

# Unlocking the helpfulness of extreme and exaggerated hotel online reviews: Consumers and brand influences

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## ARTICLE INFO

### Keywords:

Review helpfulness  
Extreme reviews  
Brand familiarity  
Consumers  
Hotels

## ABSTRACT

In the digital age, where extreme reviews capture the most attention, understanding their influence on consumer decision-making becomes crucial, particularly in the hospitality industry. This research examines consumers' perceptions of the helpfulness of extreme and exaggerated positive online hotel reviews. Specifically, we explore the role of consumer traits (buying impulsiveness and susceptibility to online influence) and hotel brand reputation in shaping these perceptions. Additionally, we examine how brand familiarity moderates these effects. Our findings reveal that impulsiveness enhances helpfulness, but only for consumers familiar with the brand. Conversely, susceptibility decreases helpfulness for consumers with low brand familiarity. Brand reputation displays a consistent, positive impact on helpfulness, irrespective of familiarity. The impact of helpfulness on booking intentions was stronger for consumers less familiar with the hotel brand. These insights contribute to the understanding of review helpfulness and provide actionable implications for hospitality businesses in managing online reviews and brand strategies.

## 1. Introduction

Consumers increasingly face an overwhelming amount and variety of online user-generated content. In the context of online consumer reviews, companies know that helpful reviews are a powerful form of commercial communication that companies search and encourage among their customers (Hu, 2020; Hu & Yang, 2021). This is particularly the case for hospitality and tourism businesses since most of their product attributes and quality aspects can only be effectively evaluated during or after consumption. For consumers choosing among particular hotels or destinations, the online reviews of other consumers' experiences are of paramount relevance. For example, a recent study on 23,000 participants across 12 markets found that a little over four out of five consumers (81 %) always or frequently read reviews before booking a place to stay (Tripadvisor, 2019).

Online reviews have received a lot of attention from the hospitality and tourism literature as evidence in recent literature reviews (Kwok et al., 2017; Wang et al., 2019; Zheng et al., 2023). Researchers have used a wide array of methodologies within this field of study such as surveys (Bai et al., 2022; Belarmino & Koh, 2018), field experiments (e.g., Lv et al., 2021) and textual and sentiment analysis of secondary data

(e.g., Kim et al., 2021; Mauro et al., 2021; Xia, 2023; Xie et al., 2016). The shift from traditional word-of-mouth (WOM) to electronic word-of-mouth (eWOM) has revolutionized research methodologies in hospitality and tourism, as researchers now increasingly retrieve voluminous, unstructured, and textual review secondary data publicly available on different platforms, instead of relying on primary information from consumer surveys (Bhaiswar et al., 2021; Zhen et al., 2023). This paradigm shift is particularly noticeable when assessing the helpfulness of online reviews, as most platforms now allow users to mark reviews as helpful, offering a rich source of secondary data (Hong et al., 2017; Hu & Yang, 2021). This availability of helpfulness votes provides a valuable resource for researchers studying consumer behavior and the influence of online reviews. However, there are conceptual and practical issues associated with the use of such data for theory development and testing (Lv et al., 2022; Mariani et al., 2018). One increasingly problematic issue refers to data quality and reliability. Specifically, some consumers may provide some fake reviews (extremely positive or negative) because they have been incentivized to do so (Xu et al., 2020). In addition, some organizations might create fake reviews which are not representative of real customer opinions and situations (e.g., Reyes-Menendez et al., 2019; The Guardian, 2023; Zheng et al., 2023).

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Our interest in this research is on the extent to which extreme and exaggerated reviews may be perceived as helpful. There is some uncertainty in the literature regarding whether extreme reviews are seen as useful to consumers. While several studies have found that extreme evaluations drew more attention from consumers and hence received more weight in their decision making (e.g., Fang et al., 2016; Park & Nicolau, 2015), other research discovered that customers were skeptical of extreme ratings (e.g., Filieri, 2016; Racherla & Friske, 2012). Accordingly, many scholars have called for further research on the diagnosticity and perceived value of extreme online reviews in the hospitality industry (Filieri et al., 2021; Moon et al., 2019; Roh & Yang, 2021).

Our framework seeks to offer an improved theoretical understanding of the mechanisms that consumers-readers follow when evaluating the helpfulness of extreme and exaggerated positive online hotel reviews. Specifically, this research will investigate how consumers' traits (buying impulsiveness and susceptibility to online interpersonal influence) and hotel brand reputation influence the perceived helpfulness of reviews (the mediator variable), and how this perceived helpfulness ultimately impacts booking intentions (the outcome variable) using an online survey with consumers. Gathering published online reviews can be very helpful in summarizing aggregate attitudes, yet we believe that our survey will allow for more in-depth detail regarding theoretical and practical explanations for those consumer attitudes and intentions. Furthermore, by using a survey to measure perceived helpfulness through a multi-item scale instead of single measures like "helpful" votes, our approach provides richer insights and improved validity (Hu & Yang, 2021). Two categories of helpfulness measures exist – perceived helpfulness (multiple measures) and the number of helpfulness votes (single measure). Compared to a single numerical measure, a multi-item measure can achieve more satisfactory validity. Additionally, studies of perceived helpfulness generally gather data via surveys or experiments, whereas those focusing on helpfulness votes scrape data directly from websites (Hu & Yang, 2021; p.6).

In addition, we investigate the extent to which these effects are moderated and possibly differ depending on the extent to which consumers are familiar with the hotel brand. For example, do consumer reviews even matter for well-known hotel chains? Even though previous research indicates that brand familiarity influences electronic word of mouth (eWOM) processes (e.g., Casaló et al., 2015; Purnawirawan et al., 2015; Vermeulen & Seegers, 2009), its potential moderating role in the context of extreme and exaggerated reviews remains unexplored.

This research is intended to contribute to the literature along several dimensions. Compared with previous studies on review helpfulness, the current research is different in terms of: 1) the methodology used, 2) the extreme and exaggerated nature of the reviews examined, and 3) the variables included in the framework. A better understanding of these facets is important theoretically but also managerially. These findings can help hospitality and tourism businesses strengthen their understanding of how and why these reviews affect consumer choices. We employed a survey with 600 consumers, enabling us to analyze both the antecedents (consumer traits) and consequences (booking intentions) of perceived helpfulness in extreme reviews, as well as the moderating role of brand familiarity.

In the subsequent sections, we begin by summarizing the literature on extreme and exaggerated online reviews and their helpfulness. Then, we introduce our theoretical framework and hypotheses. Next, we describe the methodology and present the results. Finally, implications for theory and management are discussed.

## 2. Literature review and conceptual framework

### 2.1. Helpfulness of extreme and exaggerated online reviews

Among different types of electronic word of mouth (eWOM), online reviews are one of the most prevalent forms given their great flexibility,

expressiveness, and user-friendliness (Zheng et al., 2023). An online review is considered helpful and diagnostic when it offers information that is actually useful for making purchase decisions (Jiang & Benbasat, 2007). In other words, it enables consumers to better assess the quality and performance of a product or a service, thus creating superior value (Hu, 2020).

The prevalence of extreme and exaggerated online reviews is escalating (Shin et al., 2023). Consumers tend to exaggerate about their most satisfying and unpleasant experiences, particularly when recounting a consumption experience to others which is the case of online reviews (Cowley, 2014; Kapoor et al., 2021; Kirilenko et al., 2024). Extremely positive reviews are consistent with any marketing persuasion attempt, in that they accentuate extremely favorable experiences or features of the product (Kupor & Tormala, 2018), which can be very persuasive to consumers. Yet they can be "over the top" and perhaps backfire if consumers view them with skepticism (Filieri, 2016; Karabas et al., 2020).

In this research, we refer to *extremely positive and exaggerated online reviews* (EORs) as those that overemphasize consumers' consumption experiences by providing an exceedingly high rating which deviates from the overall average rating (Filieri et al., 2021; Kupor & Tormala, 2018). Additionally, these reviews often combine subjective and somewhat vague information with emotional language to convey the reviewer's personal experience and feelings (Baker & Kim, 2019; Banerjee, 2022; Kapoor et al., 2021).

As Table 1 shows, consistent with the methodological paradigm shift described earlier in the introduction, most hospitality research assessing the helpfulness of extreme reviews have been conducted by analyzing secondary data mostly through computational methods such as statistical machine learning and natural language processing. These studies have provided relevant insights into the area of extreme reviews. Yet, a company's brand team will know how their establishment is doing relative to others, but they will not necessarily have a sense of why the ratings are so good. The current research is intended to tease out findings that lead to a more definitive conclusion on the value of extreme reviews. For example, one point of confusion is whether, when, or how extreme reviews might be helpful. While many studies evidence the effectiveness of the *extremity bias*, namely, that extreme (vs. moderate) ratings were considered as more helpful for decision making (Filieri, Raguseo, & Vitari, 2018; Mauro et al., 2021; Nicolau et al., 2022; Park & Nicolau, 2015; Roh & Yang, 2021; Shin et al., 2023; Xia, 2023), others found that readers responded negatively to extreme evaluations, therefore less extreme ratings were given more weight (Chatterjee, 2020; Filieri, 2016; Racherla & Friske, 2012). As shown in Table 1, some of these studies (Filieri et al., 2021; Filieri, Raguseo, & Vitari, 2018; Hernández-Ortega, 2020; Racherla & Friske, 2012; Xia, 2023; Zhu et al., 2014) have also found that variables such as hotel and review characteristics influence the degree to which extreme reviews are helpful. For example, the helpfulness of extreme reviews was stronger for large hotels as compared to small ones (Filieri, Raguseo, & Vitari, 2018).

As shown on Table 1, only a few scholars have gathered primary information within this area of knowledge. For example, the qualitative study by Filieri (2016, p. 54) revealed that "extreme reviews accompanied by overly positive ratings are more likely to be viewed as untrustworthy rather than overly negative rating reviews". Interestingly, experiments conducted with consumers evaluating restaurant reviews indicated that the helpfulness of extreme reviews is contingent upon specific conditions; i.e., when the average overall rating in a given context was moderately positive, extremely positive reviews were more helpful than moderate ones (Kupor & Tormala, 2018). Hernández-Ortega (2020) found that the influence of extreme reviews as compared to moderate reviews on post-consumption responses was stronger when restaurant final performance was high.

One plausible explanation of the inconsistent findings depicted in Table 1 is that this stream of research has not taken the characteristics of the reader into consideration. Of course, readers differ in numerous ways, and some reviews might be perceived as more helpful to some

**Table 1**  
Summary of studies related to the helpfulness of extremely positive online reviews in the hospitality sector.

Reference	Context and sample	Moderating effects	Main results
Racherla and Friske (2012)	3000 reviews from Yelp on furniture stores, restaurants and beauty saloons	YES (service type)	Extreme reviews (positive and negative) were perceived as more useful than moderate ones in search and credence services (furniture and beauty saloons), but valence did not influence helpfulness in experience services (hotels).
Zhu et al. (2014)	16,265 hotel reviews from Yelp	YES (review extremity)	The positive influence of reviewer expertise on review helpfulness was weaker in reviews with extreme ratings as compared to those with moderate ratings
Park and Nicolau (2015)	5090 restaurant reviews from Yelp	NO	Extreme reviews were seen as more helpful than moderate ones. Extreme negative reviews were more useful than positive ones, but positive reviews were associated with higher enjoyment
Fang et al. (2016)	19,674 reviews of attractions on TripAdvisor	NO	The more the review deviated from the mean rating the more helpful it was considered.
Filieri (2016)	35 in-depth interviews with travel consumers	NO	Moderate two-sided reviews were seen as more trustworthy than one-sided, positive extreme reviews.
Filieri, Raguseo, and Vitari (2018)	11,358 hotel reviews from TripAdvisor	YES (hotel size, reviewer and review characteristics)	Extreme reviews were more helpful than moderate reviews. Large hotels were more affected by extreme reviews than small hotels. Extreme reviews were more helpful to consumers when reviews were long and accompanied by hotel photos
Kupor and Tormala (2018)	400 participants completed an online experiment of restaurant reviews	NO	When the perceived default evaluation in a given context is extremely positive, moderately positive reviews that deviate from that default were more persuasive. In contrast, when the perceived default was moderately positive, extremely positive reviews were more helpful.
Chatterjee (2020)	942 hotel reviews from TripAdvisor	NO	The higher the positive polarity of

**Table 1 (continued)**

Reference	Context and sample	Moderating effects	Main results
Hernández-Ortega (2020)	239 participants completed an online experiment on restaurant reviews	YES (restaurant performance)	the text of the review, the less helpful the review was perceived to be The influence of extreme reviews as compared to moderate reviews on post-consumption responses was stronger when performance was high. The opposite held when performance was low.
Filieri et al. (2021)	3757 extremely positive ratings of hotels from TripAdvisor	YES (service category)	Several hotel attributes (e.g., owner, location, price/quality ratio) discussed in consumer reviews were particularly relevant in affecting their helpfulness. Results also indicate the moderating role of service category (i. e., hotel stars) in the relationship between hotel attributes and helpfulness.
Mauro et al. (2021)	75,000 hotel and food stores reviews from Yelp	NO	Rating deviation from the mean value of the reviews written by the same person improves perceived helpfulness.
Roh and Yang (2021)	951,178 reviews of New York restaurants made by 142,286 reviewers on Yelp	NO	Extremely positive reviews were considered more useful than moderate ones
Nicolau et al. (2022)	48,491 hotel reviews from Booking	NO	Extremely (stressed) positive opinions on the use of language had a stronger influence on satisfaction with the hotel than moderate ones
Shin et al. (2023)	134,106 restaurant reviews from TripAdvisor and two online experiments (n = 198 and 153)	NO	Extremely positive reviews in the simulated restaurant website had stronger effects on customers' decision-making than moderately positive
Xia (2023)	815,083 restaurant reviews from Yelp	YES (geographic location)	The difference between the review score and the average score was positively correlated to helpfulness and this effect was weaker when reviewers were geographically closer

segments of consumers but not others. We will investigate consumer traits, along with hotel qualities, and the moderator of hotel brand familiarity to understand how consumers process extreme reviews. This richer model will help marketers better understand the conditions that encourage consumers to believe extreme reviews to be helpful, which in turn will help explain the impact on downstream booking intentions.

2.2. The elaboration likelihood model

This research will draw from and build on the Elaboration Likelihood Model (ELM, Petty & Cacioppo, 1986) to explain how persuasive stimuli (i.e., extreme and exaggerated reviews) are processed and interpreted differently by consumers. Specifically, this theory posits that consumers engage in more or less effortful processing of persuasive arguments depending on their motivation and/or ability to do so. Motivation is defined as goal-directed behavior, while ability is whether the consumer has enough skills to be able to process information (Risselada et al., 2018). Individuals who want to process a message (i.e., who have motivation) and/or are able to do it (i.e., who have the ability) will evaluate persuasive attempts via the *central route* (MacInnis et al., 1991). That means that they are more likely to engage in thoughtful, effortful processing of information, and then generate their own thoughts based on relevant content arguments. In the context of reviews, this means that consumers may read the text of the reviews, evaluate their usefulness, and look for specific features or attributes of the product or service. In contrast, individuals who lack motivation or ability are more likely to process information via the *peripheral route*, using mental shortcuts or heuristics without systematically processing the content of individual product reviews (Metzger & Flanagin, 2013). This processing may involve, for example, quickly scanning the overall rating and the number of reviews (Román et al., 2019).

2.3. An overview of the conceptual model

In the framework depicted in Fig. 1, the model focuses on two traits of review readers, one is buying impulsiveness, a personal characteristic that has a major influence on how consumers process information and make evaluations about products (Zhang et al., 2018). The other trait is consumers' susceptibility to online interpersonal influence, which is particularly pertinent in the context of social media (Lee & Jin Ma, 2012). The selection of these traits is supported by the ELM model. In particular, as described shortly, buying impulsiveness aligns with the peripheral route, where decisions are made quickly based on heuristics, while susceptibility to online interpersonal influence is linked to the central route, involving more thoughtful and detailed processing of information. These traits are integral for assessing how different types of consumers interact with and are influenced by online reviews, particularly those that are extreme and exaggerated, which represent the focus of our framework. We also incorporate a brand-related variable, namely, the hotel brand reputation, because this has been found to reduce the uncertainty faced by consumers during decision-making (Yan & Hua, 2021). Specifically, it is predicted that consumers' impulsiveness (H1), susceptibility (H2) and hotel reputation (H3) will likely influence the helpfulness of extremely positive and exaggerated online reviews

(EEORs), which in turn is hypothesized to increase consumers' intentions to book online (H4). Finally, we also examine the extent to which the relationships proposed in hypotheses (H1-H4) are contingent on consumers' hotel brand familiarity. Thus, as depicted in Fig. 1, our framework will test for the moderated mediation effects of the antecedents on booking intentions through helpfulness (H5a-c).

2.4. The moderating role of brand familiarity

Brand familiarity represents a consumer's knowledge about a brand, acquired either directly through personal experience or indirectly through various forms of exposure. Research has shown that brand familiarity significantly influences consumers' attitude formation (Li et al., 2020; Manthiou et al., 2016; Morgan et al., 2021). This influence is dependent on several factors such as the product life cycle and product type (hedonic vs. utilitarian) (Junior Ladeira et al., 2022). In the hospitality industry, brand familiarity is particularly important due to its high levels of heterogeneity and intangibility.

Previous studies suggest that brand familiarity not only directly affects consumer behavior but also plays a moderating role. Our theoretical framework focuses on this moderating role, which has been highlighted by hospitality scholars. For instance, brand familiarity influences the relationship between hotel brand personality and customer loyalty (Li et al., 2020), and between price perceptions and booking intentions (Wen et al., 2020). It also moderates the impact of review valence on booking intentions (Ruiz-Equihua et al., 2019), demonstrating that consumers' familiarity with a hotel brand can change their responses to reviews. Furthermore, greater familiarity with a brand typically reduces the cognitive effort a consumer needs to process information, a concept related to the ELM. This interaction between brand familiarity and information processing further supports its selection as a moderator in our study. Our focus on these two constructs provides a clear and theoretically grounded framework to explore how consumers process persuasive stimuli in online reviews. With this overview of the model and Fig. 1, next, we explain the rationale of the hypotheses which are divided into two sections. First, we focus on the antecedents of the helpfulness of extremely positive and exaggerated online reviews (EEORs). Then, we address the impact of the helpfulness of EEORs on booking intentions, which is the outcome variable in the model.

3. Hypotheses development

3.1. Antecedents of the helpfulness of EEORs

3.1.1. Consumer's buying impulsiveness

Consumer's buying impulsiveness refers to the tendency of individuals to make spontaneous and unplanned purchase decisions

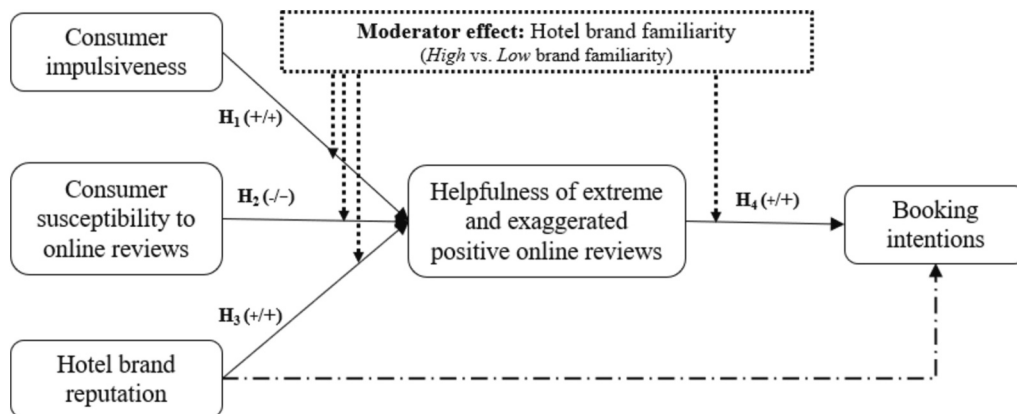


Fig. 1. Research Model. Replication hypothesis; Moderated mediated hypotheses (H5a-c) are not shown in the figure.

without much deliberation (Beatty & Ferrell, 1998). Specifically, impulsive consumers tend to engage in less information search before making a purchase and are more likely to be influenced by the behavior of others (Rook & Fisher, 1995). Also, they focus more on the hedonic value of online reviews, as compared to low impulsive consumers, who place more emphasis on the utilitarian value (Zhang et al., 2018).

We expect impulsiveness to be positively related to the helpfulness of EEORs. First, these reviews may help impulsive buyers to make a decision by providing the shortcut they need to do it quickly, without the need of much deliberation, as their extreme positiveness is aimed at encouraging purchase, not the opposite. Second, extreme and exaggerated positive reviews place special emphasis on the emotional and affective content, elements that research has shown impulsive buyers are more likely to react and find valuable (Hubert et al., 2018; Zhang et al., 2018).

We also anticipate that this positive influence of impulsiveness on perceptions of extreme reviews will be stronger for consumers who are more familiar with the brand. Brand familiarity implies consumers have already spent some time processing information about the brand, regardless of the type or content of the processing involved (Baker et al., 1986). Marketers know that brand familiarity helps consumers in purchase decisions, decreasing the need for information search (Biswas, 1992).

Brand familiarity thus facilitates easier shopping, consumers do not have to engage in extensive search, they are more confident in the information they are processing, and easier shopping experiences have been shown to be more satisfying (Ha & Perks, 2005). Building a virtuous cycle, brand familiarity and smoother shopping experiences in turn help consumers develop stronger positive brand attitudes and purchase intentions about a brand after reading positive eWOM (Sundaram & Webster, 1999). We believe that these effects should be especially true for impulsive buyers, as they are more willing to take advantage of all the benefits of being familiar with a brand. Specifically, familiarity may decrease the need for cognitive deliberation or a more effortful information search, and may predispose these consumers to positively react to a message that offers the confirmation they need to book quickly and efficiently, without second guessing themselves. As explained by Ahluwalia (2002), positive information of a product or service may be more diagnostic when the product is familiar and liked (even if this liking is weak), as consumers are inclined to give more importance to this information. Accordingly, impulsive individuals, more familiar with the brand, may perceive EEORs as more helpful, as they provide the shortcut and positive context (emotional content, hedonic experience, etc.) they need to follow their impulses. Stated formally:

**H1.** The positive influence of consumer buyer impulsiveness on the helpfulness of extremely positive and exaggerated online reviews (EEORs) increases for those consumers who are *more* familiar with the brand hotel as compared to those who are less familiar.

### 3.1.2. Consumer susceptibility

Another consumer trait that is predicted to be important in formulating consumers' assessment of review helpfulness is consumer susceptibility. Specifically, consumer susceptibility to online interpersonal influence refers to individuals' tendency to actively seek information about products, brands and services from other consumers within the online environment (Bedard & Tolmie, 2018; Litvin et al., 2008). This construct derives from the informational dimension of susceptibility to interpersonal influence from Bearden et al. (1989). Individuals with higher degrees of interpersonal susceptibility find online reviews as more credible, helpful and are more strongly influenced by them (Lee & Jin Ma, 2012; Park et al., 2011; Park & Lee, 2009). Thus, it is plausible to expect that an individual with a greater propensity to be influenced by others in the online context is more likely to attach more weight to eWOM information as compared to less susceptible individuals. More

susceptible individuals pay detailed attention to all available information in a review (Gavilan et al., 2018). In terms of central versus heuristic processing, the more susceptible consumers will be more cognitively engaged and systematically process online reviews, exerting the cognitive effort to engage in thorough, central processing. For them, EEORs may be perceived as less helpful; in particular, the more subjective and exaggerated nature of information provided in extremely positive reviews may trigger attempts to counter-argue the claims or simply dismiss the review.

Moreover, we expect the negative effect of this susceptibility predisposition on the helpfulness of EEORs to be stronger for consumers who are less familiar with the hotel brand. In this context, highly susceptible consumers will be even more motivated (given the natural positive predisposition of these consumers) to process and analyze the online reviews to get greater knowledge about the hotel. Therefore, we predict that these consumers will engage in effortful processing of the extremely persuasive and vague arguments of EEORs, thus seeing them as very unhelpful. Stated formally:

**H2.** The negative influence of consumers' susceptibility to online reviews on the helpfulness of extremely positive and exaggerated online reviews (EEORS) increases for those consumers who are *less* familiar with the brand hotel.

### 3.1.3. Hotel reputation

A potential antecedent that has received little attention in the context of review helpfulness is corporate characteristics (Lee & Park, 2022). In this research we focus on company reputation, an umbrella assessment of overall brand equity. Good reputations reflect the value of being "a good company" and are earned over time by a firm's superior performance in serving its customers with high quality goods and services and doing so honestly, based on direct consumer experience or word of mouth from others (Helm, 2013). A company's good reputation also serves as a heuristic that reduces transaction costs and perceived risks for customers (Metzger & Flanagin, 2013). The stronger a consumer's feelings toward the brand prior to the exposure of review information, the more these feelings will dominate the interpretation of the reviews (Pan & Zhang, 2011). Thus, we anticipate that exaggerated positive online reviews of well-reputed hotels will be perceived, in general, as useful, as they provide credible shortcuts for consumer decision making.

Prior research has found that an individual's evaluative predisposition toward the target of a review (e.g., a hotel) significantly influences the receptivity to and interpretation of the information provided in the review (Chatterjee, 2001). Confirmation bias theory indicates that people with a positive opinion about some object or issue (like a brand) are more likely to believe information that confirms their prior beliefs (Klayman, 1995). Thus, online reviews that are consistent (e.g., extremely positive) with a consumer's prior beliefs about the brand (which is perceived as having a good reputation) should therefore be more readily accepted as valid because those reviews are congruent with their own predisposition (Pan & Zhang, 2011). Thus, we expect perceived brand reputation to increase the helpfulness of EEORs.

In addition, the helpfulness of reviews is predicted to likely be greater when the consumer is not familiar with the hotel brand, because it is in this situation when exaggerated positive reviews may provide some additional and valuable information about the hotel. Specifically, extreme cues such as five star ratings in reviews should be weighted more heavily and have a higher impact on impression formation when consumers' knowledge about the hotel is limited, as being more diagnostic (Filiari, Raguseo, & Vitari, 2018). For consumers who know the brand, these reviews may be perceived as credible, but the utility of reading positive things about a hotel the consumer already knows is not expected to provide the same value (i.e., useful information), because in this situation the perceived risk of the selection should be lower than in the situation of not being familiar with the brand hotel. It is also

important to note that prior research shows that positive reviews of experience products (i.e., hotels) have a stronger effect on awareness, consideration and attitudes for familiar hotels than unfamiliar ones (Purnawirawan et al., 2015; Vermeulen & Seegers, 2009). Accordingly, we anticipate that brand reputation will play a more important role influencing review helpfulness when consumers are less familiar with the hotel. Stated formally:

**H3.** The positive influence of perceived hotel reputation on the helpfulness of extremely positive and exaggerated online reviews (EEORs) increases for those consumers who are *less* familiar with the brand hotel.

### 3.2. Review helpfulness and consumer's booking intentions

The ELM contends that the ultimate purpose of a persuasive message is to cause an attitudinal and/or behavioral change. Therefore, in this model we will analyze the influence of EEORs on booking intentions. Helpful reviews allow consumers to gain relevant information about the product or service in terms of its quality, attributes and/or performance and minimize uncertainty (Filiari, 2016). Although limited, there is recent empirical evidence about the positive consequences of review helpfulness on consumer decision processes and likely purchasing intentions in the hospitality sector (Filiari, McLeay, et al., 2018; Moloi et al., 2022). We expect that this must be particularly the case for extremely positive reviews. Specifically, helpful EEORs offer clear star rating information about the hotel, which is a commonly used shortcut by consumers in this experiential context where diagnostic or objective information is more difficult to obtain (Sparks & Browning, 2011). Thus, if consumers perceive these extremely positive reviews as useful, then it is reasonable to expect that they will be more willing to book the hotel under review.

Given that attitudes and behavioral intentions tend to be correlated, we also expect the influence of helpfulness on booking intentions to be moderated by brand familiarity. Prior research has found that positive reviews had a stronger impact on attitude toward hotels (Vermeulen & Seegers, 2009) and booking intentions for unfamiliar than for familiar hotels. Self-perception theory (Bem, 1972) holds that individuals build their attitudes and emotions originally from first-hand information (i.e., their previous experiences). If this first-hand information is weak or limited, people then consider second-hand information (other people's experiences). When applied to the context of online reviews, we expect the influence of review helpfulness (second-hand information) on booking intentions to be stronger when first-hand information about the hotel is limited (i.e., the hotel is less familiar). In such circumstances, individuals will place more weight on second-hand information in their decision-making when there is a lack of information on unfamiliar hotels (Casaló et al., 2015). Accordingly, we formulate the following:

**H4.** The positive influence of the helpfulness of extremely positive and exaggerated online reviews (EEORs) on consumer's booking intentions increases for those consumers who are *less* familiar with the brand hotel.

### 3.3. Moderated mediation effects

Note that these hypotheses are collected in Fig. 1 into an overarching model or framework in which we expect a pattern of moderated mediation. Specifically,

H1, H2, and H3 suggest that consumer traits, including impulsiveness and susceptibility to online influence, along with brand reputation, influence the perceived helpfulness of EEORs. Brand familiarity is hypothesized to moderate these relationships, affecting how helpfulness is perceived. What we propose in this section is that these relationships extend to booking intentions through the mediation of perceived helpfulness, with the strength of these indirect effects depending on brand familiarity.

#### 3.3.1. Impulsiveness and booking intentions

In H1, we argue that more impulsive consumers will find EEORs more helpful, especially when they are familiar with the hotel brand. Familiarity reduces cognitive effort, allowing impulsive consumers to act on the emotional and affective cues in extreme reviews quickly. When these reviews are perceived as helpful, impulsive consumers are more likely to follow through with a booking intention. We expect the moderated mediation effect to occur because the influence of impulsiveness on booking intentions through review helpfulness will be stronger when consumers are already familiar with the brand. Familiarity reduces the need for effortful deliberation, reinforcing the impulsive behavior that is more likely to result in a booking decision.

**H5a.** The indirect effect of consumer buying impulsiveness on booking intentions through the helpfulness of extremely positive and exaggerated online reviews (EEORs) increases for those consumers who are more familiar with the hotel brand.

#### 3.3.2. Susceptibility and booking intentions

In H2, we predict that highly susceptible consumers will find EEORs less helpful, particularly when they are less familiar with the hotel brand. These consumers are more likely to scrutinize exaggerated claims, leading to skepticism about the review's credibility. This skepticism reduces the perceived helpfulness of EEORs, which, in turn, weakens their impact on booking intentions. We expect the moderated mediation effect to occur because when consumers are unfamiliar with the brand, their susceptibility leads to lower perceived helpfulness, thereby dampening their likelihood of booking the hotel. In contrast, for familiar brands, susceptibility may have less impact on helpfulness perception, allowing booking intentions to be less hindered.

**H5b.** The indirect effect of consumer susceptibility to online reviews on booking intentions through the helpfulness of extremely positive and exaggerated online reviews (EEORs) increases for those consumers who are less familiar with the hotel brand.

#### 3.3.3. Hotel reputation and booking intentions

H3 posits that perceived hotel reputation enhances the helpfulness of EEORs, particularly for consumers who are less familiar with the brand. A well-regarded reputation serves as a heuristic, especially for those unfamiliar with the hotel, providing reassurance and reducing perceived risks. This positive evaluation of the hotel's reputation increases the likelihood of a booking decision via the intermediary of helpfulness. We expect the moderated mediation effect to occur because the reputation's influence on helpfulness—and thus on booking intentions—will be stronger when consumers lack familiarity with the brand. In contrast, for familiar brands, while a good reputation remains valuable, it is less crucial for decision-making, as consumers already possess first-hand information, reducing the added value of the review's helpfulness in forming booking intentions.

**H5c.** The indirect effect of perceived hotel reputation on booking intentions through the helpfulness of extremely positive and exaggerated online reviews (EEORs) increases for those consumers who are less familiar with the hotel brand.

### 3.4. Brand reputation and booking intentions

Finally, the model also includes, as a statistical and theoretical control, a direct path from brand reputation to booking intentions in line with prior research (e.g., Gatti et al., 2012; Wen et al., 2021).

## 4. Methodology

### 4.1. Sample characteristics

An online survey was administered by an independent market

research firm<sup>1</sup> to collect the data. The final sample consisted of 600 participants.<sup>2</sup> Participants were selected to be representative of the general population's age and gender distribution. Two screening questions were used to recruit subjects (age > 18 years, knowledge about the hotel brand shown in the review scenario). The sample consisted of 50.2 % males, with a mean age of 41.2 years (s.d. = 12.3), and 54.3 % of participants had a college degree.

#### 4.2. Experimental stimuli and measures

The survey employed a scenario-based approach, a well-established procedure in related studies known for its effectiveness in capturing authentic responses regarding consumers' perceptions, attitudes, and intentions (e.g., Baker & Kim, 2019; Kapoor et al., 2021; Riquelme et al., 2021). Both qualitative and quantitative pretests were conducted to validate the questionnaire. The qualitative pretest involved 10 consumers and 4 academics familiar with the research topic, while the quantitative pretest was carried out with a convenience sample of 99 individuals. Feedback from this pretest confirmed the clarity of the questionnaire items, and minor revisions were made to improve wording and comprehension. Additionally, they provided evidence that the reviews used in the survey were perceived as extreme and exaggerated, essentially a manipulation check. Table 1 reports all measures of the survey items.

Brand familiarity of the hotel depicted in the scenario (described next) was measured through an 11-point scale from Ryu et al. (2022) which ranged from (0) "I know nothing about these hotels" to (10) "I know a lot about these hotels." The use of a single item to measure brand familiarity is a common and straightforward approach in consumer and marketing literature (Junior Ladeira et al., 2022). We used the 7-point Likert scale for all subsequent items, unless otherwise noted. Hotel brand reputation was assessed through a 3-item scale from (Veloutsou & Moutinho, 2009). This measure has been applied in the hospitality context (e.g., Touni et al., 2022) and is consistent with our understanding of brand reputation as a unidimensional intangible asset.

The stimuli reflected a hypothetical scenario where participants were asked to imagine themselves searching for information about a hotel on a travel booking website (see Appendix). Participants were shown a simulated look-alike booking site which was independent from the brand. The hotel brand and prices shown were real to enhance their authenticity and potential external validity. During the experiment, participants were exposed to three individual online reviews. Extremity and exaggeration in these reviews were emphasized using both high ratings and textual informational content (e.g., Baker & Kim, 2019; Hernández-Ortega, 2020; Shin et al., 2023). Specifically, the three individual ratings were exceptionally positive (9.7, 9.9, and 10), far exceeding the average global rating for the hotel (6.7 out of 10). Furthermore, the content of these reviews was exaggerated by using highly emotional language, capitalization, and exclamation marks (e.g., "Everything about the experience was AWESOME!"). At two points in the questionnaire, participants were required to respond to attention-check questions as a prerequisite for advancing through the system.

After reading the scenario, participants were asked to evaluate the review helpfulness on a 7-point semantic differential 3-item scale from Folse et al. (2016). Consistent with prior research focused on consumers' perceptions of online reviews (e.g., Hong et al., 2017), respondents rated the usefulness, helpfulness, and informativeness of the review. In line

<sup>1</sup> The data were acquired from the Netquest panel, a technology-driven company adhered to rigorous quality standards (ISO 26362 and ISO 20252). Netquest is also a member of ESOMAR, and thus is required to comply with the General Data Protection (GDPR) when handling personal data.

<sup>2</sup> The sample size greatly exceeds the widely accepted guideline of requiring at least 10 observations per indicator or item for conducting structural equation model analysis (Kline, 2011).

with previous hospitality research (e.g., Ruiz-Equihua et al., 2020), respondents were then asked about their booking intentions through a 3-item scale from Reimer and Benkenstein (2016). Buying impulsiveness was measured using 3 items from Rook and Fisher (1995). This scale has been widely used in the marketing literature (e.g., De Vries & Fennis, 2020; Wachter et al., 2012). Susceptibility to online interpersonal influence was measured using three items adapted from Bearden et al. (1989) and Bedard & Tolmie, 2018 to the specific context of online reviews. The original scales have been extensively applied in psychology research (e.g., Cheng et al., 2013; Thomas & Vinuales, 2017) The survey concluded with demographic questions.

## 5. Results

### 5.1. Measurement validation

We tested our hypotheses using structural equation modeling (SEM) with LISREL 12.<sup>3</sup> We assessed the dimensionality and validity of measures by an initial Confirmatory Factor Analysis (CFA)<sup>4</sup> for each of the two groups (see Table 2). The measurement models displayed excellent fits for both the high familiarity ( $\chi^2(80) = 97.97, p = 0.08$ ; GFI = 0.94; AGFI = 0.91; NNFI = 0.99; CFI = 0.99; RMSEA = 0.03; RMSR = 0.05) and the low familiarity group ( $\chi^2(80) = 138.10, p = 0.00$ ; GFI = 0.93; AGFI = 0.90; NNFI = 0.98; CFI = 0.98; RMSEA = 0.05; RMSR = 0.04). The normalized  $\chi^2$  values for both groups were below 3 (1.22 and 1.73, respectively), suggesting a satisfactory model fit, as per Fornell and Larcker (1981).

All parameter estimates were significant, which proved convergent validity of the scales as shown in Table 2 (Fornell & Larcker, 1981). Table 3 indicates that all scales showed good levels of reliability (composite reliability index >0.60; average variance extracted >0.50; Bagozzi & Yi, 1988). Furthermore, for each comparison between the construct and all other variables (Table 3), the explained variance exceeded shared variances, which confirmed discriminant validity of all scales (Fornell & Larcker, 1981).

We checked for the invariance of the measurement model across the two samples (Vandenberg & Lance, 2000). Based on the multigroup analysis, metric invariance was successfully established. Specifically, the chi-square difference between the non-restricted model and the full constrained model was not significant ( $\chi^2(15) = 23.06, p > 0.05$ ).

### 5.2. Hypothesis testing

Multi-group analyses were performed through LISREL 12 in a series of nested models to examine group differences and the moderating role of brand familiarity. The overall sample was divided into two subsamples, according to whether participants scored high or low on the moderating variable (a median split was used), to achieve within-group

<sup>3</sup> SEM was chosen for this study as it allows for the simultaneous estimation of both direct and indirect relationships between multiple dependent and independent variables, making it well-suited for testing complex theoretical models (Iacobucci, 2010). Before running the SEM model, a Confirmatory Factor Analysis (CFA) was conducted to ensure that the measurement model was valid and reliable. CFA is a necessary step in SEM to confirm that the observed variables adequately represent the latent constructs, ensuring the accuracy of the structural relationships tested in the model (Brown, 2015). LISREL has long been one of the most popular and well-regarded software tools for conducting SEM (Jöreskog & Sörbom, 1993).

<sup>4</sup> The Mardia test rejected the multivariate normality of the data. Accordingly, the Maximum Likelihood estimated via Satorra-Bentler's (2010) correction (asymptotic covariance matrix) was used, as this provides robust estimates of parameters in case of non-normal distributions.

**Table 2**  
Construct measurement summary: results of convergent validity tests.

Constructs, Survey Items <sup>a</sup> and Sources	High brand familiarity (n = 299)	Low brand familiarity (n = 301)
	Std. loading (t-value)	Std. loading (t-value)
Buying impulsiveness (Rook & Fisher, 1995)		
I often buy things spontaneously	0.77 (13.33)	0.85 (17.91)
I often buy things without thinking	0.95 (22.99)	0.99 (23.41)
“Just do it” describes the way I buy things	0.75 (14.07)	0.77 (13.47)
Susceptibility to online interpersonal influence (Bearden et al., 1989; Bedard & Tolmie, 2018)		
I seek information about products and brands from others online	0.88 (15.19)	0.94 (13.74)
I frequently gather information from others online before I buy	0.90 (16.79)	0.93 (15.91)
I consider others’ opinions online when I purchase goods or services	0.85 (15.10)	0.95 (16.07)
Hotel brand reputation (Weiss et al., 1999)		
This brand is reputable	0.89 (18.54)	0.79 (12.21)
This brand is trustworthy	0.93 (16.75)	0.69 (10.87)
This brand makes honest claims	0.86 (17.79)	0.83 (13.46)
Helpfulness of EEOs (Folse et al., 2016)		
These reviews were not at all useful / very useful	0.92 (23.24)	0.90 (23.27)
These reviews were not at all informative / very informative	0.90 (21.63)	0.89 (21.83)
These reviews were not at all helpful / very helpful	0.93 (22.15)	0.89 (23.35)
Booking intentions (Reimer & Benkenstein, 2016)		
After reading these online reviews... I would consider staying at IBIS hotels in the future	0.63 (6.95)	0.72 (9.83)
It is probable that I would stay at IBIS hotels	0.86 (14.97)	0.75 (12.25)
I would give IBIS hotels a try	0.86 (12.94)	0.83 (13.29)

<sup>a</sup> Except for helpfulness, that was measured as seven-point differential semantic scale, rest of the items were measured on five-point Likert-type scales (1 = “strongly disagree” to 7 = “strongly agree”).

**Table 3**  
Mean, SD, Correlations, Average Variance Extracted (AVE) and Discriminant Validity.

High brand familiarity	Mean	sd	AVE	1	2	3	4	5
1. Impulsiveness	3.19	1.29	0.77	0.91	0.00	0.00	0.00	0.00
2. Susceptibility	5.41	1.10	0.79	0.01	0.92	0.06	0.00	0.01
3. Reputation	4.41	0.72	0.66	-0.00	0.25	0.85	0.10	0.17
4. Helpfulness	3.96	1.51	0.79	-0.04	-0.05	0.31	0.92	0.32
5. Booking intentions	4.12	0.95	0.54	-0.01	0.09	0.41	0.57	0.78
Low brand familiarity	Mean	sd	AVE	1	2	3	4	5
1. Impulsiveness	3.21	1.24	0.85	0.94	0.00	0.01	0.04	0.01
2. Susceptibility	5.61	1.05	0.80	0.03	0.93	0.09	0.01	0.01
3. Reputation	4.85	0.83	0.75	0.10	0.30	0.90	0.13	0.18
4. Helpfulness	3.97	1.51	0.85	0.19	0.08	0.36	0.95	0.23
5. Booking intentions	4.27	0.97	0.68	0.12	0.12	0.42	0.48	0.87

Scale composite reliability is reported along the diagonal of both matrices, shared variances of multi-item measures are reported in the upper half, and correlations are reported in the lower half.

homogeneity and between group heterogeneity<sup>5</sup> as recommended by Stone and Hollenbeck (1989).

As shown in Table 4, H1 and H2 were supported. Impulsiveness

<sup>5</sup> These two samples did not differ based on age ( $\chi^2 = 3.41$ ;  $p = 0.49$ ) or education ( $\chi^2 = 9.40$ ;  $p = 0.23$ ). They showed a small difference based on gender ( $\chi^2 = 5.23$ ;  $p = 0.02$ ), but not important in terms of distribution (deviations with respect to an equal distribution are less than 4 percentage points – 55 % of women compared to 46 % of men in the low familiarity group and the same difference but in the opposite direction in the group of men- in both groups).

**Table 4**  
Model comparison and parameter estimates.

Paths 1–5 compared with restricted model	Chi-Square Difference ( $\Delta df = 1$ )	Std. Path Coefficients (t-value)		Hypothesis supported?
		High brand familiarity	Low brand familiarity	
Free path:				
H1: Impulsiveness → Helpfulness	$\Delta\chi^2 = 9.31^{**}$	$\beta = 0.14$ (t = 2.33)	$\beta = -0.03$ (t = -0.41)	Yes
H2: Susceptibility → Helpfulness	$\Delta\chi^2 = 11.94^{***}$	$\beta = -0.05$ (t = -0.83)	$\beta = -0.16$ (t = -2.60)	Yes
H3: Reputation → Helpfulness	$\Delta\chi^2 = 1.49$ (ns)	$\beta = 0.38$ (t = 5.62)	$\beta = 0.42$ (t = 6.42)	Partially
H4: Helpfulness → Booking intentions	$\Delta\chi^2 = 2.91^*$	$\beta = 0.43$ (t = 5.95)	$\beta = 0.54$ (t = 7.09)	Yes
Replication hypothesis	$\Delta\chi^2 = 0.50$ (ns)	$\beta = 0.33$ (t = 4.74)	$\beta = 0.30$ (t = 3.87)	Yes

\*  $p < 0.10$ ; \*\*  $p < 0.05$ ; \*\*\*  $p < 0.01$ .

enhanced review helpfulness, but only for consumers highly familiar with the brand, while susceptibility reduced helpfulness, but only among consumers with low familiarity. We found partial support for H3, as brand reputation significantly increased helpfulness, but this effect was not moderated by brand familiarity. In line with H4, helpfulness positively influenced booking intentions, and this effect was marginally moderated ( $p < 0.1$ ). Finally, the replication hypothesis was also confirmed, showing a significant and positive influence of brand reputation on booking intentions in both samples.

Multigroup analysis also revealed moderated mediated results (see Table 5). To analyze them, we tested two distinct models: the first allowed both direct and indirect paths to fit concurrently and varied between the two samples, while the second model mandated these paths to be identical. The variance in the chi-square values for these models, specifically for the direct paths in the mediation process, combined with the significance of the indirect effects in the unconstrained model,

served as the basis for assessing the moderated mediation effects (Iacobucci et al., 2007; Muller et al., 2005).

Results indicate that impulsiveness indirectly increased booking intentions through its influence on helpfulness, but only among consumers highly familiar with the brand (H5a). Susceptibility, again, showed the opposite pattern: it indirectly reduced booking intentions through lower levels of perceived helpfulness only for consumers with low brand familiarity (H5b). Finally, along with its direct effect, reputation also increased booking intentions indirectly, but this mediated effect was not moderated by brand familiarity (H5c).

**Table 5**  
Moderated mediated results within high and low brand familiarity.

Indirect paths	Stdzd Indirect Path Coeff. (t-value, confident interval)	
	High brand familiarity	Low Brand familiarity
H5a: Impulsiveness → Booking intentions	0.05 (t = 2.15, 0.01; 0.08)	-0.01 (t = -0.42, -0.05; 0.03)
H5b: Susceptibility → Booking intentions	-0.02 (t = -0.84, -0.05; 0.02)	-0.07 (t = -2.42, -0.11; -0.02)
H5c: Reputation → Booking intentions	0.12 (t = 4.26, 0.08; 0.17)	0.17 (t = 4.79, 0.11; 0.23)

## 6. Discussion

The current research examines the influence of consumer's traits and brand reputation on the helpfulness of extremely positive and exaggerated online reviews and its subsequent effect on consumer's responses in the hospitality industry. Results, from a survey with 600 consumers, showed that buying impulsiveness enhances the perceived helpfulness of such reviews, but this effect was only significant among consumers who were more familiar with the brand. Conversely, susceptibility to online interpersonal influence decreased helpfulness, but only among consumers less familiar with the hotel brand. Brand reputation, on the other hand, displayed a consistent, positive effect on helpfulness, irrespective of brand familiarity. Notably, the impact of helpfulness on intentions to book was more substantial among consumers less familiar with the brand. These findings offer valuable insights for both theoretical understanding and practical applications.

### 6.1. Theoretical implications

This study contributes to the hospitality literature in several distinctive ways: First, it specifically focused on the domain of extreme and exaggerated reviews, a subject that has received relatively little attention from hospitality and tourism scholars (Filiari et al., 2021; Roh & Yang, 2021), despite their increasing prevalence in the online review landscape (Shin et al., 2023). This focus on extreme reviews addresses a gap in the literature and sheds light on the specific mechanisms through which extreme opinions are evaluated by consumers and affect their intentions. Our findings align with other studies that have indicated that the diagnosticity of extreme reviews is influenced by the extent to which the extreme review deviates from the overall mean rating (Fang et al., 2016; Kupor & Tormala, 2018; Mauro et al., 2021; Xia, 2023). From a psychological perspective, an extreme opinion signifies a substantial departure from a central point reflecting "attitude extremity" (Krosnick et al., 1993), which conveys impactful information and higher value as long as readers notice the deviation from the average rating (Gao et al., 2017; Román et al., 2023). In other words, a review that significantly diverges from the average rating often conveys the reviewer's unique experience and definitive opinion about a product or service, and is consequently regarded as more informative and diagnostic (Yin et al., 2016).

Second, while prior research has typically placed special emphasis on the characteristics of reviews and/or reviewers that make an online review to be categorized as helpful (Hong et al., 2017; Hu & Yang, 2021; Wang et al., 2019), our research diverges by shifting the focus to the readers of these reviews. In doing so, we offer new insights into the cognitive processes that consumers undergo when encountering extreme and exaggerated online reviews. This is essential given that consumers increasingly rely on online reviews to make informed decisions in the hospitality industry. Also, by showing how different consumer traits influence the processing of extreme reviews through central and peripheral routes, we validate the theoretical framework of ELM in explaining consumer behavior in extreme online review contexts.

Third, our research delves into the subsequent impact of review

helpfulness on consumers' responses (i.e., booking intentions). Previous studies in online reviews have tested the direct effect of review characteristics (e.g., valence, length, consistency, timing, use of images) and/or reviewer attributes (e.g., expertise, reputation) on consumers' reactions and behaviors (e.g., Ren & Nickerson, 2018; Sparks & Browning, 2011; Syafiganti & Walrave, 2022; Zhang et al., 2021), but are typically not inclusive of the critical influence of review helpfulness on purchase decisions.

Fourth, beyond previous studies, this analysis is grounded in primary data collected through an online survey involving consumers. This methodology is not new to marketing research but it is quite rare in the literature examining the helpfulness of online reviews. This methodological approach allowed us to provide a better understanding of the complex mechanisms surrounding the helpfulness of extreme reviews by testing moderated mediations which included the antecedents of helpfulness and its subsequent effect on booking intentions along with the moderating influence of brand familiarity. Our results shed light on the conditions (high vs. low brand familiarity) under which the mediation pathway through helpfulness is more or less relevant. Specifically, the indirect influence of consumer traits (impulsiveness and susceptibility) on booking intentions was moderated by brand familiarity, while the positive effect of brand reputation on booking intentions through helpfulness was not contingent on brand familiarity. A plausible explanation might be in the interaction between brand reputation and brand familiarity, which both refer to the same object, namely, the brand. Specifically, a consumer who is well aware of the reputation of a hotel (because he/she is highly familiar with it) may feel that such extremely positive reviews confirm their strong beliefs and find the reviews as equally helpful as another consumer who is less familiar with the reputed hotel and extreme cues in the review will reduce uncertainty and perceived risks.

### 6.2. Practical implications

The findings of this study offer several actionable insights for hospitality practitioner. First, hotels should recognize the significant impact of extreme and exaggerated reviews on consumer decision-making. These reviews, when perceived as helpful, can strongly influence booking intentions, particularly among consumers who are less familiar with the hotel brand. Therefore, hotels should proactively encourage highly satisfied guests to share their experiences online. Engaging with these customers at key touchpoints—such as during checkout or via follow-up communications—can prompt them to provide positive reviews. Additionally, offering incentives like discounts or complimentary services in exchange for detailed reviews can motivate satisfied guests to contribute.

Second, brand reputation emerged as a consistently positive factor in influencing the perceived helpfulness of extreme reviews, regardless of consumers' familiarity with the brand. Hotels should capitalize on this by prominently highlighting their strong brand reputation in all marketing efforts. Consistent messaging across online platforms, social media, and physical touchpoints is essential to reinforce brand recognition and trust. Maintaining high service standards and ensuring that positive customer experiences are shared publicly will further enhance the brand's reputation and attract new customers.

Finally, the study revealed that consumer impulsiveness increases the helpfulness of extreme reviews, particularly among those familiar with the brand. To leverage this, hotels should aim to boost brand familiarity among impulsive consumers through visually engaging content on websites and social media. Special promotions or time-limited offers can also appeal to impulsive customers, encouraging them to act quickly. Additionally, enhancing the hotel's visibility on booking platforms and travel websites can further attract this segment of consumers, who tend to make quick decisions when familiar with the brand.

Finally, the full model of moderated mediation showed that consumer's impulsiveness increased booking intentions through helpfulness

for consumers who are very familiar with the brand. To capitalize on this effect, hotels can implement several strategies to enhance brand familiarity among this customer segment. For example, creating visually appealing content on their websites and social media platforms that highlights the hotels' unique features and offerings might be particularly effective, as impulsive customers are often drawn to eye-catching visuals (Khachatryan et al., 2018). Another effective approach is to promote limited-time special offers or discounts tailored to impulsive travelers to capture their attention. Furthermore, the hotel brand team can collaborate with travel booking platforms and websites to increase the hotel's visibility within the impulsive customer segment.

6.3. Future research and limitations

Any research has some limitations that point to interesting avenues for future research. In the current research, consumers reacted to hypothetical purchase scenarios with a limited number of reviews, which may have influenced the realism of the situations. While the pretests showed that these scenarios were perceived as realistic, future research would benefit from using a mix method approach (Caulley, 2007). This could involve initially conducting qualitative interviews to explore in-depth how consumers perceive and react to extremely positive and negative online reviews. Insights gained from these interviews could then inform the design of a more targeted quantitative survey, ensuring that it captures the complexity of consumer attitudes and behaviors. In addition, future research could consider using extremely negative reviews which are typically viewed with suspicion and could provide critical insights into damage control strategies for hospitality management and their effects on customer trust. Future research could also conduct experiments in a controlled laboratory setting by manipulating the nature of the reviews (extreme positive vs. extreme negative) and observing direct behavioral responses to these reviews in real-time. This method would allow researchers to isolate specific variables and directly measure the impact of review extremity on decision-making processes without the confounding effects present in a natural setting.

To further expand this research area, additional consumer traits that

might influence the perception and effectiveness of extreme and exaggerated online reviews could be explored. For instance, **need for cognition**, which reflects an individual's propensity to engage in and enjoy effortful cognitive endeavors (Cacioppo & Petty, 1982), could impact how consumers process detailed, objective reviews versus those that are extreme and subjective. Another relevant trait to consider is risk aversion (Weber & Milliman, 1997), which could influence how consumers perceive and react to the credibility and extremity of online reviews in the context of hotel bookings.

In summary, this research offers new insights into marketing theory and practice regarding how extremely positive online reviews may be interpreted and used. We theorized, tested, and demonstrated that different consumer segments can be leveraged who will find the extreme reviews particularly useful, in conjunction with the hotel's presence and familiarity. We established a relatively under-studied construct of the perceived helpfulness of the online reviews and hospitality marketers can use the clear effects which converted into increased hotel bookings.

CRediT authorship contribution statement

**Sergio Román:** Writing – review & editing, Writing – original draft, Supervision, Methodology, Formal analysis, Conceptualization. **Isabel P. Riquelme:** Writing – review & editing, Writing – original draft, Methodology, Formal analysis, Conceptualization. **Dawn Iacobucci:** Writing – review & editing, Writing – original draft, Conceptualization.

Declaration of competing interest

None.

Acknowledgements

This research was supported by Spanish National Agency for Research (grant PID2020-116247GB-I00). Authors also thank the assistance provided by Fundación Cajamurcia.

Appendix A. Survey questions

Could you please indicate the extent to which you know IBIS hotels?

0	Neutral	10
I know nothing about them		I know a lot about them
<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/> <input type="checkbox"/> <input type="checkbox"/> <input type="checkbox"/> <input type="checkbox"/> <input type="checkbox"/> <input type="checkbox"/> <input type="checkbox"/> <input type="checkbox"/> <input type="checkbox"/> <input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>

Please indicate your level of agreement with the following statements regarding IBIS brand from 1 "strongly disagree" to 7 "strongly agree":

	1	2	3	4	5	6	7
	Strongly disagree	Disagree	Somewhat disagree	Neutral	Somewhat agree	Agree	Strongly agree
This brand is reputable	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
This brand is trustworthy	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
This brand makes honest claims	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>

IMAGINE that you want to spend a weekend in Málaga at the end of February and you are seriously considering to stay at the IBIS MÁLAGA-CENTRO CIUDAD hotel. The price of a double room is 59 euros per night (without breakfast), that is, 118 euros for the weekend. You intend to make the reservation at an online booking travel website (which is independent from the IBIS hotel chain) where the global evaluation of 860 customers is 6.7 out of 10. Below are the three most positive opinions (please read them carefully).

**6.7 Acceptable** · 860 customer reviews

Sort reviews by: **Highest scores**

Reviewed 4 days ago

**10** **“Exceptional”**

+ This hotel is AMAZING! This is the best experience I've ever had in a hotel. From now on I will always consider IBIS hotels as my first option

- Nothing

Reviewed 12 days ago

**9.9** **“Best option ever”**

+ If you are reading this review do not think twice. This is the HOTEL OF YOUR LIFE! Book now because you won't regret it! Hurry up or the hotel will run out of rooms!

- Nothing at all

Reviewed 3 weeks ago

**9.7** **“Almost perfect”**

+ Everything about the experience was AWESOME! I really loved it. Try it and you won't be disappointed

- Nothing

In the light of the overall rating of IBIS MÁLAGA-CENTRO CIUDAD hotel of 6.7 out of 10, how would you consider the three most positive reviews shown earlier?

	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	
				Neutral				
Not at all useful	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	Very useful
Not at all informative	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	Very informative
Not at all helpful	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	Very helpful

Regarding the three individual reviews shown earlier in the scenario, please select only one of the following options:

---

The rating given to the hotel IBIS Málaga by these reviews is lower than the average overall rating provided by other users

The rating given to the hotel IBIS Málaga by these reviews matches the average overall rating provided by other users

The rating given to the hotel IBIS Málaga by these reviews is higher than the average overall rating provided by other users

After reading the reviews shown earlier, please indicate your level of agreement with the following statements from 1 “strongly disagree” to 7 “strongly agree”:

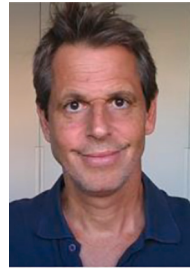
	1	2	3	4	5	6	7
	Strongly disagree	Disagree	Somewhat disagree	Neutral	Somewhat agree	Agree	Strongly agree
I would consider staying at IBIS hotels in the future	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
It is probable that I would stay at IBIS hotels	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
I would give IBIS hotels a try	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>

The situation described earlier in the scenario refers to... (select only one option):



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