, historical significance, natural or built beauty, offering leisure, adventure and amusement.

Tourist attractions may include (beaches, island resorts, parks, mountains and forests, historical places, ancient temples, zoos, aquaria, museums, art galleries, bridges, theme parks and carnivals, cultural events, factory tours, industrial heritage, ....etc)

**Remember there are no right or wrong answers.**

Part 1: The following questions refer to your personal experiences of travelling and internet using

Q1 Do you read online consumer reviews about tourist attractions before your tourism trip?

- Always
- Usually
- Sometimes
- Rarely
- Never **(if your answer is "Never", thank you have completed the questionnaire)**

Q2 How often do you use travel websites that provide customers reviews on tourist attractions?

- More than once a month
- Once a month
- Very rarely
- Never

Q3 How often do you read online consumer reviews on tourist attractions before your tourism trip?

- 4 – 5 times per week
- Once or twice a week
- Once or twice a month
- Very rarely

Q4 How long has it been since you read online consumers reviews about tourist attractions?

- 1 Week- 1 Month
- 1 Month-3 Months
- 3 Months -6 Months
- 6 Months-12 Months
- More than 12 months

Q5 Please indicate the travel website you mostly refer to for reading online consumer reviews on tourist attractions (please circle or specify one travel website).

- TripAdvisor
- Kayak
- Google
- Other, please specify \_\_\_\_\_

Q6 – a: Is there any specific tourist attraction you are thinking of?

- Yes
- No

B: If your answer is “yes”, would you please name the tourist attraction?

.....

Part 2: Please consider the following questions in terms of online consumer reviews regarding tourist attractions only, **taking into account your response to question 5 when answering**

Q7 Whilst looking for online consumer reviews regarding a tourist attraction, I find that the travel website I am using...

	Strongly Disagree	Disagree	Neither Agree nor Disagree	Agree	strongly agree
1-Is easy to use	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
2-has well-organized hyperlinks	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
3-has customized search functions	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
4-provided opportunities to interact with other customers	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
5-has high speed of page loading	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
6-is easily accessible from different media	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
7-guarantees users' privacy	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>

Q8 Can you please tell us any additional information that is not mentioned? (optional)

Q9 Whilst reading the online consumer reviews regarding a tourist attraction, I feel that....

	Strongly Disagree	Disagree	Neither agree nor disagree	Agree	Strongly agree
1-People who left these reviews were trustworthy	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
2-People who left these reviews were reliable	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>

Q10 Can you please tell us any additional information that is not mentioned? (optional)



Q11 Whilst reading the online consumer reviews regarding a tourist attraction, I feel that the arguments made in the review...

	strongly agree	Agree	Neither agree nor disagree	Disagree	Strongly disagree
1-are convincing	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
2-are strong	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
3-are good	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
4-The online consumer review information takes persuasive arguments	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
5-The online review information effectively supports its arguments	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
6-The online review information makes reasonable arguments	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>

Q12 Can you please tell us any additional information that is not mentioned? (optional)

Q13 Whilst reading the online consumer reviews regarding a tourist attraction, I feel that the information in the review ...

	strongly agree	Agree	Neither agree nor disagree	Disagree	Strongly disagree
1-includes both pros and cons on the discussed target	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
2-only has one-sided comments (positive or negative)	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
3-are biased toward one side or the other	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
4-includes both positive and negative comments	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>

Q14 Can you please tell us any additional information that is not mentioned? (optional)

Q15 I would say that when I am thinking about visiting a tourist attraction...

	strongly agree	Agree	Neither agree nor disagree	Disagree	Strongly disagree
1-People who influence my behavior think that I should read online consumer reviews.	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
2-People who are important to me think that I should read online consumer reviews.	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
3-People whose opinions I value prefer that I should read online consumer reviews.	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>

Q16 Can you please tell us any additional information that is not mentioned? (optional)

Q17 Please indicate the extent to which you agree or disagree with the following statements.

	strongly agree	Agree	Neither agree nor disagree	Disagree	Strongly disagree
1-Being accepted as a member of a group is more important than having autonomy and independence	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
2-Being accepted as a member of a group is more important than being independent	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
3-Group success is more important than individual success	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
4-Being loyal to a group is more important than individual gain	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
5-Individual rewards are not as important as group welfare	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
6-It is preferable to have a man in a high level position rather than a woman	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
7-In some jobs, a man can always do better than a woman	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
8-While men solve problems with logical analysis, women solve problems with intuition	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>

9-It is more important for men to have a professional career and the opportunity for high earnings than it is for women to have a professional career	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
9-Inequalities among people are both expected and desired	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
10-People should respect those in authority because of their position	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
11-People are better off not questioning the decisions of those in authority	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
12-People in authority should take care of their subordinates as they would take care of their children	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
13-People should avoid making changes because things could get worse	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
14-It is better to have a known bad situation than to have an uncertain situation which might be better	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
15-Work that has detailed standard operating procedures spelled out is preferable	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>

16-Fear of ambiguous and unfamiliar situations is normal	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
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Q18 Can you please tell us any additional information that is not mentioned? (optional)

Q19 Please consider the following questions in terms of online consumer reviews regarding tourism attractions only.

	strongly agree	Agree	Neither agree nor disagree	Disagree	Strongly disagree
1-online consumer reviews enhance my online tourist attraction choice effectiveness	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
2-before intending to visit a tourist attraction, I find using online consumer reviews useful	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>

Q20 Can you please tell us any additional information that is not mentioned? (optional)

Q21 The following group of statements will ask your thoughts about your perceived trust from online consumers reviews about tourist attractions.

	strongly agree	Agree	Neither agree nor disagree	Disagree	Strongly disagree
1-the information from the online consumer reviews is trustworthy	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
2-the information from the online consumer reviews is reliable	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
3-the information from the online consumer reviews is credible	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>

Q22 Can you please tell us any additional information that is not mentioned? (optional)



Q23 The following group of statements will ask your thoughts about the influence of online consumers reviews on your adoption to visit a tourist attraction.

	strongly agree	Agree	Neither agree nor disagree	Disagree	Strongly disagree
1-to what extent do you agree with online consumer reviews	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
2-Online consumer reviews contribute to my knowledge about a tourist attraction.	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
3-Online consumer reviews make easier for me to choose which tourist attractions to visit.	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
4-Online reviews enhance my effectiveness in choosing which tourist attraction to visit.	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
5-They motivate me to choose a tourist attraction for my trip.	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>

Q24 Can please you tell us any additional information that is not mentioned? (optional)

Q25 After considering the information from an online consumer review regarding visiting a tourist attraction....

	strongly agree	Agree	Neither agree nor disagree	Disagree	Strongly disagree
1-It is very likely that I will travel to the tourist attraction.	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
2-I will travel to the tourist attraction next time I need a trip.	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
3-I will recommend traveling to the tourist attraction to my friends.	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>

Q26 Can you please tell us any additional information that is not mentioned? (optional)

.....

Part 3: Just a few final questions for statistical purposes only

Q27 What is your gender?

- Male
- Female

Q28 What is your age?

- 18- 24
- 25-34
- 35-44
- 45-54
- 55-64
- Age 65 or above

Q29 What is your Education level (Highest degree) ?

- High school
- Diploma
- Bachelor's degree
- Master degree
- PhD
- Other, please specify \_\_\_\_\_

Q30 Marital status?

- Single
- Married
- Divorced
- Other, please specify \_\_\_\_\_

Q31 How long have you been using the Internet?

- Less than 1 year
- 1 to 3 years
- 4 to 6 years
- More than 6 years

Q32 How many times within the last 6 months have you traveled for more than one night for the purpose of visiting a tourism attraction?

- Have not traveled
- 1 - 3 times
- 4 - 6 times
- 7 - 10 times
- more than 10 times

Q33 Are you a Saudi?

- Yes (if yes, Thank you have completed the questionnaire)
- No (if no please go to the next question)

Q34 If no, how long have you lived in Saudi Arabia?

- 0-3 years
- 4-6 years
- 7-12 years
- +12 years

## Appendix C: Translation letters.

C.1.



Arej Alhemimah  
7a Athenaeum Street  
The Hoe  
PL1 2RQ  
United Kingdom

21<sup>st</sup> June 2017

To whom it may concern,

**Re: Translation of English PHD questionnaire.**

This letter is to confirm and certify that the translation of the attached document from **English** into **Arabic** relating to **Arej Alhemimah** is a true and accurate translation of the source document provided.

Should any additional information or confirmation be required please do not hesitate to contact us.

Kind regards,

Rob Turner  
Senior Project Manager



Lingo Service Translations Ltd.  
+44 020 8935 5635  
info@lingoservice.com | www.lingoservice.com  
Level 1, Devonshire House,  
One Mayfair Place, Mayfair, W1J 8AJ





## ترجمة معتمدة

مكتب أركان الحجاز للترجمة

ترخيص رقم ٦١٧

س.ت.٤٥٤٥٢٨٩٥٣٠ رقم العضوية: ٢٤٤٦٦٨

25112

### CERTIFICATION

Arkan Al Hijaz for Translation, Jeddah Saudia Arabia, Which is Licensed as an authorized translator by virtue of License No. 617, hereby certifies that, the translation of the document / documents annexed hereto which are stamped for identification only is a complete and true translation without any responsibility for the contents thereof.

### إشهاد

يشهد مكتب / أركان الحجاز للترجمة بجدة بالملكة العربية السعودية المرخص له بمزاولة مهنة الترجمة المعتمدة بموجب الترخيص رقم ٦١٧ أن ترجمة الوثيقة / الوثائق المرفقة والمختومة لأغراض تعريفها فقط هي ترجمة صحيحة وكاملة دون أدنى مسئولية عن محتوياتها.

الدير العام

Handwritten signature of the General Director.



## Appendix D: Ethical approval application.



Ref: FREC1617.55B  
Date: 4 October, 2017

Dear Arej,

RE: FREC1617.55B

Title: The influence of online consumer reviews in Saudi Arabia on consumers' tourism destination visiting intentions

The Faculty Research Ethics Committee has considered the ethical approval form and is fully satisfied that the project complies with Plymouth University's ethical standards for research involving human participants.

Approval is for the duration of the project. However, please resubmit your application to the committee if the information provided in the form alters or is likely to alter significantly.

We would like to wish you good luck with your research project.

Yours sincerely

*(Sent as email attachment)*

Dr James Benhin  
Chair  
Faculty Research Ethics Committee  
Faculty of Business

Faculty of Business  
University of Plymouth  
Drake Circus  
Plymouth  
Devon PL4 8AA United Kingdom

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**Appendix E: Common method bias test – Harman’s one-factor test.**

**Total Variance Explained**

Component	Total	Initial Eigenvalues		Extraction Sums of Squared Loadings		
		% of Variance	Cumulative %	Total	% of Variance	Cumulative %
1	17.146	32.973	32.973	17.146	32.973	32.973
2	3.965	7.625	40.597			
3	3.667	7.052	47.649			
4	2.751	5.291	52.940			
5	2.212	4.254	57.194			
6	1.922	3.695	60.889			
7	1.727	3.320	64.210			
8	1.577	3.033	67.243			
9	1.396	2.685	69.929			
10	1.257	2.417	72.346			
11	1.239	2.383	74.729			
12	1.142	2.197	76.926			
13	1.048	2.015	78.941			
14	.981	1.886	80.827			
15	.834	1.603	82.431			
16	.713	1.370	83.801			
17	.683	1.314	85.115			
18	.580	1.115	86.231			
19	.546	1.050	87.281			
20	.483	.928	88.209			
21	.421	.809	89.018			
22	.394	.758	89.776			
23	.356	.684	90.460			
24	.330	.634	91.094			
25	.317	.610	91.704			
26	.286	.550	92.254			
27	.266	.512	92.766			
28	.256	.492	93.258			
29	.237	.457	93.715			
30	.234	.450	94.164			
31	.224	.431	94.596			
32	.218	.419	95.014			
33	.206	.396	95.410			
34	.202	.388	95.798			
35	.190	.366	96.164			
36	.179	.344	96.508			
37	.167	.321	96.828			
38	.159	.305	97.133			
39	.148	.284	97.417			
40	.139	.268	97.685			
41	.135	.259	97.944			
42	.129	.247	98.191			
43	.125	.240	98.432			
44	.113	.217	98.649			
45	.102	.196	98.845			
46	.100	.192	99.037			
47	.098	.189	99.226			
48	.091	.175	99.401			
49	.089	.171	99.572			
50	.084	.161	99.733			
51	.072	.139	99.872			
52	.067	.128	100.000			

Extraction Method: Principal Component Analysis.



**Appendix F: The indicators' loadings and their *p* values.**

	Web Qual	RPC	Arg Qty	INF OS	SNs	Collect vsm	Mas	Pwr Dstn	Uncr Avo	PIU	PIT	INF OA	Vint	Type	SE	<i>P</i> Value
webQlty1	(0.718)	0.212	0.067	-0.088	-0.142	0.122	-0.040	-0.023	-0.179	0.233	0.174	0.030	-0.246	Reflective	0.057	<0.001
WebQlty2	(0.809)	0.014	-0.115	0.153	0.056	0.039	-0.002	-0.114	0.025	-0.015	-0.024	0.004	0.044	Reflective	0.056	<0.001
WebQlty3	(0.856)	-0.052	0.046	0.044	-0.015	0.000	0.015	-0.024	0.045	0.041	-0.047	0.058	-0.025	Reflective	0.056	<0.001
WebQlty4	(0.828)	0.004	0.242	-0.087	-0.042	0.085	0.014	0.070	-0.081	0.097	-0.027	0.058	-0.161	Reflective	0.056	<0.001
WebQlty5	(0.897)	-0.018	0.011	-0.120	0.056	-0.040	0.013	0.020	0.031	-0.065	0.043	-0.004	0.064	Reflective	0.055	<0.001
WebQlty6	(0.878)	-0.047	-0.026	0.016	0.006	-0.059	0.014	0.058	0.021	-0.085	-0.026	0.025	0.058	Reflective	0.056	<0.001
WebQlty7	(0.748)	-0.088	-0.242	0.090	0.067	-0.135	-0.025	0.003	0.122	-0.182	-0.078	-0.188	0.250	Reflective	0.057	<0.001
RPC	-0.019	(0.981)	0.028	-0.007	-0.022	0.014	-0.029	0.009	-0.037	0.015	-0.013	0.035	-0.032	Reflective	0.055	<0.001
RPC2	0.019	(0.981)	-0.028	0.007	0.022	-0.014	0.029	-0.009	0.037	-0.015	0.013	-0.035	0.032	Reflective	0.055	<0.001
ArguQlty1	-0.169	0.112	(0.852)	-0.196	-0.089	-0.034	-0.041	-0.003	-0.137	0.239	0.161	0.030	-0.110	Reflective	0.056	<0.001
ArgQlty2	-0.079	0.034	(0.898)	-0.223	-0.019	0.004	-0.036	0.033	-0.064	0.140	0.115	0.016	-0.022	Reflective	0.055	<0.001
ArgQlty3	-0.130	-0.058	(0.903)	-0.133	-0.047	0.067	0.014	0.054	-0.126	0.112	0.094	0.043	-0.044	Reflective	0.055	<0.001
ArgQlty4	0.031	-0.024	(0.871)	0.132	0.082	0.005	0.017	0.005	0.136	-0.144	-0.194	-0.005	0.072	Reflective	0.056	<0.001
ArgQlty5	0.134	-0.012	(0.834)	0.211	0.006	0.013	0.005	-0.057	0.115	-0.162	0.112	-0.072	0.063	Reflective	0.056	<0.001
AtguQlty6	0.248	-0.056	(0.778)	0.252	0.075	-0.065	0.045	-0.042	0.095	-0.219	-0.080	-0.018	0.049	Reflective	0.057	<0.001
InfoS	-0.220	0.293	0.380	(0.763)	-0.147	-0.012	0.044	0.061	-0.118	0.187	0.079	0.152	-0.231	Reflective	0.057	<0.001
InfoS2	0.019	0.013	-0.044	(0.933)	0.028	0.054	-0.008	0.018	0.013	-0.073	0.044	-0.072	0.035	Reflective	0.055	<0.001
InfoS3	0.094	-0.080	-0.196	(0.930)	0.062	-0.040	-0.035	0.008	0.055	-0.070	-0.103	-0.037	0.083	Reflective	0.055	<0.001
InfoS4	0.071	-0.180	-0.075	(0.894)	0.032	-0.005	0.007	-0.024	0.030	-0.012	-0.006	-0.016	0.074	Reflective	0.055	<0.001
SNs1	0.034	0.106	-0.076	-0.035	(0.933)	-0.022	-0.018	0.034	0.062	-0.007	0.006	-0.030	-0.005	Reflective	0.055	<0.001
SNs2	0.043	-0.017	0.038	-0.018	(0.964)	0.009	0.043	-0.017	0.018	-0.017	0.000	-0.043	0.050	Reflective	0.055	<0.001
SNs3	-0.079	-0.090	0.116	-0.054	(0.925)	0.013	-0.027	0.053	-0.081	0.025	-0.005	0.075	-0.048	Reflective	0.055	<0.001
Colvis m1	0.011	0.083	-0.014	0.017	-0.043	(0.906)	-0.046	0.039	-0.058	-0.008	0.054	0.029	-0.023	Reflective	0.055	<0.001
Colvis m2	0.043	-0.036	-0.020	0.006	0.025	(0.936)	-0.010	-0.015	0.009	0.003	-0.005	0.027	-0.032	Reflective	0.055	<0.001
Colvis m3	0.033	-0.050	0.037	-0.060	0.009	(0.947)	-0.020	0.073	-0.041	0.041	-0.026	0.036	-0.020	Reflective	0.055	<0.001

Colvis m4	- 0.018	0.02 5	0.00 4	- 0.04 7	0.03 2	(0.90 8)	0.01 1	- 0.07 6	0.031	0.01 4	- 0.02 6	- 0.08 4	0.06 0	Refle ctive	0.0 55	<0. 001
Colvis m5	- 0.075	- 0.01 9	- 0.00 9	0.09 1	- 0.00 6	(0.86 5)	0.06 9	- 0.02 6	0.064	- 0.05 4	0.00 4	- 0.01 1	0.01 8	Refle ctive	0.0 56	<0. 001
Masc1	0.090	- 0.07 0	0.00 4	- 0.02 2	- 0.01 5	0.172	(0.8 72)	- 0.15 9	- 0.003	0.01 7	- 0.04 2	0.06 2	0.01 6	Refle ctive	0.0 56	<0. 001
Masc2	- 0.015	0.01 0	0.06 8	- 0.00 9	- 0.05 8	0.027	(0.9 61)	- 0.07 3	0.005	- 0.03 4	0.03 9	- 0.02 5	- 0.00 6	Refle ctive	0.0 55	<0. 001
Masc3	- 0.057	0.01 5	0.01 1	0.00 2	0.04 2	- 0.055	(0.9 59)	0.02 8	0.003	0.02 8	- 0.01 6	- 0.02 9	0.02 4	Refle ctive	0.0 55	<0. 001
Masc4	- 0.011	0.04 1	- 0.08 7	0.02 9	0.03 1	- 0.135	(0.9 10)	0.20 0	- 0.006	- 0.00 9	0.01 7	- 0.00 2	- 0.03 5	Refle ctive	0.0 55	<0. 001
PwrDs tnc1	- 0.120	0.03 3	- 0.01 7	0.15 2	- 0.01 7	- 0.086	0.28 9	(0.74 5)	- 0.136	- 0.11 7	- 0.02 3	0.15 4	- 0.00 7	Refle ctive	0.0 57	<0. 001
PwrDs tnc2	0.028	- 0.00 3	0.00 8	0.06 3	- 0.05 6	- 0.009	- 0.12 2	(0.93 0)	0.013	0.08 0	- 0.06 6	- 0.06 5	- 0.03 4	Refle ctive	0.0 55	<0. 001
PwrDs tnc3	0.019	0.01 1	0.08 0	- 0.03 5	0.00 4	0.006	- 0.06 4	(0.91 7)	- 0.037	- 0.05 6	0.06 8	- 0.00 5	- 0.10 6	Refle ctive	0.0 55	<0. 001
PwrDs tnc4	0.114	- 0.07 9	- 0.17 1	- 0.35 0	0.15 3	0.167	- 0.10 7	(0.40 0)	0.308	0.16 2	0.04 2	- 0.12 4	0.33 6	Refle ctive	0.0 61	<0. 001
UncrA vd1	- 0.306	0.27 7	0.11 7	- 0.01 2	0.11 6	- 0.164	0.19 9	0.04 3	(0.53 4)	0.13 8	- 0.17 4	0.19 7	- 0.07 7	Refle ctive	0.0 59	<0. 001
Uncr Avo2	- 0.277	0.19 0	0.16 0	0.00 8	0.13 7	- 0.162	0.17 9	- 0.06 9	(0.66 0)	- 0.04 8	- 0.11 4	0.33 1	- 0.15 1	Refle ctive	0.0 58	<0. 001
Uncr Avo3	0.185	- 0.19 2	- 0.08 3	- 0.02 2	- 0.10 2	0.112	- 0.16 6	0.03 5	(0.82 4)	- 0.00 8	0.11 3	- 0.11 7	0.07 0	Refle ctive	0.0 56	<0. 001
Uncr Avo4	0.247	- 0.14 6	- 0.12 7	- 0.02 4	- 0.08 7	0.130	- 0.11 2	- 0.00 8	(0.78 9)	- 0.04 5	0.09 6	- 0.28 9	0.10 6	Refle ctive	0.0 57	<0. 001
PIU1	- 0.003	- 0.01 7	- 0.04 4	- 0.02 5	- 0.05 5	0.022	0.00 3	- 0.01 3	0.013	(0.9 65)	0.01 3	0.02 0	0.00 7	Refle ctive	0.0 55	<0. 001
PIU2	0.003	0.01 7	- 0.04 4	- 0.02 5	0.05 5	- 0.022	- 0.00 3	0.01 3	- 0.013	(0.9 65)	- 0.01 3	- 0.02 0	- 0.00 7	Refle ctive	0.0 55	<0. 001
PIT1	- 0.014	0.03 3	0.00 5	0.04 0	- 0.00 7	- 0.029	- 0.02 2	0.02 5	0.017	- 0.05 4	(0.9 42)	0.01 0	- 0.07 2	Refle ctive	0.0 55	<0. 001
PIT2	- 0.031	0.02 6	- 0.00 5	0.04 9	0.00 0	- 0.030	0.02 6	0.01 3	- 0.006	- 0.03 7	(0.9 74)	- 0.01 2	0.00 7	Refle ctive	0.0 55	<0. 001
PIT3	0.047	- 0.06 0	0.00 0	- 0.09 1	0.00 8	0.061	- 0.00 5	- 0.03 9	- 0.011	0.09 3	(0.9 32)	0.00 3	0.06 5	Refle ctive	0.0 55	<0. 001
InfoA 1	0.051	0.04 7	- 0.04 1	- 0.06 8	0.01 3	0.062	0.02 5	- 0.02 3	0.048	- 0.28 0	0.46 4	(0.7 13)	- 0.22 9	Refle ctive	0.0 57	<0. 001
InfoA 2	0.056	0.00 3	0.07 5	- 0.03 2	- 0.05 2	0.114	- 0.06 0	0.01 4	- 0.062	- 0.09 5	0.11 1	(0.8 62)	- 0.16 2	Refle ctive	0.0 56	<0. 001
InfoA 3	0.061	- 0.10 2	0.02 7	0.04 3	0.04 1	- 0.009	- 0.02 1	0.01 4	- 0.016	0.03 4	- 0.20 3	(0.8 88)	- 0.05 4	Refle ctive	0.0 56	<0. 001
InfoA 4	- 0.073	0.02 9	- 0.03 2	0.01 3	- 0.00 9	- 0.052	- 0.02 1	0.01 1	- 0.008	0.15 6	- 0.16 8	(0.8 91)	0.10 7	Refle ctive	0.0 56	<0. 001
InfoA dop5	- 0.088	0.03 4	- 0.03 6	0.03 3	0.00 9	- 0.105	0.08 5	- 0.02 2	0.049	0.13 5	- 0.11 6	(0.8 31)	0.30 8	Refle ctive	0.0 56	<0. 001
VInt1	- 0.028	0.13 7	- 0.04 4	- 0.02 4	0.05 5	0.015	- 0.01 5	- 0.02 4	- 0.020	- 0.00 1	- 0.02 4	- 0.02 4	(0.9 04)	Refle ctive	0.0 55	<0. 001
VInt2	- 0.015	- 0.01 0	0.04 8	0.02 8	- 0.04 4	- 0.064	- 0.01 9	0.01 2	0.005	- 0.03 7	- 0.01 1	0.02 2	(0.9 17)	Refle ctive	0.0 55	<0. 001
VInt3	0.042	- 0.12 6	- 0.00 4	- 0.00 5	- 0.01 0	0.050	0.03 4	0.01 1	0.014	0.03 8	0.03 4	0.00 2	(0.9 07)	Refle ctive	0.0 55	<0. 001

**Appendix G: Common Method Bias analysis.**

<b>Construct</b>	<b>Indicator</b>	<b>Substantive Factor Loading (R1)</b>	<b>R12</b>	<b>Method Factor Loading (R2)</b>	<b>R22</b>
Website quality	WebQual1	0.63	0.39	0.11	0.01
	WebQual2	0.74	0.54	0.08	0.01
	WebQual3	0.78	0.60	0.09	0.01
	WebQual4	0.73	0.53	0.13	0.02
	WebQual5	0.90	0.81	0.01	0.00
	WebQual6	0.90	0.81	0.03	0.001
	WebQual7	0.88	0.77	0.18	0.03
Perceived information usefulness	PIU1	0.96	0.92	0.01	0.00
	PIU2	0.96	0.92	0.01	0.00
Perceived information trust	PIT1	0.94	0.88	0.01	0.00
	PIT2	0.97	0.94	-0.01	-0.00
	PIT3	0.90	0.81	0.04	0.001
Information adoption	InfoA1	0.63	0.39	0.10	0.01
	InfoA2	0.80	0.64	0.08	0.01
	InfoA3	0.92	0.84	0.05	0.003
	InfoA4	0.96	0.92	0.09	0.01
	InfoA5	0.80	0.64	0.04	0.001
Visit intention	VInt1	0.89	0.79	0.02	0.001
	VInt2	0.93	0.86	0.03	0.001
	VInt3	0.90	0.81	0.02	0.0004
Review provider credibility	RPC1	0.99	0.98	0.02	0.0004
	RPC 2	0.96	0.92	0.02	0.0004
Argument quality	ArgQual1	0.96	0.92	0.07	0.005
	ArgQual2	0.93	0.86	0.01	0.0001
	ArgQual3	0.96	0.92	0.03	0.001
	ArgQual4	0.82	0.67	0.04	0.001
	ArgQual5	0.65	0.42	0.13	0.02
Information sidedness	InfoS1	0.54	0.29	0.29	0.09
	InfoS2	0.93	0.86	0.003	0.00
	InfoS3	1.04	1.08	0.15	0.023
	InfoS4	0.89	0.79	-0.004	0.00
Subjective norms	SNs1	0.93	0.86	0.01	0.0001
	SNs2	0.96	0.92	0.001	0.00
	SNs3	0.91	0.82	0.02	0.0004
Collectivism	Colvism1	0.91	0.82	0.005	0.00
	Colvism2	0.94	0.88	0.013	0.00
	Colvism3	0.89	0.79	0.06	0.004
	Colvism4	0.99	0.98	0.09	0.01
	Colvism5	0.80	0.64	0.07	0.005
Masculinity	Masc1	0.83	0.68	0.08	0.01
	Masc2	0.97	0.94	0.04	0.001
	Masc3	0.96	0.92	0.02	0.0004
	Masc4	0.91	0.82	0.002	0.00

Power distance	PwrDistnc1	0.76	0.57	0.025	0.06
	PwrDistnc2	0.97	0.94	0.06	0.004
	PwrDistnc3	0.94	0.88	0.03	0.00
	PwrDistnc4	0.14	0.01	0.41	0.17
Uncertainty avoidance	UncrAvo1	0.46	0.21	0.17	0.03
	UncrAvo2	0.65	0.42	-0.08	0.00
	UncrAvo3	0.85	0.72	0.016	0.00
	UncrAvo4	0.78	0.60	-0.03	0.00
<b>Average</b>		<b>0.88</b>	<b>0.93</b>	<b>0.51</b>	<b>0.010</b>

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