

## Research Note

## Opinions for you, not me: Self-other differences in review reliance

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## Introduction

Electronic word-of-mouth is increasingly vital for the tourism industry. Ninety-six percent of travelers consider reviews crucial in decision-making, and 52 % would only book accommodation with reviews (Tripadvisor, 2019). In addition to reading reviews when making travel decisions (Ghimire, Shanaev, & Lin, 2022; Srivastava & Kalro, 2019), tourists also generate and share reviews with others (Ring, Tkaczynski, & Dolnicar, 2016; Tuomi, 2021). While extensive research has examined why people read and write reviews (e.g., Berger, 2015), do people write reviews that they themselves will find helpful as readers? Namely, do people rely on different types of reviews to facilitate decisions for others vs. themselves?

While extant literature has examined the antecedents of review reliance (i.e., the extent to which people find reviews helpful and rely on them; e.g., Liu & Hu, 2021; Filieri, 2016; Zhang, Zhang, Liang, Yang, & Law, 2023), it is unclear if tourists differ in the reviews they rely on vs. think others rely on. Tourists tend to generate different reviews depending on destinations (Sánchez-Franco & Rey-Moreno, 2022) and communication channels (e.g., communal social media vs. travel websites; Li, Larimo, & Leonidou, 2023), suggesting that review reliance can vary by context. We posit that tourists' reliance on subjective vs. objective reviews depends on their perspective (self vs. other). People often have different motivations when writing reviews for others vs. reading reviews for themselves (Babić Rosario, De Valck, & Sotgiu, 2020; Berger, 2015). While 87 % of travelers write reviews to share good experiences, 62 % read reviews for content accuracy (Tripadvisor, 2019). Similarly, tourists writing about their exclusive vacation view their reviews as self-enhancing, yet readers find them boastful (Chen, Liu, & Mattila, 2020). Therefore, it is essential to examine if tourists differ in the reviews they consider helpful for others vs. themselves.

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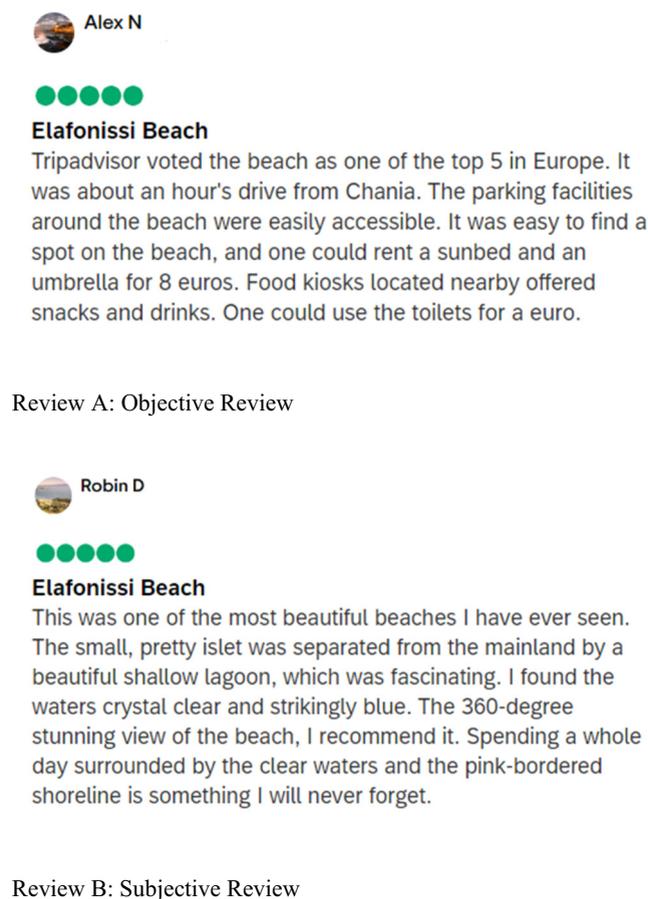
We theorize that tourists predict subjective (vs. objective) reviews to be more helpful for others than for themselves. While objective reviews reflect an experience's overall quality (e.g., one Michelin-star restaurant), subjective reviews reflect one's personal taste (e.g., my favorite restaurant; Spiller & Belogolova, 2017). Moreover, objective reviews tend to generate greater consensus by presenting more factual information (Spiller & Belogolova, 2017). Conversely, subjective reviews often attract less agreement, as they express personal opinions through self-referencing (i.e., using first-person pronouns; Mirny & Spiller, 2021) and opinion-conveying adjectives (e.g., "the room has a *brehtaking* sea view"; Kaiser & Wang, 2021). Since experiential purchases such as travel and tourism are often unique and tied to the self (Carter & Gilovich, 2010), people tend to rely on subjective (vs. objective) assessments when reviewing experiences for others but less so for themselves.

The social projection literature shows that people project their personal opinions and experiences onto others more than they introject others' opinions and experiences onto the self (Krueger, 2002). For instance, hikers predict others' experiences will be similar to theirs (Van Boven & Loewenstein, 2003). Therefore, when facilitating decisions for others, people believe others share their personal preferences and will rely on their subjective reviews. However, for their own decisions, people believe their experiences are unique, and others' preferences will not generalize to them (Carter & Gilovich, 2010). We hypothesize:

**H1a.** Tourists predict that *others* rely on subjective reviews more than *themselves* (i.e., self-other difference) because they consider others' experiences less unique than their own.

Conversely, objective reviews are considered factual (Mirny & Spiller, 2021), generating greater consensus (Spiller & Belogolova, 2017). Therefore, tourists consider them applicable to both themselves and others. We hypothesize:

**H1b.** This self-other difference in review reliance attenuates for objective reviews.



**Fig. 1.** Review A: Objective review.  
Review B: Subjective review.



Alex N



### Elafonissi Beach

Tripadvisor voted the beach as one of the top 5 among all the beaches in European countries. The small islet was separated from the mainland by a shallow lagoon. The waters were clear and blue. There were 360-degree views of the beach. The clear waters and pink-bordered shoreline were something to remember. It took about an hour to drive from Chania to the beach. The parking facilities around the beach were easily accessible. It was easy to find a spot on the beach, and one could rent a sunbed and an umbrella for 8 euros. Food kiosks were located nearby that offered snacks and drinks. One could use the toilets for a euro.

### Review A: Objective Review



Alex N



### Elafonissi Beach

This was one of the most beautiful beaches I've ever seen. The small, pretty islet was separated from the mainland by a beautiful shallow lagoon. I found the waters crystal clear and strikingly blue. The 360-degree stunning view of the beach, I recommend it. The clear waters and pink-bordered shoreline were something I will never forget. My drive from Chania to the beach was short, about an hour. I found the parking facilities easily accessible. Found myself an amazing spot and got a sunbed and umbrella for an affordable 8 euros. Snacks and drinks were readily available from nearby food kiosks. The toilets cost a euro to use, which I thought was cheap.

### Review B: Subjective Review

**Fig. 2.** Review A: Objective review.  
Review B: Subjective review.

## Study 1

### Method

Following Dolnicar and Ring's (2014) call for more experimental research in tourism marketing, we conducted an online experiment to examine self-other differences in subjective (vs. objective) review reliance. Participants ( $N = 235^2$  American participants on CloudResearch,  $M_{age} = 40.85$ , 47.2 % female) were randomly assigned to one of two conditions (perspective: self vs. other).

In the Self condition, participants assumed the role of a potential holidaymaker considering a trip to Elafonissi Beach. They were presented with two reviews: Review A (vs. B) reflected objective (vs. subjective) assessments of the trip (for manipulation checks, see Appendix; Fig. 1). Next, to assess review reliance, participants indicated which review they would base their own decision on visiting Elafonissi Beach (1 = Review A [objective review], 9 = Review B [subjective review]).

In the Other condition, participants assumed the role of a travel agent who wants to promote a trip to Elafonissi Beach to other potential holidaymakers. To assess review reliance for others, participants indicated which review (i.e., of the same two reviews presented in the Self condition) they would prefer to share with others [post] on their website.

<sup>2</sup> We excluded incomplete responses from the sample, leaving 233 usable responses.

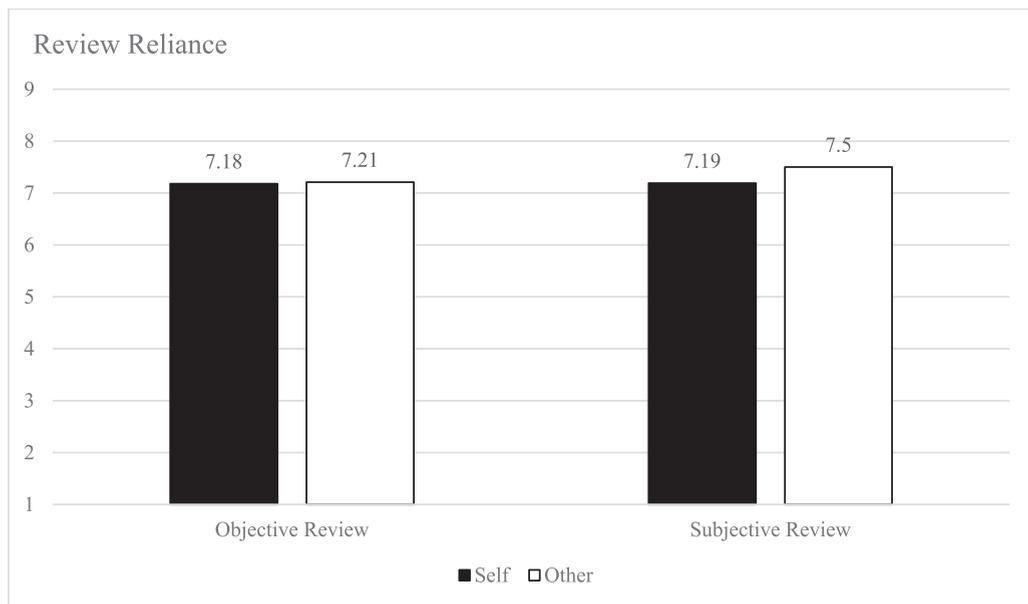


Fig. 3. Review reliance as a function of review type and perspective.

To test for social projection, participants indicated which review better accounted for their (Self) or others' (Other) unique circumstances (see Appendix).

## Results

As predicted, participants were more likely to share the subjective review (Review B) with others, yet less likely to base their own decision on it ( $M_{other} = 7.12$ ,  $SD = 2.60$  vs.  $M_{self} = 5.99$ ,  $SD = 2.60$ ,  $t(231) = 3.31$ ,  $p = .001$ , *Cohen's d* = 0.43; H1a). Social projection explains these findings (see Appendix).

## Study 2

### Method

Following [Viglia and Dolnicar's \(2020\)](#) guidance, we conducted a 2 (review type: subjective vs. objective)  $\times$  2 (perspective: self vs. other) mixed-design experiment to test the causal effect of review type on self-other review reliance. Review type was manipulated as a between-subjects factor, and perspective as a within-subjects factor. Participants ( $N = 241^3$  American participants on CloudResearch,  $M_{age} = 44.06$ , 52.3% female) were randomly assigned to read either an objective or a subjective review, controlling for the reviews' content and structure (for manipulation checks, see Appendix; Fig. 2). Then they indicated review reliance for their own (Self) and Sam's (Other) decision to visit Elafonissi Beach on two items: "To what extent would you (Self)/Sam (Other) – (1) rely on this review to visit Elafonissi Beach, and (2) be encouraged by this review to decide whether to visit Elafonissi Beach?" (1 = not at all, 9 = very much, Cronbach's  $\alpha_{self} = 0.81$ ; Cronbach's  $\alpha_{other} = 0.88$ ) (Fig. 2).

### Results

A mixed ANOVA revealed a significant interaction effect of review type and perspective on review reliance ( $F(1, 236) = 4.09$ ,  $p = .044$ ,  $\eta_p^2 = 0.02$ ). Participants thought that Sam (others) would rely on the subjective review more than themselves ( $M_{other} = 7.50$ ,  $SD = 1.29$  vs.  $M_{self} = 7.19$ ,  $SD = 1.50$ ,  $F(1, 236) = 10.01$ ,  $p = .002$ ,  $\eta_p^2 = 0.04$ ; H1a). Conversely, there was no significant self-other difference in review reliance for the objective review ( $F < 1$ ,  $p = .761$ ; H1b) (Fig. 3).

<sup>3</sup> We excluded incomplete responses from the sample, leaving 238 usable responses.

## Discussion

Do tourists share and rely on the same type of reviews? We show that tourists predict others to rely on subjective (vs. objective) reviews more than themselves. Consequently, they are more likely to share subjective reviews to facilitate others' decisions, but less likely to base their own decision on the same reviews.

### Theoretical contributions

Although prior work shows how consumer segments differ in electronic word-of-mouth generation and sharing (Ring et al., 2016), we demonstrate within-person differences. The same tourist can differ in the reviews they consider helpful for themselves vs. others. While prior research highlights the differences in self-other perceptions of bragging in online reviews (Chen et al., 2020), we show that these self-other differences also extend to subjective (vs. objective) review reliance. We also build on social projection literature that highlights how people erroneously project their own preferences onto others in perspective-taking (Krueger, 2002; Van Boven & Loewenstein, 2003). Critically, we show that this tendency affects tourists' review generation and reliance, where writers might be more inclined to generate subjective (vs. objective) reviews yet rely on them less as readers.

### Empirical and managerial implications

We follow the call for more experimental research in tourism marketing (Dolnicar & Ring, 2014). The between-subjects design of Study 1 provides greater confidence in the findings than other experimental designs (Viglia & Dolnicar, 2020). The unipolar scales used in Study 2 can facilitate comparison with future work (Dolnicar & Grün, 2013).

Considering the popularity of tourism websites, future research can use experimental methods and big data analysis (Zhao, Xu, & Wang, 2019) to corroborate the self-other differences in review generation (i.e., reviews written and shared) and reliance (i.e., reviews read and rated helpful). These insights can help develop adaptive travel recommender systems, such as screening reviews based on objectivity and relevance to facilitate decision-making (e.g., Dolnicar & Ring, 2014). Future research can also examine if linguistics and culture moderate self-other differences in review reliance.

## Declaration of competing interest

The authors declare that they have no known competing financial interests or personal relationships that could have appeared to influence the work reported in this paper.

## Supplementary data

Supplementary data to this article can be found online at <https://doi.org/10.1016/j.annals.2023.103611>.

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