Reading between the lines: Are we as savvy as we'd like to think when it comes to reviews?

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New research suggests we are willing to blindly trust hotel reviews when they conform to our preconceived ideas.

The study, led by the University of York, found that we are subconsciously less likely to question the credibility of a [review](#) that fits with our expectations – for example a bad review for a budget hotel or a good review for a [luxury](#) hotel.

Fake reviews

It's only when a review doesn't align with our expectations—such as a bad review for a luxury hotel—that we become extra-vigilant and take a more sceptical view on whether we are being given reliable information.

With up to 30 percent of all online reviews estimated to be fake, the researchers are warning people not to let down their guard when it comes to the reviews they live and buy by.

Dr. Snehasish Banerjee from the University of York Management School, said: "The human brain is biologically wired to feel comfortable when our expectations are confirmed. Confirmation bias sets in and we tend to make decisions without necessarily paying adequate attention to our perceptions.

"On the other hand, when we see information contradictory to our expectations we can't easily use this cognitive shortcut and start to look at the review more closely and sceptically."

Attractive titles

The researchers also found that reviews with an attractive title stand a better chance of being relied upon for decision making.

Reviews with well-articulated and concise titles may be better perceived because they required participants to put in less effort in order to digest

the information they provide – something the researchers say would-be [social media](#) "influencers" should bear in mind.

For the study, the researchers created mock-up review websites with fictitious names. They recruited 100 participants who were all regular users of review websites and had made a decision to stay in a hotel after reading reviews within the last year.

The participants looked at positive and negative reviews for luxury and budget hotels and then filled in a questionnaire designed to test their level of trust in the different reviews.

Social media

The results imply that budget and luxury hotels may have to make different levels of investment of time and resources in [social media marketing](#).

Dr. Banerjee added: "our study suggests budget hotels are more vulnerable to bad reviews as negative comments are more likely to be judged as reliable. Luxury hotels on the other hand enjoy a degree of immunity when it comes to social media criticism."

When reading reviews, the researchers advise looking at the ratings a hotel has received overall, rather than placing too much importance on individual reviews. Verified review websites which send customers a unique URL after their stay also reduce the likelihood of [fake reviews](#).

"When it comes to fake reviews, hotel owners face a 'prisoners' dilemma' – they don't know whether their competitors are engaging in these unscrupulous practices so they hedge their bets so as not to risk losing out on business," said Dr. Banerjee.