SOCIAL MEDIA POWER IN TOURISM AND HOSPITALITY: THEORETICAL

FOUNDATIONS AND EMPIRICAL EVIDENCE

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Social Media Power in Tourism and Hospitality:
Theoretical Foundations and Empirical Evidence

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CERTIFICATE OF ORIGINALITY

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ABSTRACT

The power of social media in hospitality and tourism has grown exponentially. A consensus exists between the academia and industry regarding the role of social media platforms as powerful stakeholders, but no study has conceptualized the power attributed to social media. Therefore, the development of theory to explain the extent of social media power in hospitality and tourism is important and timely. The rationale of this thesis is to bridge the aforementioned knowledge gap. First, this thesis synthesizes fundamental discourses in power using media effect theories to propose a hierarchical model to convey the exercise of social media power (Chapter 2). The researcher identifies definitions and sources of social media power at different levels of the power pyramid, and attributes triggers to technological mechanisms. The empirical component of this thesis focuses on the two most salient sources of power: expert power (Chapter 3) and reward power (Chapter 4). In Chapter 3, the focus is on testing the psychological effect of expert power in the case of social media platforms (influencer) and the interaction effects with the power of users (influenced) by applying referent theory to social media power. Two expert power attributes, namely, experience and specialization, are conceptualized based on deliberate practice theory. A $2 \times 2 \times 2$ between-subjects experiment identifies a significant three-way interaction effect among platform specialization, platform experience, and user power on perceived information-task-fit. Platform specialization affects perceived information-task-fit when the platform has low experience and users are powerful. Perceived information-task-fit mediates the conditional effect of specialization on intention to use. In Chapter 4, the psychological effect of reward power is tested. The reward power of social media platforms is conceptualized as their ability to provide the lowest available prices. The psychological

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mechanism of the two functions that promise lowest price, namely, best price guarantee and price comparison functions, are also evaluated. In particular, the second study hypothesizes the interaction effect between the reward power of social media platforms and the power of users. A $2 \times 2 \times 2$ between-subjects experiment is conducted. A significant three-way interaction effect is found among best price guarantee, price comparison, and user power on perceived transaction value. It is found that best price guarantee affects perceived transaction value when the platform has no price comparison function and users are powerful. Perceived transaction value mediates the conditional effect of best price guarantee on intention to use. The valuable theoretical and managerial implications of each study are provided, and then the common features of the working mechanisms of the reward power and expert power of social media platforms are discussed to reveal their pattern. This thesis answers a number of crucial research questions while introducing additional questions by applying what is regarded as the most fundamental concept in social sciences — power — to social media discourses in tourism and hospitality.

Keywords: power; social power theory; social media; social media power; computers as social actors.

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CHAPTER 1 INTRODUCTION

1.1 Social media as a powerful technology

The rise of social media has transformed social power dynamics among and between service providers and tourists (Akehurst, 2009). Over a decade has passed since Time magazine declared "you" as the 2006 Person of the Year, thereby highlighting the power of individual social media users. The editor postulated that "[i]t's about the many wresting power from the few and helping one another for nothing and how that will not only change the world, but also change the way the world changes" (Grossman, 2006, p. 1). Apart from empowering tourists, social media have also bestowed service providers with power in ways that support and transform businesses by allowing them to reach out to their target customers (Fotis, Buhalis, & Rossides, 2012). Recent studies have shown that social media help hospitality and tourism businesses with their communications, research, promotions, service recovery, service performance, product distribution, and management activities (Duan, Yu, Cao, & Levy, 2016; Leung, Law, van Hoof, & Buhalis, 2013; Rose & Blodgett, 2016).

Social media platforms (social media and social media platforms will be used interchangeably hereafter) have empowered both tourists and businesses. Importantly, social media platforms themselves have become very powerful stakeholders in hospitality and tourism. Recent studies have confirmed the influence of social media on the destination perceptions, attitudes (Camprubi, Guia, & Comas, 2013; Kim & Stepchenkova, 2015), decision making (Hernandez-Mendez, Munoz-Leiva, & Sanchez-Fernandez, 2015), and purchase intentions (Bui, Jeng, & Lin, 2015) of tourists. Leung et al. (2013) referred to social media as a "mega trend" that influences all tourism systems. In other words, social media have become disruptive technology

that transforms the management and marketing practices of destination marketing organizations (DMOs), travel agencies, and hotels (Leung et al., 2013).

The profound impacts of social media platforms on consumers and suppliers have been acknowledged by researchers and industry practitioners (Leung et al., 2013). Zeng and Gerritsen (2014) underpinned three critical aspects of social media. First, social media depend on information technology because they are end products that combine a multiplicity of technical features, such as online tools, applications, and platforms. Second, social media are communication channels that enable users to co-create and exchange information. Last, social media affect people's life behaviors. Along these lines, it is a legitimate claim that social media platforms have become an important and powerful stakeholder in tourism and hospitality.

Recent statistics and research also emphasize the power of social media platforms. The exponential increase in the number of social media users over the last decade resulted in 3.2 billion users in 2018 (Chaffey, 2018). The implications of this phenomenon for hospitality and tourism are of utmost importance. Recent research has shown that approximately 80% of tourists read hotel reviews online prior to travel, 53% do not proceed to hotel booking in the absence of reviews (Tsao, Hsieh, Shih, & Lin, 2015), and over 77% of hospitality and tourism companies use at least one social media platform (Istat, 2015). It is no longer meaningful to question whether social media platforms are powerful, but rather what this means and how it operates. Thus, conceptualizing the power of social media in hospitality and tourism is a timely and relevant research topic.

1.2 Power in social sciences

1.2.1 Power as a complex and fundamental concept

The term "power" is used in various disciplines. In physics and in the natural sciences, power is defined as "the change in energy over time" (Prentiss, 2015, p. 87). As a fundamental component of power, energy is observed in two forms: potential and kinetic. Potential energy is stored energy (e.g., gravitational energy of an apple on a tree), whereas kinetic energy is energy in motion or energy that is released to work (e.g., the apple's energy in motion while falling to the ground) (Prentiss, 2015). From this perspective, the function of power and energy is considered the universal law of nature. Any move or action in nature has a grounding on the concepts of power and energy.

There are a variety of seemingly conflicting perspectives on the exercise of power within the social sciences. However, social scientists seem to agree on its vital role, as is indicated in the following: "the fundamental concept in social science is power, in the same sense in which energy is the fundamental concept in physics" Russell (1938, p. 12). In other words, it may be alleged that any behavior (which is analogous to movement or action in physics) by a social actor is grounded on the concept of power.

There are multiple discourses within the social sciences which have generated perspectives and orientations. One group of theorists (e.g., Barnes, 1988; Parsons, 1964) have regarded power as a prerequisite of agency in the form of food, employment, money, a car, skills, knowledge, or health, which enable one to act in certain ways. For these authors, power refers to "the ability or capacity to do something or act in a particular way" (Power, n.d.). This scientific approach is limited in its scope because power is conceived as solely agent-centric and does not capture the agent's relations with other social beings. In most social processes, however, power is relational

and cannot be considered in isolation mainly because power emerges from interactions that occur in association with others (Tseng & Seidman, 2007). Other theorists viewed power as a concept that shapes social relationships. For instance, Hobbes (1968) posited that an individual takes his/her power from society. In his book, *The Prince*, Machiavelli (1981) argued that power has a parallel with violence and coercion, thereby leading to the domination of the weak by the strong. To Weber (1978), power can be authority and/or a form of coercion that one can exert on others legitimately and/or through threats and violence, respectively. When social relations are taken into account, power refers to "the capacity or ability to direct or influence the behavior of others or the course of events" (Power, n.d.).

Pitkin (1972, p. 277) distinguished two types of power, namely, power-over and power-to: "One may have power over another or others, and that sort of power is indeed relational […] But he may have power to do or accomplish something all by himself, and that power is not relational at all." In a similar vein, Scott (1991) used the term "causal power" to refer to the concept of power-over. Dowding (1996) named power-over a social power and power-to an outcome power. As a relational phenomenon, power-over has gained attention in the social sciences and in tourism studies (Church & Coles, 2007). Pettigrew and McNulty (1995, p. 851) stated that "[p]ower is not an attribute possessed by someone in isolation. It is a relational phenomenon. Power is generated, maintained, and lost in the context of relationships with others." Power can also be socialized as explained by Arendt (1970, p. 44): "[w]hen we say of somebody that he is 'in power' we actually refer to his being empowered by a certain number of people to act in their name. The moment the group, from which the power originated […] disappears, 'his power' also vanishes."

In an apparent analogy with potential and kinetic energy in physics, social scientists have proposed two dimensions of power: potential and actual use. Bierstedt (1950) postulated that power is the potential to apply sanctions and should be differentiated from the actual use of force. Conceptualizing power as cause and effect, Dahl (1957) argued that unused potential is not power, because it does not successfully cause an effect. On the contrary, Wrong (1968) stated that potential power may itself be sufficient to alter behaviors because people perceive that the potential can and will be used by the power holder where and when necessary. Along similar lines, Lukes (1974) argued that the non-exercise of power can be more effective than its exercise.

Scholars have also engaged in debate about the holders of power in societies. The two influential schools of thought in this context are elitist and pluralist schools. The two influential schools in this context are the elitist and pluralist schools. Elitists such as Mills (1956) advocated that power in societies is concentrated in the hands of few individuals whom they call an elite group. Pluralists such as Dahl (1957), on the other hand, believed that power is distributed unevenly, though widely within communities. As Bachrach and Baratz (1962, p. 947) noted, elitist researchers ask "Who runs this community?" while their pluralist counterparts ask whether "anyone at all run[s] this community." However, pluralists cannot be said to completely deny that elites exist in the community. As Clegg (1989, p. 8) stated, "they [pluralists] simply see them [elite groups] as more dispersed, more specialized and less co-ordinated than would elite theorists."

It is not an intended purpose of this thesis to debate which of these approaches has greater merit. In fact, as Clegg and Haugaard (2009, p. 5) asserted, "no one of these usages is right or wrong." Each school and author has made a contributions to the field and researchers can determine which approach is most suited to the research in question.

1.2.2 Social power theory

While several power theories are synthesized to propose a new framework to understand power, social power theory is used as a fundamental theoretical foundation in this thesis. Social power theory elucidates how social groups and/or individuals influence the attitudes and behaviors of others (French & Raven, 1959). The theory has been widely adopted to discuss dynamic power relations in the social sciences. However, few applications of the said theory have been made in social media research in general (Ngai, Tao, & Moon, 2015) or to the tourism and hospitality field in particular. This theory proposes that individuals and social groups need at least one of five sources of power to influence other(s), including i) reward power, ii) coercive power, iii) legitimate power, iv) referent power, and v) expert power. The following provides a brief explanation of the five types of power proposed by social power theory.

Outcome control power is the name given to the combination of reward and coercive power (McDonald, 1980). Reward power is the perception of the influenced that the influencer may financially or by other means reward him/her if the influencers' will is followed. By contrast, coercive power refers to the perception of the influenced that he/she will be punished if the influencers' will is not followed. For example, in a parent–child relationship, parents may influence the child's behavior by using a financial or other reward or punishment. The reward and coercion can be as simple as promising a child an ice cream for good behavior or not letting the child watch TV for misbehavior. Such power can be observed in manager–subordinate relations and in many other forms.

Legitimate power may be synonymous with established cultural or organizational norms and standards (French & Raven, 1959). Children believe their parents have the right to tell them what to do and will behave according to their parents' will without question. In some cultures,

the elderly–youth relationship is also an established norm, where the former may issue "legitimate" dictates to the younger generation on how to behave. Legitimacy also refers to very high trust (Holzinger & Biddle, 2016), such as a strong friendship where close friends can legitimately influence one another's behavior. The same power is likely to be observed in manager–subordinate relations or other forms of relationships where a person with higher rank can legitimately dictate the action of his/her subordinate.

Referent power is often described as the attractiveness of the influencer to the influenced and occurs when the latter refers to the former as reference (Liang, 2017). Up to a certain age, children usually refer to their parents as role models and try to behave as they would. French and Raven (1959) explained referent power as the "self-identification" of an individual with the influencer, which can be a person, a social group, or a community. The marketers' use of celebrities is another good example of referent power. In this case, the influencer does not even need to tell the influenced what to do. The influencer's attitude toward certain products and choice behavior is already an example for the influenced on how to behave. If an influencer prefers brand X, then the influenced will also act accordingly because he/she associates him/herself with the influencer.

Finally, expert power can be understood as the knowledge and expertise of the influencer on the area within which the influenced is making a choice (French & Raven, 1959). Examples of expert power include a doctor's recommendation to patients or a supervisor's recommendation to a student, each in their area of expertise. Similar to legitimate power, expert power is based on trust. People usually follow experts' recommendations because they trust them and think that they know better.

1.3 Problem statement

Power plays a central role in operations of the tourism industry (Hall, 1994; Nyaupane & Timothy, 2010). Cheong and Miller (2000, p. 372) stated that "there is power everywhere in tourism." Power, as a form of authority and control over the behaviors and non-behaviors of social beings (Lukes, 1974; Wrong, 1979), may explain the role of social media in the social relations among and between tourists and service providers. Specifically, researchers have explored the concept of power in discourses about tourism planning and development (Bramwell, 2006; Xiao, 2006; Zhao & Timothy, 2015), policy making (Nyaupane & Timothy, 2010; Velasco, 2016), and stakeholder relations (Beritelli & Laesser, 2011; Lenao, 2017).

In their discussion on the power of different stakeholders, Morgan and Pritchard (1998) postulated that new media channels are likely to shape power structures in the tourism industry in the age of information and knowledge. As the authors expressed, "[t]he elite of the future will […] be linked into the global communications systems and enjoy a cosmopolitan lifestyle in a 'virtual' global village" (Morgan & Pritchard, 1998, p. 101). Social media platforms are one of the new global channels of communication whose power merits attention. Despite growing social media research, no study has discussed social media as a stakeholder that holds and exercises power in tourism and hospitality or in other fields of study. From a traditional perspective of many sociologists, power is a fundamental concept attributable to social beings and shapes social relations (Russell, 1938). The applicability of power to technologies, such as social media and social media platforms is, however an intriguing and unexplored question.

One radical perspective toward media power is technological determinism, which postulates that the entire structure of the society at every level is determined by technological changes (Chandler, 1995). This perspective asserts that the power of social media is based on

technological mechanisms that empower social media platforms. Furthermore, according to the "computers are social actors" (CASA) paradigm (Nass & Moon, 2000; Reeves & Nass, 1996), people tend to evaluate the credibility of computers, machines, and media sources by applying social rules and manners. According to Koh and Sundar (2010, p. 900) "[t]he media equation literature […] has attributed the tendency for treating computers as if they are human to the overuse of human social categories (e.g., gender, social status, and ethnicity) while interacting with computers." Interestingly, power, which is allegedly the most fundamental social characteristics in human relations (Russell, 1938), has not been applied to social media platforms, one of the most influential technologies over recent years. To conclude, generating a theory of social media power is an essential gap that needs to be covered in tourism and hospitality.

1.4 Research purpose and objectives

The approaches to and the definitions of power in social and political sciences are many and diverse and cannot be readily summarized (Macleod & Carrier, 2010). Nevertheless, the aforementioned studies provide solid grounds for the conceptualization of "social media power." The first purpose of this thesis is to develop and provide a comprehensive theoretical model to explain social media power in tourism and hospitality. To do so, the synthesis of power discourses and media discourses is conducted on the literature in business, psychology, sociology, tourism, and hospitality. The following research questions (RQs) are raised with regard to the first purpose of this thesis.

RQ1. What is social media power?

RQ1a. How can social media power be defined?

RQ1b. What are the sources of social media power?

RQ1c. What platform attributes generate social media power?

RQ1d. What are the effects of social media power on the perceptions and behavior of tourists?

In this regard, the first set of objectives of this thesis are i) to provide the definition of social media power for tourism and hospitality, ii) to explain the sources of social media power, iii) to examine the attributes that generate social media power, and iv) explain the effect of social media power on tourist perceptions and behavior.

Each source of power has its own mechanisms for producing distinct psychological effects that influence individuals (French & Raven, 1959). Although this thesis proposes a comprehensive model with different levels and types of social media power, empirically testing the working mechanism of all sources of social media power in any one thesis would not be feasible. Accordingly, this work conducts two empirical studies investigating the effects of expert power and reward power. Instead of testing all sources of power suggested in social power theory, only two sources of social power are chosen and tested to promote the feasibility and manageability of the thesis. Testing two sources enables the identification of certain patterns in the working mechanisms of different power sources. By doing so, this research may reveal a bigger picture and pave the ground for further empirical works on the other sources of social media power proposed in the conceptual model.

This thesis particularly focuses on expert power and reward power for the following reasons. French and Raven's (1959) expert power is similar to what Foucault (1980) refers to as *power/knowledge*. Knowledge/expertise is unequivocally one of the most salient sources of power in social relationships (Foucault, 1980). The second emphasis is on reward power, which

occurs when social agents influence others by promising rewards. Allegedly, such power is one of the most frequently exercised sources of power across diverse industries, including tourism and hospitality. That is, firms constantly provide/promise rewards through measures such as discounts, best price guarantees, loyalty programs, and membership points to influence tourist behaviors.

The second purpose of this thesis is to conceptualize and test the working mechanism of expert power when applied to social media platforms. In particular, the following RQ is introduced:

RQ2. What is the working mechanism of the expert power of social media?

As discussed, social power theory explains the power relationships between two agents: the influencer (in this context, social media platform) and the influenced (in this context, tourist). According to the theory, social agents who possess expertise have more influence over the attitudes and behaviors of others than those without. Thus, the argument can be made that so-called expert social media platforms have more influence over tourist intention and behavior than non-expert do platforms. Accordingly, the following sub-RQs are raised:

RQ2a. What platform attributes of social media generate expert power?

RQ2b. Does the expert power of social media affect tourists' behavioral intentions?

RQ2c. What mediates the effect of the expert power of social media on tourists' behavioral intentions?

Social power theory further posits that the effect of such an influence also depends on the power of the influenced agent (French & Raven, 1959). Therefore, the interaction effect between the expert power attributes of social media platforms and the power of tourists in affecting tourist behavior can be predicted. The following question can also be addressed:

RQ2d. Is there an interaction effect between the expert power of social media (i.e., the influencer) and the power of tourists (i.e., the influenced) in affecting tourist perceptions and behavioral intentions?

In this regard, the second set of objectives of this thesis are i) to articulate the attributes that generate expert power of social media platforms, ii) to test the effect of expert power of social media platforms on tourists' behavioral intention, iii) to articulate and test what mediates the effect of expert power of social media on tourists' behavioral intention and iv) to test an interaction effect between the expert power of social media and the power of tourists in affecting tourist perceptions.

The second empirical study focuses on the reward power of social media platforms. A similar line of intriguing questions can be addressed in this regard. The third purpose of this thesis is to conceptualize and test the working mechanism of the reward power of social media platforms on tourists' behavioral intentions. Specifically, the following RQs are introduced:

RQ3. What is the working mechanism of the reward power of social media?

RQ3a. What attributes of social media generate reward power?

RQ3b. Does the reward power of social media affect tourists' behavioral intentions?

RQ3c. What mediates the effect of the reward power of social media on tourists' behavioral intentions?

RQ3d. Is there an interaction effect between the reward power of social media (i.e., the influencer) and the power of tourist (i.e., the influenced) in affecting tourists' perceptions and behavioral intentions?

In this regard, the third set of objectives of this thesis are i) to articulate the attributes that generate reward power of social media platforms, ii) to test the effect of reward power of social

media platforms on tourists' behavioral intention, iii) to articulate and test what mediates the effect of reward power of social media on tourists' behavioral intention and iv) to test an interaction effect between the reward power of social media and the power of tourists in affecting tourist perceptions.

1.5 Significance of this study

1.5.1 Contribution to theory

This thesis has several significant contributions to research and practice. First, it contributes to the tourism and hospitality literature by conceptualizing the power of social media. Many hospitality and tourism scholars (e.g., Browning, So, & Sparks, 2013; Zhang, Zhang, & Yang, 2016; Zhao, Wang, Guo, & Law, 2015) have discussed the power of social media without referring to its theoretical foundations. Given the fundamental importance of power in understanding stakeholder relations in hospitality and tourism (Cheong & Miller, 2000; Ford, Wang, & Vestal, 2012) along with the ubiquity of social media in research and practice (Leung et al., 2013), conceptualizing social media power is vital. This thesis will cover this essential gap by providing theoretical grounds that introduce social media as a social agent that possesses and exercises power. This study then can be used as a reference point that takes account of the power of social media platforms when discussing the power relations between various tourism stakeholders.

The conceptualization of social media power can enrich discourses about power and media in tourism and hospitality. By capturing the unique characteristics of social media, this work also attempts to synthesize the views of the CASA paradigm and power theories. Thus, it contributes to power theories and media studies in the following ways. Social power theory attributes power

and influence to social groups and individuals (French & Raven, 1959). The current work extends the concept of influencers to refer to social media platforms. Here, empirical studies on the power of social media become examples to test and discuss how other technologies may also possess and exert power.

This research is also significant from the perspective of tourists' decision-making process. The influence of social media is one of the most researched areas in destination marketing. Kim and Stepchenkova (2015) demonstrated that user-generated photos of destinations influence the behavioral intentions and destination perceptions of customers. Other researchers confirmed that social media have the power to influence destination image (Camprubi et al., 2013; Oliveira & Panyik, 2015) and consumer decision making (Hernandez-Mendez et al., 2015). The two most investigated variables in social media studies in the field appear to be tourist attitudes and behavioral intentions. Keyword analysis also shows that marketing and consumer behavior are the most frequently used keywords in social media studies in tourism (Zeng & Gerritsen, 2014). Although previous studies have established that social media have the power to influence, researchers have overlooked the concept of power over customer behaviors. In recognizing that power is one of the most crucial factors explaining customer attitudes and behaviors (Lines, 2007), this thesis will fill a vital gap by setting a solid foundation for identifying the role of social media power in understanding tourist experience and behavior.

1.5.2 Contribution to practice

From a managerial perspective, this work provides valuable knowledge for industry practitioners. First, findings will be useful for social media programmers, developers, and marketers to develop their strategies of differentiating their social media from other platforms,

thereby enhancing their influence. This will be possible by revealing the attributes that generate power and influence tourist behavior.

Second, social media platforms in tourism and hospitality can benefit from answering the raised questions, such as "How can one become an expert platform?" "Is it worth being an expert platform and does it influence tourist perceptions?" and "Does such an influence occur over powerful or powerless tourists?" The answers to such queries will lead to the adoption of relevant development strategies. Tourism firms that use social media for marketing and/or distribution purposes will also benefit from these results.

Third, practitioners will be able to consider the working mechanism of reward power when making strategic decisions related to pricing. Tourism and hospitality firms may also consider which types of businesses and platform attributes can be more beneficial when targeting potential customers. The interaction effects between the reward power of social media platforms and the power of tourists will also provide useful information for social media platforms and the firms that utilize them. In particular, the findings will reveal how the sense of power of social media users may be considered when targeting them as potential customers.

1.6 Definitions of key terms

Table 1.1 lists alphabetically the definitions of key terms used in this thesis. Note that definitions were either adapted or adopted by synthesizing various studies.

Table 1.1 Definitions of key terms

Term	Definition
Expert power	Having superior knowledge or ability in very specific areas (p.60)

Information-task-fit	Quality of task-oriented information (p.61)
Behavioral intention	Tourists' intention to use a social media platform (p.69)
Power*	i) Ability to choose (chapter 2) ii) Ability to influence behavioral choices (chapter 2) iii) Ability to provide behavioral choices (chapter 2). Influence in terms of psychological change at a level of generality that includes changes in behavior, opinions, attitudes, goals, needs, values, and all other aspects of a person's psychological field (p.41)
Reward power	Ability to influence choices by promising rewards and benefits (p.92)
Social media	Internet-based applications that utilize the technological and conceptual foundations of Web 2.0 and enable users to instantly communicate with and distribute information to people widely so as to reach and/or influence them (p.23)
Transaction value	Psychological satisfaction or pleasure obtained from taking advantage of the financial terms of the price deal. (p.96)
User power	Asymmetric control in relation to other people (p.67)

* See Table 2.1 for further definitions of power.

1.7 Organization of this thesis

This thesis has six chapters and is organized in the following order. The first chapter is the Introduction. The research background is introduced by acknowledging social media as a powerful technology. Subsequently, the fundamentality of the concept of power in social

sciences and tourism and hospitality field is illustrated. The problem statement is explained by pinpointing the essential research gaps and raising three RQs. The significance of this work is also discussed by articulating its potential theoretical and practical contributions. Finally, the definitions of key terminologies are given.

The second chapter is the Literature review section. Both descriptive and critical reviews of previous literature on social media and power are presented. The aim of this chapter is to address the first RQ and provide theoretical and conceptual foundations to understand social media power in tourism and hospitality through a critical analysis of relevant literature. A hierarchical model of social media power is also developed.

The third chapter focuses on conceptualizing and empirically testing the working mechanism of the expert power of social media platforms. Social power theory and deliberate practice theory are synthesized to articulate experience and specialization as two fundamental attributes of expert power. In particular, a $2 \times 2 \times 2$ between-subjects experiment is conducted to test the three-way interaction effect among specialization, experience, and user power on perceived information-task-fit. The mediating role of information-task-fit in tourists' decision making is likewise tested. The theoretical and practical contributions of this study are then discussed.

The fourth chapter conceptualizes and empirically tests the working mechanism of the reward power of social media platforms. This chapter synthesizes social power theory and pricing literature and claims that the fundamental feature of a social media platform's reward power is its ability to provide the lowest price. Best price guarantee and price comparison are then suggested as the two attributes of such power. A $2 \times 2 \times 2$ between-subjects experiment is then conducted to test the interaction effect among best price guarantee, price comparison, and

user power on perceived transaction value. The mediating effect of perceived transaction value on behavioral intention is also tested. The chapter concludes with a discussion on the theoretical and practical contributions of the findings.

The fifth chapter involves discussions. The three RQs and their sub-questions from the first chapter are revisited and answered. The answer to each question is first discussed in terms of their theoretical contributions. Their practical implications for practitioners are subsequently explored.

Finally, the sixth chapter provides the concluding remarks. A brief summary of the conceptual and empirical studies is revisited. In particular, the common patterns of the findings of two empirical studies are discussed. The limitations of this thesis are examined and future research directions are identified.

CHAPTER 2 LITERATURE REVIEW: A CONCEPTUAL STUDY

This chapter has four sections. Given that this thesis focuses on social media power in the tourism and hospitality domain, the first section of the literature review concentrated on explaining what social media are. The second section synthesized fundamental power discourses to propose a new theoretical framework for understanding the hierarchical structure of power. The third section proposed and developed a comprehensive conceptual model to understand social media power in tourism and hospitality. Finally, the fourth section presented a chapter summary by identifying the contributions of the proposed model to theory building and practice.

2.1 Understanding social media

This section consists of two parts. The first sub-section reviewed and critically analyzed the existing definitions of social media. The second sub-section provided general knowledge about social media platforms in terms of types of platforms and their evolution. The importance and usage of these platforms in the tourism and hospitality industry were also discussed.

2.1.1 Defining social media

Despite the immense interest amongst researchers in social media research, understanding in the literature about what social media are and what they are not is limited (Kaplan & Haenlein, 2010). The term "social media" was used interchangeably with other expressions, such as social networking, social computing, virtual social worlds, Web 2.0 (Kaplan & Haenlein, 2009), and eWOM (Tham, Croy, & Mair, 2013). This section briefly ran through various definitions of social media and their important features. By critically assessing and comparing extant definitions, this section provided theoretical and operational definitions of social media for this thesis.

Before the definition of "social media" can be discussed, note that some scholars started by using the verb "is" in relation to social media (Henderson & Bowley, 2010; Mangold & Faulds, 2009), thereby referring to it as a singular noun, whereas others used "are" (Kaplan & Haenlein, 2010; Malita, 2011). In the sense that the term "media" is a plural of the Latin word "medium" and made its way into the English dictionary as a plural, in this thesis, "social media" is treated as a plural term. This approach is widely accepted and more common than its counterpart.

As for the definition of social media, several studies can be reviewed to thoroughly understand what social media are. Ngai, Moon, Lam, Chin, and Tao (2015) conceptualized social media by summarizing several definitions and proposed that all definitions discuss two important features of social media, namely, "social" and "media." As the authors stated, "[t]he 'social' part refers to the activities carried out among people, whereas the 'media' part refers to the Internet-enabled tools and technologies used to carry out such activities" (Ngai, Moon, et al., 2015, p. 771). Zeng and Gerritsen (2014) examined 30 definitions of social media summarized by Cohen (2011) and proposed several common features of these definitions. The first is that all definitions depend on information technology. The second and third are that social media ii) enable "the interactive web's content creation, collaboration and exchange" and iii) introduce "substantial and pervasive changes to communication between organizations, communities and individuals" (Zeng & Gerritsen, 2014, p. 28). The final feature the authors highlighted is the relationship between social media and people's subsequent behaviors in real life.

One of the most cited, widely accepted, and thorough definition of social media is from Kaplan and Haenlein (2010, p. 61), who defined social media as "a group of Internet-based applications that build on the ideological and technological foundations of Web 2.0, and that

allow the creation and exchange of User Generated Content." This definition can be separated into three aspects: 1) subject, 2) competency, and 3) function. The first aspect, or the "subject" of the definition, deals with the question of what social media are at their root. The second aspect defines the competency of the subject in discussing what social media do. The final aspect raises the "how" question in relation to how social media do what they do.

In terms of subject, Kaplan and Haenlein (2010) narrowed the subject to "Internet-based applications." Within the wider literature, the subject of social media has been referred to as "web-based applications" (Tham et al., 2013, p. 144), a "hybrid" that originates "from mixed technology and media origins" (Mangold & Faulds, 2009, p. 359), or "online applications and technologies" (Henderson & Bowley, 2010, p. 239). The term "web-based application" seems more widely used and accepted. By adding adjectives such as "Internet-based" (Kaplan & Haenlein, 2010), "web-based" (Tham et al., 2013), or "online" (Henderson & Bowley, 2010), scholars make the subject of the definition clearer and more specific. The terms "Internet-based" and "web-based" are valid and can be interchangeably used, while "online" limits the definition because many social media applications allow users to work offline, though not for sharing but only to read what is shared.

With respect to the second ("competency") part of the definition, the main function of social media, as expressed by Kaplan and Haenlein (2010), is to allow or facilitate users to create and share user-generated content (UGC). Despite the many UGC definitions, their main distinguishing feature is that UGC must be created outside of professional practices and routines (OECD, 2007). This feature makes the Kaplan and Haenlein (2010) definition not only more specific but also more limited. First, several semi-professional individuals in social media nowadays earn their living through social media engagements (e.g., creating videos and posting

them on their YouTube channels and getting paid by YouTube in accordance with the number of clicks, viewers, and ads attached to the videos). Contents created by these semi-professionals blur the boundaries of UGC and, consequently, the boundaries of social media are obscured. Second, many companies use various social media platforms to share professionally created content and encourage other users to distribute and share them as well. This outcome, in turn, further questions the logic of limiting shared content with UGC. Within the wider literature on the competency of social media, the question of "what social media do" has been discussed in generic terms; that is, they "enable instantaneous, real-time communications" (Mangold & Faulds, 2009, p. 359), "reach and influence people widely" (Zeng & Gerritsen, 2014, p. 28), and "enable participation, connectivity user-generated content, sharing of information, and collaboration" (Henderson & Bowley, 2010, p. 239). According to the subject and competency aspects of these diverse definitions, social media are Internet/web-based applications that enable users to instantly communicate with and distribute information to people widely so as to reach and/or influence them.

Finally, the third aspect of the definitions discuss the "how" question or the function for which social media use their capabilities. Kaplan and Haenlein (2010) defined the function of social media using the concept of Web 2.0 with its ideological and technological foundations. A complicated question, however, involves ascertaining what Web 2.0 is. In the first Web 2.0 conference, O'Reilly (2005) mentioned that the feature that distinguishes Web 2.0 from Web 1.0 is that the former uses the collective intelligence of crowds. The author referred to the new web as the "architecture of participation" that allows multiple users to co-create and co-produce web content. The concept of Web 2.0 subsequently gained popularity, and academia promptly discussed the third wave of web technologies by arguing that Web 3.0 is already present (Barassi

& Treré, 2012). Literature suggested that Web 2.0 and Web 3.0 concepts can be distinguished by user practices (Barassi & Treré, 2012). In particular, Barassi and Treré (2012, p. 1270) stated that "Web 2.0 is seen as enabling user participation whilst Web 3.0 is seen as triggering users' cooperation." The authors defined users' roles in Web 1.0, Web 2.0, and Web 3.0 as cognition, participation, and cooperation, respectively. However, the differentiation between Web 2.0 and Web 3.0 did not become prevalent in academia, unlike the differentiation between Web 2.0 from Web 1.0. According to Kaplan and Haenlein (2010), the main distinguishing feature of Web 2.0 from Web 1.0 is that the content in websites is "not static" anymore but is dynamic and "continuously co-created by all users." This definition incorporates both participatory and collaborative roles of multiple users. Hence, using such a definition of Web 2.0 is broad enough to include Barassi and Treré's (2012) conceptualization of Web 2.0 and Web 3.0. Accordingly, for the purpose of this thesis, Kaplan and Haenlein's (2010) broad conceptualization of Web 2.0 can be seen as the function of social media. This thesis then extends Kaplan and Haenlein's (2010) conceptualization to define social media as Internet-based applications that utilize the technological and conceptual foundations of Web 2.0 and enable users to instantly communicate with and distribute information to people widely so as to reach and/or influence them.

2.1.2 Evolution of social media platforms by type and their usage in tourism

Ascertaining which website was the earliest form of social media is challenging. The origin of social media can be even tracked back to Usenet, a worldwide forum created by Tom Truscott and Jim Ellis from Duke University. Usenet was created as early as 1980, and anybody who had the Unix system could participate in the network without special membership requirements and post-public messages (Emerson, 1983). Obviously, Usenet did not have Web 2.0 features, but it can be regarded as the initial concept of social media that allowed users to

interact with one another. The following paragraphs provide a typology of social media platforms and the discussions about the evolution of each type.

One of the earliest categorizations of social media was from Mangold and Faulds (2009), who proposed 15 social media categories: social networking sites (SNS) (e.g., Facebook and Myspace), creative work-sharing sites (e.g., YouTube and Flickr), user-sponsored blogs (e.g., Cnet.com), company-sponsored cause/help sites, company-sponsored websites/blogs (e.g., apple.com), business networking sites (e.g., LinkedIn), invitation-only social networks, collaborative websites (e.g., Wikipedia and Wikitravel), virtual worlds (e.g., Second life), commerce communities (e.g., ebay.com), podcasts, news delivery sites (e.g., Current TV), educational material sharing (e.g., MIT OpenCourseWare), social bookmarking sites (e.g., ReddiT), and open-source software communities (e.g., Rapidminer). Although the framework is useful, it was criticized for having too many categories which make it impractical to use for studies that do not focus on categorization per se.

Kaplan and Haenlein (2010) categorized social media based on two factors: the level of social presence/media richness and the level of self-presentation/self-disclosure. They proposed six categories: i) blogs, ii) collaborative projects (e.g., Wikipedia and Wikitravel), iii) SNSs (e.g., Facebook and Myspace), iv) content communities (e.g., YouTube and Flickr), v) virtual social worlds (e.g., Second Life), and vi) virtual game worlds (e.g., World of Warcraft). As Fotis et al. (2012) asserted, this taxonomy neglects important types of social media, namely, i) microblogs (e.g., Twitter), ii) consumer review and rating websites. (e.g., TripAdvisor and Hotels.com), and iii) Internet forums (e.g., WarriorForum and ThornTree).

Tourism researchers investigated social media typologies to identify those that are more preferred by tourists. Wilson, Murphy, and Fierro (2012) found that SNSs are the most popular

websites among tourists for sharing experiences followed by picture and video-sharing websites. Munar and Jacobsen (2013) confirmed that review and evaluation websites are the most trustworthy information sources among social media websites.

2.1.2.1 Blogs and Internet forums

Blogs and forums constitute some of the earliest forms of social media. Siles (2011) showed that early blogs were online diaries that gained popularity in the second half of the 1990s. Most blogs were personal websites hosted in free-of-charge domains, such as American Online, and only few bought their own domains. Justin Hall, who started his first personal page in 1994, is regarded as one of the earliest bloggers, though the term "blog" did not exist at the time (WebdesignerDepot Staff, 2011). This term owes its existence to Jorn Barger and Peter Merholz. In 1997, Jorn Barger, one of the practitioners of what is now called blogging, called his homepage a "weblog," referring to a "log" on a "web" (WebdesignerDepot Staff, 2011). Two years later, Peter Merholz jokingly transformed "web-log" into "we-blog," subsequently creating the new term "blog," which is now used as both verb and noun (The Economist, 2006). According to Kaplan and Haenlein (2010), soon after its launch in 1997, OpenDiary became the first professional online community that had the main features of current modern blogs, where people would write their diaries and, more importantly, comment on those of others. Although the website gained immense popularity, it was not commercially successful and ceased operations in 2004. Blogs continue to be popular, with various websites allowing their users to create blogs and for others to follow them.

Microblogging differs from blogging with respect to the size of the posted content. In 2005 Jonathan Gillette (Why, 2005) noticed the concept in a blog post by a user called Anarchia and described his post as a "tumbelog." Some users liked the idea of posting short content and

the concept grew in popularity. This popularity eventually led to the launch of Twitter in 2006 (Twitter, 2017), followed by Tumblr in 2007 (Tumblr, 2017), developments which further increased the prevalence of microblogging. As one of the most popular microblogging social media sites, Twitter has a limit of 140 characters and allows users to express their opinions in short posts. The implications of blogs (Pan, McLaurin, & Crotts, 2007) and microblogs (Park, Jang, & Ok, 2016) in tourism have been widely acknowledged in the literature.

Unlike blogs, the term "forum" is not recent, and the milestones of Internet forums are unclear. The difference between a forum and a blog is that the latter has fewer discussions and is mainly created by one user to express his/her view, experience, or attitude toward various topics in the so-called blog-type articles. Other users may also comment on such articles. In fact, popular blog posts may generate many comments and even replies to these comments, thereby resembling a discussion forum. Thus, a forum is a social media platform where different users argue, discuss, and debate about views on various topics, much like in a real-life forum.

Blogs usually involve only one person who posts various articles while others comment, but forums entail discussion topics that are created in a way that everybody comes up with his/her views and approaches. With this feature, Internet forums arguably resemble Usenet and early bulletin boards more than the other types of social media platforms. Delphi Forum is generally recognized as one of the earliest Internet forums that remain active. It evolved through time from dial up to the web format in the 1990s and improved their services along with technological developments (Delphi Forums, 2017). The suggestion by Chalkiti and Sigala (2008) that knowledge created through Internet forums can be successfully used by tourism professionals highlight the potential importance of these forums for the tourism industry.

2.1.2.2 Online review sites

Many blog and forum users discuss their experiences with certain products and companies by either recommending or not recommending them to other users. However, the features of early blogs and forums were limited to enabling users to gain knowledge about certain products rapidly and efficiently. It was not until 1999 that three "game-changing" websites were created that significantly empowered users and allowed them to rate various products or services on a major scale. The birth of Epinions.com, RateItAll.com, and Deja.com provided users with a unique means of expressing their opinions about products and services by rating them (Anthill Magazine, 2016). These sites created the social trend that is now known as "online reviews."

The idea of reviewing products was welcomed by many users and quickly gained popularity. Consequently, many websites specializing in various areas added the online review feature to their platforms. Examples include IMDB, which allows users to rate movies and other things related to the film industry, and TripAdvisor, which allows users to rate travel-related products and companies. Major electronic commerce websites, such as Amazon and E-bay, also embraced the concept, further popularizing the trend. New online review websites that specialize in niche markets emerged, such as RateMDs in 2004, which exclusively focused on doctors (RateMDs, 2017). The popularity of this idea continues to this day as more websites adopt rating features and novel online review websites with various foci come into existence.

The influence of such websites on tourism-related consumer decisions is now tacitly accepted (Lui, Bartosiak, Piccoli, & Sadhya, 2018; Zhang, Feng, Wu, & Xiao, 2018). Many companies, including hotels, even develop strategies to work with these websites and have responded to online reviews and communicated with both satisfied and dissatisfied customers

(Sparks, So, & Bradley, 2016). Currently, TripAdvisor is considered the world's largest travel review site (Bassig, 2012), with content posted by both users and businesses themselves about restaurants, hotels, attractions, and other travel and hospitality-related businesses. Some online review sites, such as Hotels.com, booking.com, and expedia.com, provide online reviews and also serve as booking channels. They fit Mangold and Faulds's (2009) categorization of "commerce communities" in the tourism and hospitality context. TripAdvisor also recently shifted its focus and started to serve as a booking channel. Other sites focus only on providing a platform for users to communicate with one another and with businesses by sharing their experiences and rating firms. Yelp.com and openrice.com are examples of such online review sites.

2.1.2.3 Virtual social and game world

Although virtual worlds have complex technical designs, they already existed in the late 1980s. Habitat usually takes credit for being the first online virtual world (Rossney, 1996). It was developed in 1985, became available online for users in 1988, and had many features, such as avatars that could talk and gesture, a geographic system, and an internal economy (Rossney, 1996). The concept was available mostly due to developments in computer graphics. Virtual Helsinki Project is one of the earliest attempts to map an entire city as a virtual 3D world. The project started in 1996 and was subsequently renamed as Helsinki Arena 2000. It aimed to create a virtual world in which every home would be connected, thereby allowing its users to experience a virtual Helsinki where they could move freely (CORDIS, 1997). Other examples of early virtual worlds include Whyville, which was launched in 1999 and designed specifically for children (Nelson & Erlandson, 2012), and Habbo, which was launched in 2000 and focused on

teenagers who were allowed to design hotel rooms, chat with other users, care for virtual pets, create or play games, and engage in other activities (Habbo, 2016).

Second Life is considered the biggest virtual social world that resembles the real world in many ways. Users or so called residents are represented by their chosen avatar and perform various day-to-day activities, including buying or selling stuff, gambling, listening to music, owning property, joining communities, flirting, having sex, and other activities (Kalning, 2007). Second Life even became the main income source for some users because virtual money could be exchanged for real money and vice versa.

The importance of such websites was also acknowledged by the tourism industry. DMOs and other companies in the said industry started to use Second Life for marketing and other purposes (Huang, Backman, Backman, & Moore, 2013). Starwood Hotels was the first company to open a hotel brand inside Second Life (Virtualaloft, 2007). As for the examples of DMO usage of Second Life, St. Louis Convention and Visitors Commission invested in building recognizable monuments, streets, and buildings in Second Life as part of their virtual tourism strategies, and the Mexico Tourism Board used Chichen Itza in Second Life to encourage users to visit the site in real life (Huang et al., 2013).

2.1.2.4 Collaborative projects

The first five years of the 2000s marked a significant milestone in the evolution of social media. The period is particularly notable for the rising popularity of SNSs and the creation of new types of social media, namely, collaborative projects and content communities.

Wikipedia is perhaps the first type of social media that fit into the collaborative project categorization of Kaplan and Haenlein (2010). It differs substantially from other social media websites in the sense that it allows multiple users to create content within the same article. All

articles collectively make Wikipedia a free online encyclopedia. Any user can create a new article or edit any existing article. By allowing literally anybody to edit texts in Wikipedia, the administration tries to avoid bias. Wikitravel was created in 2003 (Wikitravel, 2017) with the same concept but with a focus only on travel-related articles. However, unlike Wikipedia, Wikitravel did not gain the expected popularity. The influence of Wikipedia and Wikitravel in tourism is one of the least researched areas.

2.1.2.5 Social networking sites

The first SNS as we know the concept today was "SixDegrees.com," launched in 1997 by Andrew Weinreich (Boyd & Ellison, 2007). It was inspired by six degrees of separation theory, according to which all living people on earth are separated by a maximum of six steps in a friendship network. The website allowed users to create their own profiles, surf other profiles, and communicate with other users. Although the site gained immense popularity, it was not commercially successful and consequently stopped operations in 2014. Ryze and LinkedIn came up with a special SNS concept and became the first social networks to link business professionals. Although both networks are currently active, LinkedIn is considered to be the biggest social network of professionals with over 500 million members (LinkedIn, 2018); conversely, Ryze only has over 1 million members (Ryze, n.d.).

Launched in 2002, Friendster had considerably more functions than did preceding websites of its kind. Its users could create a profile, communicate with friends, establish new friendships, share pictures and videos, and participate in groups (Fiegerman, 2014); most of these functions remain popular in many SNSs. Friendster became a role model, and its popularity created a new milestone in social media evolution. Many websites came into existence trying to copy it (Fiegerman, 2014), and the number similar websites started to grow dramatically (Boyd

& Ellison, 2007). High-speed Internet was becoming increasingly accessible and popular during that period, and those developments contributed to the popularity of the SNS concept (Kaplan & Haenlein, 2010). Chafkin (2007, p. 1) called Friendster "the biggest disappointment in Internet history" due its wide popularity and consequent failure. The author claimed that the main reason for the commercial failure of the website was its many disappointed members and numerous restrictions.

Friendster failed to provide its users with features that they required, unlike Myspace, which was launched in 2003 and constantly developed additional features and offered users more options. Another reason for the success of Myspace was the influence of rock bands that were unhappy with Friendster and who migrated in large numbers to Myspace (Boyd & Ellison, 2007). Myspace already had its own members, but it took many Friendster members and finally became the most commercially successful website among SNSs that were created with a relatively similar concept until it was outnumbered by Facebook. Facebook is currently the biggest SNS with 1.86 billion monthly active users (Facebook, 2016). It started in 2004 as an internal networking site only for Harvard students and required a harvard.edu email address for registration. The concept soon became successful, and the network was made accessible to students from other universities and then eventually to high school students, and finally to everybody. In addition to globally known SNSs, there are sites that target specific markets, such as QQ in China, Vkontakte in the Russian-speaking world, and others.

Many businesses, including those in the tourism industry, have official pages in Facebook and other SNSs for various reasons. Wilson et al. (2012) illustrated that SNSs are the most used social media platforms for tourists compared with other platforms. SNSs remain one of the most

important platforms for tourism businesses to market their services and products and communicate with potential customers (Leung et al., 2013).

2.1.2.6 Content communities

The popularity of content communities started relatively later than that of other social media websites. Although several content communities were launched in the first half of the 2000s, the concept became popular in the next half, making these websites among the last waves of Web 2.0 development. The best example for such a community is YouTube, a video-sharing website that is the second most visited website following Google or the most popular social media platform followed by Facebook (Alexa, 2017). Content communities are not only limited to video-sharing platforms. Launched in 2001, BookCrossing is one of the earliest content communities that enabled users to share their books with one another (BookCrossing, 2017). Other examples of these communities include Flickr, a popular platform for sharing photos and videos, and SlideShare, a platform for creating and sharing PowerPoint, PDF, Keynote, or OpenDocument presentations. More content communities with various foci evolved in the second half of the 2000s. User-generated photos and videos shared on such websites are also considered as highly influential in the tourism industry (Stepchenkova & Zhan, 2013). Öz (2015) found that content communities are the most preferred social media platforms of tourists along with SNSs. Although the aforementioned categorization of social media is useful, note that as Web 2.0 technologies evolve, new platforms and types of social media are expected to emerge.

2.2 Power discourses

This section has two sub-sections. The first sub-section reviewed power discourses in tourism and hospitality. The discussions start with a review of the main seminal works in tourism

and hospitality literature on power. Subsequently, studies that deliberately focus on social power in tourism and hospitality are reviewed. The essential tourism studies on power are then thematically classified. The second sub-section reviewed discussions on power in other disciplines and fields beyond tourism and hospitality. The complex nature of power was explored by evaluating several related definitions, approaches, and settings. Subsequently, a framework that largely synthesizes the diverse approaches to and theories of power was proposed. This framework will then be applied to conceptualize social media power.

2.2.1 Power in tourism and hospitality

2.2.1.1 Seminal works in tourism and hospitality

"*Tourism and Politics: Policy, Power and Place*" by Hall (1994) is one of the earliest books to systematically address the power issues in tourism studies. In the book, Hall discussed the importance of politics and power relations for understanding the tourism ecosystem. As he stated, "[t]he study of politics is inexorably the study of power," and thus researchers interested in tourism politics and policies must incorporate the concept of power in their work (Hall, 1994, p. 2). Several perspectives of power relations from the local to the international level and from the individual to the community and government levels were illustrated in this study.

A book edited by Macleod and Carrier (2010, p. 4) "provides insights into tourism, power and culture from [the perspective of] anthropologists." The first part of the book depicted the struggle of different groups of people over water, material culture, and other physical resources in tourism destinations. The power of these groups is central to the discussions. The second part illustrated how culture is used, manipulated, and presented by different groups. The message of the authors is that powerful people can present an image about a culture of a destination as they

wish even though such an image conflicts with the perceptions and interests of other groups and is at times quite far from reality.

"*Tourism, Power and Space*" by Church and Coles (2007) is one of the most insightful books about power debates in tourism. The authors clearly stated that "we [the authors] wish to place constructs of power more firmly at the center of the agenda of critical tourism research" (Church & Coles, 2007, p. 2). The main aim of the book was to stimulate increased connectivity between power theory and tourism analysis. The book had three main parts. The first part involved the relationship among performance, practice, and power with the individual tourist as the main unit of analysis. The second part examined the relationship among poverty, resources, and power. The power relations between different groups in tourist destinations were analyzed and the mediating role of state institutions in these relations were explored. The final part covered issues of governance and power. The role of state institutions was revisited, this time from the perspective of empowerment. Empowerment was articulated as a means to restructure power relations or as an ideological aspiration to benefit communities.

Morgan and Pritchard (1998) discussed the relationship between tourism promotion and power. The authors specifically focused on i) the power of tourism promotional images and ii) the power structures behind these images. The concept of power was illustrated in several ways. The authors argued that promotional images reinforce the historical power structures in destinations by highlighting notions such as colonialism and neocolonialism. Sexualized gendered images were also discussed in this study. The authors went on to argue that images will continue to be an important power player in tourism. The book also focused on the importance of access to new media channels and high technologies as one of the main elements of power.

2.2.1.2 Social power in tourism and hospitality

A few tourism and hospitality studies deliberately focused on the concept of social power. Jang, Lee, Lee, and Hong (2007) aimed to extend individual choice-sets model in the tourism context to the choice-sets model of couples. They investigated the role of social power in the decision-making process of couples when choosing a honeymoon destination. They found that if couples cannot come to an agreement, then the final decisions will be made by the partner that holds social power over the other.

A similar study that focused on family relations was conducted by Liang (2013). The author found a negative relationship between perceived parental social power over children and children's engagement level in the online purchase of tourism products. "Adolescent Internet mavens" was also articulated as the knowledge of and expertise in the usage of Internet and was conceptualized as children's power. The study suggested that children's power i) has a positive relationship with their engagement level in the online purchase of tourism products and ii) moderates the relationship between parental power and children's engagement level.

Marzano and Scott (2009) used a power framework developed by Wrong (1979) to examine stakeholder power relations during the destination branding process in Australia. They found that among the four types of power (i.e., force, manipulation, persuasion, and authority) suggested by Wrong (1979), persuasion and authority are exercised by tourism stakeholders to impose their interests. They further postulated that the pluralist approach to power cannot be confirmed in their study. Out of 420 stakeholders, only six could be considered powerful. The authors endorsed the elitist approach and revealed that individual tour operators play a pivotal role in the decision-making process.

Andreu, Aldás, Bigné, and Mattila (2010) surveyed travel agents to investigate the role of social power in their adoption and use of the Internet for communication and procurement (e.g., tracking orders and making reservations). They found that the social power of travel agents perceived from both customers and industry positively influences their adoption of the Internet for communication. Conversely, the use of the Internet for procurement is significantly affected by the social power exerted by the industry.

Natural resources are crucial for tourism destinations. Given the underlying importance of water demands in an island destination, Cole (2012) used a political ecology approach to examine the role of social power and ecology in the inequitable and unsustainable distribution of water on the island of Bali, Indonesia. The main powerful stakeholder in Bali is the government. Outside stakeholders were found to enjoy support from local governments, cause degradation, and maximally benefit from tourism. The author postulated that both international businesses and their local counterparts with high bargaining power enjoy absolute access to water resources, while the "worst affected are the marginal communities at the fringes of social power, with little bargaining strength at the market, and little force in the political process. Furthermore, it is women who usually bear the brunt, as they are responsible for providing their families with water for domestic purposes" (Cole, 2012, p. 1237).

A similar research on water supply deficiencies was conducted in the case of Mallorca, Spain by Hof and Blazquez-Salom (2015). The authors claimed that the commodification of water and supply privatization strategies were initially applied as sustainability fixes. However, these approaches worsened the situation and increased the metabolic lift, as those with higher bargaining and social power benefited most from these strategies.

A recent study by Saito and Ruhanen (2017) investigated the collaborations between stakeholders for destination planning and management. They identified and categorized four types of power possessed by various stakeholders: legitimate, coercive, induced, and competent power. The authors described coercive power as attributable to government and public sector agencies. Legitimate power was mainly associated with DMOs and large private organizations. Federal, state, and local governments exerted induced power, and competent power was possessed by educational institutions and consulting forms.

2.2.1.3 Topics and settings of power studies in tourism and hospitality

The previous section presented examples that explicitly mentioned the term "social power." In tourism and hospitality literature, however, many studies used the term "power" very loosely or failed to explicitly mention it despite investigating the power relations among different stakeholders. The general trends for those investigations that used power as a concept are presented below.

Tourism development, planning, and management processes (Bramwell & Meyer, 2007; Hampton & Jeyacheya, 2015; LaPan, Morais, Barbieri, & Wallace, 2016; Nunkoo & Gursoy, 2016; Velasco, 2016; Xiao, 2006; Zhao & Timothy, 2015) are among the most researched areas under power discourses in tourism and hospitality. Similarly, policies were also examined in several studies (Nyaupane & Timothy, 2010; Velasco, 2016; Yang, Ryan, & Zhang, 2014). This situation is unsurprising because these processes are heavily dependent on political aspects of the tourism ecosystem.

Studies related to stakeholder relations (Beritelli & Laesser, 2011; Hazra, Fletcher, & Wilkes, 2017; Kennedy & Augustyn, 2014; Lenao, 2017; Saito & Ruhanen, 2017; Wang, Weaver, & Kwek, 2016; Wearing, Wearing, & McDonald, 2010) are also prevalent. In this

regard, various types of stakeholder power relations were discussed, including the two-way power relations between tourists and tour operators (Wang et al., 2016), community and tour operators (Wearing et al., 2010), and community and state (Lenao, 2017) and the more complex relationships between more than two stakeholders.

Power discussions were applied to various settings as well. Community-based tourism (Lenao, 2017; Reed, 1997; Simons & de Groot, 2015; Tolkach & King, 2015) seems to gain the most attention. Other settings for which power discussions were applied include sustainable tourism (Wearing et al., 2010), volunteer tourism (Wong, Newton, & Newton, 2014), youth tourism (Asadov & Baranov, 2017), rural tourism (Frisvoll, 2012), nature-based and heritage tourism (Gallardo & Stein, 2007), MICE tourism (Ford et al., 2012), sex tourism (Lagunas, 2010), and religious tourism (Bax, 1992).

Some studies applied an agent-centric approach to power. For example, the power of hotels (Lim, 2007), tour operators (Bastakis, Buhalis, & Butler, 2004), and news media (Schweinsberg, Darcy, & Cheng, 2017) were explored. Gender power relations in relation to local stakeholders were also examined (Bax, 1992).

Not long ago, tourism and hospitality scholars seemed to agree that the study of power in the field is at an early stage of development (Church & Coles, 2007; Macleod & Carrier, 2010; Marzano & Scott, 2009). The importance of examining the notion of power was also acknowledged "if we are to fully understand tourism processes" (Morgan & Pritchard, 1998, p. 163). The vital role of media in tourism processes has long been acknowledged, though, interestingly, rarely discussed. Morgan and Pritchard (1998) postulated that in the age of information and knowledge, new media channels are likely to shape power structures in the tourism industry. The advent of social media and their rapid development and omnipresence in

research and practice have confirmed Morgan and Pritchard's (1998) argument. Social media stand at the very heart of tourism processes in terms of communication, information, and knowledge. Accordingly, social media have become a critical social actor that shapes power structures in tourism and hospitality and their power is worth investigating.

2.2.2 Hierarchical structure of power

As mentioned, highly diverse approaches to power exist in the literature. Numerous power definitions, debates, schools, typologies, and sources were presented and discussed in Chapter 1 (see Section 1.2). By uniting several power theorizations, Haugaard (2003) suggested seven mechanisms through which power is created: i) social order (Barnes, 1988; Clegg, 1979, 1989; Giddens, 1984; Haugaard, 1992, 1997; Luhmann, 1979; Parsons, 1963), ii) bias (Bachrach & Baratz, 1962), iii) systems of thought (Foucault, 1970), iv) false consciousness (Lukes, 1974), v) power/knowledge and obligatory passage points (Clegg, 1979, 1989; Foucault, 1970), vi) discipline (Foucault, 1970), and vii) coercion (Bachrach & Baratz, 1962; Dahl, 1957; Mann, 1986; Poggi, 2001; Weber, 1978). Hindess (1996) mentioned that two schools of thought dominated western power discourses: power as capacity and power as capacity and right. The first conceptualization examined power from the perspective of the power holder, and the second one incorporated the consent of those subjects over whom power is exerted. These categorizations can by no means represent all power discussions. To emphasize the diversity and complexity of approaches to power, Hardy (1995) noted the following:

> Power has been both the *independent variable*, causing outcomes
> such as domination, and the *dependent variable*, usually the
> outcome of dependency or centrality. Power has been viewed as

functional in the hands of managers who use it in the pursuit of organizational goals, and *dysfunctional* in the hands of those who challenge those goals and seek to promote self-interest. It has been viewed as the means by which *legitimacy* is created and as the incarnation of *illegitimate* action. Power has been equated with *formal* organizational arrangements and as the *informal* actions that influence outcomes. It has been seen as *conditional on conflict* and as a means to *prevent conflict*. It has been defined as a resource that is *consciously* and deliberately mobilized in the pursuit of self-interest, and as a system of relations that knows no interest, but from which some groups *unconsciously* and inadvertently benefit. It has been seen as an *intentional* act to which causality can be clearly attributed and as an *unintentional*, unpredictable game of chance. The study of power has created a *behavioral* focus for some researchers and *attitudinal* and ideological factors for others. Power has been berated for being repressive and lauded for being productive. Small wonder, then, that there is little agreement.

(Hardy, 1995, pp. xx–xxi)

Table 2.1 Definitions of power

Author(s)	Definition of power
Russell (1938)	Power is the production of intended effects.
Max (1947)	Power is the probability that one actor within a social relationship will

	be in a position to carry out his own will, despite resistance, and regardless of the basis on which the probability rests.
Bierstedt (1950)	Power is latent force… Power itself is the prior capacity that makes the application of force possible.
Parsons (1956)	Power is defined as the realistic capacity of a system-*unit* to actualize its interests within the context of a system-*interaction* and in this sense exert influence on processes in the system.
Dahl (1957)	A has power over B to the extent that he can get B to do something that he would not otherwise do.
French and Raven (1959)	Power is defined in terms of influence, and influence in terms of psychological change […] at a level of generality that includes changes in behavior, opinions, attitudes, goals, needs, values, and all other aspects of the person's psychological field.
Mechanic (1962)	Power is defined as a force that results in behavior that would not have occurred if the forces had not been present.
Kaplan (1964)	[Power is] the ability of one person or group of persons to influence the behavior of others; that is, to change the probabilities that others will respond in certain ways to specified stimuli.
Hobbes (1968)	Present means to achieve future good.
Lukes (1974)	A's ability to do something against B's interests
Foucault (1982)	A way in which certain actions may structure the field of other possible actions
West (1990)	Power occurs when A affects B in a way that intrudes on the formative practice of B or contrary to B's autonomous formation of interests.
Carter (1992)	A power relation exists when an individual or a group of individuals can ensure that another or others do not do something, want or do not want something, and believe or do not believe something, irrespective of the latter's interests.
Physics textbooks	Energy over time
Power (n.d.)	1. The ability or capacity to do something or act in a particular way 2. The capacity or ability to direct or influence the behavior of others or the course of events

Note: Adapted from Begg (2000) and extended

Hardy's (1995) assertion emphasizes the complex nature of power in the social sciences.

Table 2.1 presents some of the most frequently used definitions of power to help visualize its

diverse conceptualizations. Given that power is exercised when one's power is stronger than another's, power seems to work in a hierarchical structure, in which behaviors are determined in different ways. In this regard, Bachrach and Baratz (1962) discussed the two faces of power. Aside from the visual face of power (seemingly related to individuals' decision making), the unseen face of power (policy and authority) is often exercised by power holders:

> Of course, power is exercised when A participates in the making of decisions that affect B. But power is also exercised when A devotes his energies to creating or reinforcing social and political values and institutional practices that limit the scope of the political process to public consideration of only those issues which are comparatively innocuous to A. To the extent that A succeeds in doing this, B is prevented, for all practical purposes, from bringing to the fore any issues that might in their resolution be seriously detrimental to A's set of preferences? (Bachrach & Baratz, 1962, p. 948)

This thesis proposes a conceptual framework to categorize power by considering its hierarchical structure and including diverse approaches, definitions, and theories. In particular, three levels of power are suggested: ability to choose, ability to influence choices, and ability to provide choices. In this thesis, choice represents any kind of behavior. This approach is grounded in the light of ample arguments indicating that choice is behavior and behavior is choice (Baum, 2004, 2010; Kőszegi & Rabin, 2007; Noll, 1995). In other words, humans at any given time have

several choices to make. Each choice they make becomes their behavior or each behavior they perform becomes their choice. The following paragraphs explain each of the three levels of power and discuss their theoretical grounds.

2.2.2.1. Ability to choose

In a capitalist world, power is usually associated with choices (Davies, Fahy, & Rau, 2014). The basic level of power is the individual's ability to choose (Luthra et al., 2017). Ability to choose is an agent-centric power and not a relational one. This level of power comprises all approaches that Pitkin (1972) classified under her taxonomy as "power to." The author noted:

> One may have power over another or others, and that sort of power
>
> is indeed relational […] But he may have power to do or
>
> accomplish something all by himself, and that power is not
>
> relational at all;

<div align="right">(Pitkin, 1972, p. 277)</div>

This level is considered a basic one because it does not involve the second person but solely accounts for the resources of an individual power agent. The question then becomes what the sources of power are at this lowest level. All prerequisites for an individual to perform a certain behavioral choice are potential sources of power for the ability to choose. For instance, in a market economy, money is one of the most important sources of power to purchase (Shambaugh, 2004). Money gives an individual the ability to choose between alternative products in the market, and having limited money might mean that one has to choose between paying the rent or buying food (Luthra et al., 2017). In hospitality and tourism, the main question

of interest is tourist choices for travel services/products (e.g., destinations, hotels, restaurants, activities, museums, cultural heritages sites, and travel packages). Therefore, the power of tourists includes the ability to choose between various hospitality and tourism products. Some people can take long and/or luxury vacations while others cannot. Thus, the resources that enable a tourist to take a specific vacation (e.g., time and money) become his/her sources of power. In this regard, while the extent of power (defined as the ability to choose) may vary widely across different socioeconomic groups, all individuals have some degree of power to choose. Therefore, the pluralist approach to power is appropriate in this context.

2.2.2.2. Ability to influence choices

The second level of power is the ability to influence choices (one's behaviors or decisions). This level of power is relational and includes exercising one's power over others. Constituents of this level involve approaches that Pitkin (1972) classified under her taxonomy as "power over." Social power theory (French & Raven, 1959) can be used to articulate sources of power at this level. An agent needs at least one of five sources of power to influence the behavioral choices of others. As mentioned earlier, the sources of social power are reward, coercion, legitimacy, reference/attraction, and expertise. This approach was critiqued by Bacharach and Lalwer (1980), who asserted that the framework is very general and can have diverse interpretations. However, the criticisms about being too general and enabling diverse interpretations constitute an advantage in this thesis because it allows to interpret more variables from the power perspective as antecedents of attitude and behavior. In the tourism and hospitality setting, researchers have suggested that social power domains can be shown as examples of social power influencing tourists' behavioral choices, such as discounts for reward power (Wong & Yeh, 2009), coercion for coercive power (Caruana & Crane, 2011), social

norms for legitimate power (Oh & Hsu, 2001), celebrity involvement for referent power (Lee, Scott, & Kim, 2008), and perceived expertise for expert power (Lo & McKercher, 2015). Many individuals and social groups have the ability to influence choices, including in tourism decision making. In this regard, this level of power also embraces the pluralist approach.

2.2.2.3. Ability to provide choices

The highest level of power is the ability to provide choices. This power reflects the unseen face of power that Bachrach and Baratz (1962) proposed, which involves control over decision making and non-decision making. As mentioned by Luthra et al. (2017), although individuals may choose, their degrees of freedom in choosing is limited and shaped by powers that they cannot control. One cannot choose something that does not exist. People have the power to choose to sit down, stand, walk, or run, but not to fly. For example, one may question the significance of the choice between Democrats and Republicans in the US or between Conservatives and Labour in the UK context (Luthra et al., 2017).

In hospitality and tourism, those who have authority and control over what service/product choices to provide to tourists possess the greatest power. For instance, governments can be very powerful as providers of gambling choices. Many countries do not allow gambling and casino business permissions, while others restrict the travel of residents in terms of where to go and who is allowed to come. For the citizens of Iran, Israel is out of the question as a tourist destination, and vice versa. Most studies of power focused on either the first or second level, but the highest level of power was infrequently discussed. A very small group of social actors have power in terms of ability to provide choices. Therefore, the elitist approach is appropriate for this level. This framework with the three levels of power can be used to conceptualize and understand what social media power is.

2.3 Conceptualizing the power of social media

This section has three sub-sections. The first sub-section revisited theories related to the power of mass media. The second sub-section discussed the fundamental differences between mass media and social media. The third section synthesized the earlier categorization of power with three levels with media theories and social media studies to articulate a hierarchical model of social media power.

2.3.1 Power of traditional mass media

From a traditional mass media perspective (e.g., TV, radio, and newspapers), researchers articulated the role of three main players in the communication process: message sender, medium, and message receiver (DiMuzio & Sundar, 2012). In the example of destination marketing, the message sender can be a tourism service provider (e.g., DMO, travel marketing company, and hotel) who pushes a message (e.g., destination advertisements and promotional materials). The medium (e.g., TV or radio) conveys the message to the receivers (e.g., tourists and consumers). The mass media communication process is initiated by message senders with the aim of influencing message receivers (DiMuzio & Sundar, 2012). Consequently, many studies have focused on the power of message senders over message receivers but often overlooked the power of the medium and message receiver in these relations.

McLuhan (1964) proposed a groundbreaking argument by asserting that "the medium is the message." He postulated that each medium conveys its own message. Studies have shown that the same message may be perceived differently by receivers if they are sent through different channels (DiMuzio & Sundar, 2012). This perspective of media determinism imposes an exclusive power on media and provides a theoretical groundwork to explain how media

technologies affect society, institutions, economies, groups, individuals, and consumer–supplier relations.

The power of mass media is also explained by agenda-setting (McCombs & Shaw, 1972) and framing theories (Goffman, 1974). According to agenda-setting theory, the press "may not be successful much of the time in telling people what to think, but it is stunningly successful in telling its readers what to think about" (Cohen, 1963, p. 13). Van Dalen and Van Aelst (2013, p. 42) mentioned that "the increasing political power of the media have led to fears about democracy turning into a 'mediacracy', where the mass media takes over the role of other political institutions and determines the political agenda." However, to a certain extent, this theory over-emphasizes the absolute power of media and ignores other stakeholders' role in agenda setting. Hence, Corbett (2015) criticized the overestimation of media's agenda-setting power (e.g., Can media exclude presidential elections from the agenda?).

In terms of the framing power of media, Entman (1993) contended that the way messages are framed (e.g., highlighting and/or minimizing certain details of the message) influences how the audience understands them. Moreover, a story's "frame" directs the audience by giving more or less attention toward certain details of the message. Wall (2017, p. 1) referred to this feature as the interpreting power of media, which is "to set the context, to frame the issue, to interpret the facts, and potentially to provide legitimacy for people, issues, or groups." The same fact can be (mis)interpreted and framed in multiple ways, thereby leading the audience to think or feel in a particular way. This perspective suggests that media not only influence an audience by presenting what aspects may be considered but also by directing them to think in a certain way.

This situation leads to the question: Who has media power? Researchers have shown the answer from the perspectives of tourists, service providers, and media technology. Originally

proposed by a British philosopher Edmund Burke, the watchdog media concept focuses on the power of the public. Given that power elites are never in a position to represent the interests and opinions of all classes (Olien, Tichenor, & Donohue, 1989), media becomes a necessary independent channel with a watchdog function over power elites in the full public interest (e.g., tourists and social media users nowadays). On the contrary, the guard dog media perspective emphasizes the power of governments, businesses, and the institution of media itself (Donohue, Tichenor, & Olien, 1995) by arguing that media guards the interests of their owners, rather than public good. However, media determinists propose that media technology has power rather than being a specific social unit. From the perspective of media determinism, social power dynamics can be influenced and determined by the development of specific media technologies. In particular, the recent development of social media and Web 2.0 technologies determines the power structures of various groups, including consumer–supplier relations in hospitality and tourism.

2.3.2 Emergence of social media and their power

Unlike traditional mass media, social media equipped with Web 2.0 technologies enable spontaneous and multilateral communications (Choi, Hickerson, & Kerstetter, 2018). Social media have induced a substantial transformation in the communication process between stakeholders (Zeng & Gerritsen, 2014). Hence, many online communications studies have focused on consumer–supplier relationships (Leung et al., 2013). Figure 2.1 represents the communication process between service providers and tourists through social media platforms. Various technical features of social media indicate and support the proposition that all three stakeholders (service providers, tourists, and social media platforms) are senders and receivers who exercise power over one another.
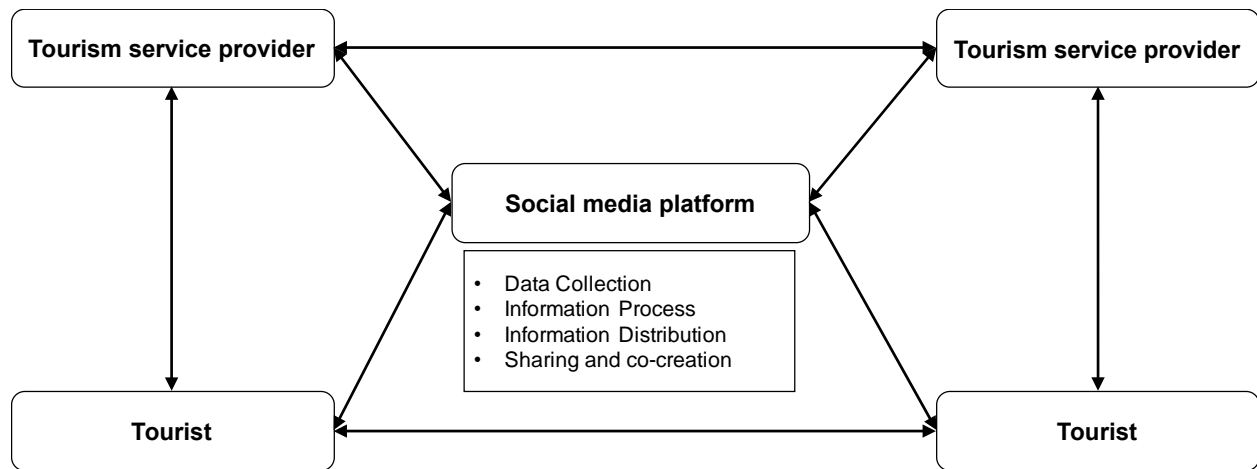
Figure 2.1. Role of a social media platform in online travel information flow

2.3.2.1 Information exchange between service providers and tourists

Nowadays, social media have transformed tourists into more than just passive receivers of information (Hanna, Rohm, & Crittenden, 2011). Communications based on social media platforms are dynamic in the way that information flows simultaneously from a service provider to tourists and/or other service providers and from a tourist to service providers and/or tourists. Tourists are empowered to provide feedback to both service providers and other (potential) tourists and, thereby, to influence their behaviors (Xie, Chen, & Wu, 2016). The traditional role of businesses as information senders has also evolved. Businesses now seek and receive information from tourists in the form of private messages and/or public posts. For instance, the "reply" feature of platforms is making communications increasingly dynamic. Service providers can respond directly to each message, thereby decreasing or increasing the effects of negative and positive posts (Zehrer, Crotts, & Magnini, 2011). Communication in such a scenario is dynamic and personal. Service providers and tourists can reach out to their specific target(s) and provide personalized, and thus more influential, messages (Jansson, 2018). Social media do not necessarily diminish the power of businesses, but they are changing the "rules of the game" by

providing different types of power resources to tourists and service providers that were previously unavailable to them.

2.3.2.2. Social media platforms as senders/receivers

Social media platforms are becoming important players in smart tourism ecosystems (Chung, Han, & Koo, 2015). In their capacity as message receivers, social media collect information from tourists and service providers. Collected data are processed through mechanical algorithms that enable the platforms to select and dispatch the most relevant messages to tourists and service providers. Recently, the Internet of Things and various forms of smart technologies have reinforced the functions of social media as a control center to manage and operate information flow (Gretzel, Werthner, Koo, & Lamsfus, 2015). In their capacity as message senders, social media technologies can be viewed as a separate stakeholder that exercises power over tourists and service providers. From the perspective of media determinism, technological features that contribute to the message-sending role of platforms may be considered mechanisms of power.

2.3.3 Developing a hierarchical model of social media power

To explain the mechanism and sources of social media power, this study synthesizes theoretical perspectives on social power relations and applies them to hospitality and tourism. According to a hierarchical structure of power, the researchers provide a comprehensive framework that explains how each source of social media power can influence tourist decision making and non-decision making. The pyramid in Figure 2 consists of three levels of power, namely, the ability to make travel choices, influence travel choices, and provide travel choices.
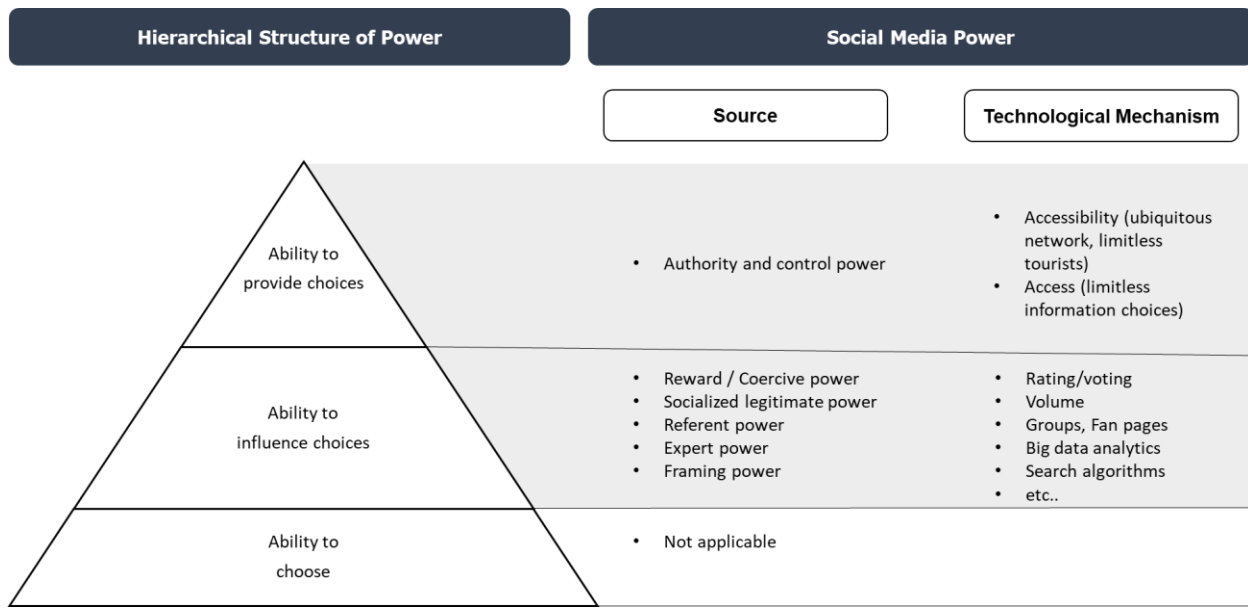
Figure 3.2. Hierarchical model of social media power

2.3.3.1 Ability to make travel choices

The ability to choose constitutes the first level of the pyramid. From the tourist perspective, this level includes the ability to perform travel choices. Travel choice may apply to specific services/products (e.g., food, room, activity, and package), providers (e.g., hotels, restaurants, transportation companies, and travel agencies), and/or destinations. At this level, power is not relational (power-over) but tourist-centric (power-to). Time and money are sources of tourist-centric power. Tourists choose one from among various products, suppliers, and destinations on the basis of their available time and money. This choice will also be influenced by an individual's health, travel experience, and knowledge. Other factors may also contribute to or limit his/her travel choices. Given the relational nature of social media power, this level of power is inapplicable to social media.

2.3.3.2 Ability to influence travel choices

The second level of power is relational and may be defined as the ability to influence choices. This level is defined here as the ability of social media to influence travel choices. Social power theory provides a theoretical lens by which to explain how certain technological features trigger the sources of social media power at this level of the pyramid by influencing tourist behaviors.

Reward and coercive power. Rating/voting is an important technological feature that relates to reward and coercive power. By aggregating numerous consumer ratings, platforms provide tourists with an assembly of information about certain travel choices. Several studies have empirically confirmed the effect of ratings on travel choices (e.g., Melian-Gonzalez, Bulchand-Gidumal, & Lopez-Valcarcel, 2013; Tsao et al., 2015). A high average rating of a service or product symbolizes "a good choice," whereas a low rating implies "a bad choice," thereby promising tourists good or bad experiences, respectively. Social power theory suggests that behaviors may be influenced through the promise of rewards or coercion. By promising good or bad experiences, rating scores encourage or restrain tourists toward or away from travel choices. The technical feature of rating/voting can grant reward and coercive power to social media by producing such psychological effects on tourists.

Another example of reward power can be the monetary rewards promised by social media platforms. O'Connor (2003) suggested that the main benefit for a customer in using online platforms is to save money. In this regard, any platform attribute that promises lower than average prices can trigger reward power. For example, Hotels.com is an online review website that has a "best price guarantee" or the lowest price possible. Membership is another feature used by diverse social media platforms to trigger user perceptions of reward power. To continue with

the same example, Hotels.com members get a free night for every 10 nights they stay in hotels booked through the platform. Such bonuses stimulate the reward power of social media platforms.

Socialized legitimate power. Rating features are usually accompanied by the technology of volume which displays the number of people who participated in ratings. Hospitality and tourism studies have observed that volume is a key influential factor. Torres, Singh, and Robertson-Ring (2015) illustrated that indicating the number of reviews in TripAdvisor influences online bookings. Volume was also found to magnify the effect of review valence on booking intentions (Tsao et al., 2015). Recent studies have shown that the quantity of reviews influences hotels' offline reputation (Xie et al., 2016) and restaurants' online reputation (Zhang, Ye, Law, & Li, 2010). Number of reviews is especially influential when choosing lower-tier hotels (Blal & Sturman, 2014). The influence of the volume feature can be explained through what Arendt (1970) described as the socialization of power. Socialization implies that the power agent acts in the name of a certain social group and represents their opinions. Similarly, the technological features of aggregating volume are an example of how platforms position themselves as social agents and proceed to socialize power. TripAdvisor introduced the Travelers' Choice Award, which soon became an important quality indicator for hospitality and tourism companies. From the perspective of social power theory, volume and socialization may be viewed as legitimate power. Ratings with high volumes represent the common knowledge of a consumer community, and accepted societal attitude (good or bad) is an epitomization of legitimate power (French & Raven, 1959). The function of volume also grants a watchdog function to social media when they act in the best interests of consumer communities.

Referent power. Web 2.0 is equipped with many technical features (e.g., create, join, like, and follow) that support the formation and operation of virtual communities for those with similar interests. Virtual communities can be formed as a group of people, a set of pages within a specific platform, or the entire platform. As Wang, Yu, and Fesenmaier (2002) explained, one explanation for the participation of users in such communities is to fulfill the psychological need of belonging and identifying with a social group. Zeng and Gerritsen (2014) suggested that participating in a virtual community has a profound influence on travel-related choices. This psychological effect of online communities may be described as the "referent power" of social media. As suggested by social power theory, individuals who identify themselves with a social group may be influenced by that referent group. In this sense, technologies that facilitate the formation of virtual communities can serve as mechanisms of referent power.

Expert power. Social media platforms are often supported by advanced data-processing technologies, such as machine learning, artificial intelligence, and big data. Through these means, colossal information possessed by social media is transformed into sophisticated knowledge about tourists and service providers (Fuchs, Höpken, & Lexhagen, 2014). The aforementioned technologies that facilitate such "knowledge" can be described as depicting the expert power of social media. They help create detailed tourist profiles at an individual level to provide highly personalized offers/services that have a profound influence on travel choices (Gavalas, Konstantopoulos, Mastakas, & Pantziou, 2014).

The expert power of social media is also triggered through reputation. Some platforms (e.g., OpenRice) have specialized in certain hospitality and tourism services over many years. As mentioned by Ullén, Hambrick, and Mosing (2016), expertise is achieved through specialization in a certain area. An experimental study by Choi, Hickerson, et al. (2018) likewise showed that

platforms specializing in tourism have more influence on tourist behaviors than do generalist websites. Thus, a specialization strategy may become an attribute that triggers expert power.

Framing power. In addition to the five sources of social power theory, framing can serve as a source of social media power at this level of the pyramid. Sparks and Browning (2011) found that the order in which positive and negative reviews on products are presented also affects travel choices. Thus, the algorithm that frames reviews can be articulated as the technology mechanism behind this influence. Similarly, a recent study confirmed that the order in which results are presented in search engines is an important influencer of tourist destination choices (Pan, 2015). The same logic can be applied to search results obtained from social media platforms. Therefore, the algorithm that frames search results is an important technology mechanism that represents the framing power of social media.

2.3.3.3 Ability to provide travel choices

The ability to provide choices is the highest level of power. This level of social media power in the pyramid is defined as the ability of social media to provide travel choices to tourists and relates to unseen power. By providing only certain or defined travel choices, social media influence the non-decision making of tourists by excluding certain decisions from choice alternatives. For example, if a restaurant does not appear in the search results of OpenRice, the restaurant is "out of choice."

Authority, defined as "the right to act in a specified way, delegated from one person or organization to another" (Authority, n.d.), is the source of social media power at the highest level. When using a specific platform for information searching, tourists authorize that platform to provide them with travel choices. Given that the authority power of social media is triggered

by the actual usage of a medium, two key factors contribute to such power: 1) accessibility to users and 2) access to travel choices.

The accessibility of traditional media (e.g., newspapers) is limited compared with that of social media. Often referred to as ubiquitous computing, technologies enable tourists to use social media anytime and anywhere, that is, before, during, and after a trip. Technological features that improve the accessibility of social media have contributed to their actual usage by tourists and, through such means, have conveyed authority power. Albeit relatively later, many traditional media agencies also increased their accessibility by offering their services via the Internet. However, in addition to being accessible to tourists, a powerful medium should also provide access to travel choices that fulfill the roles of mediating relations between tourists and travel providers. Social media largely outweigh traditional media channels because producing information about travel choices in social media has become decentralized. Moreover, the role of information producers is given to unlimited numbers of tourists. In comparison with media agents, tourists produce far more information about travel choices and about any specific travel choice. Traditional forms of media are confined to travel service providers that can afford relatively high advertisement costs. In social media, the choice spectrum extends to the smallest scaled companies (e.g., a local restaurant). Access to such vast information about travel choices is unavailable through traditional media. Access to an unlimited number of travel choices and information about them are brought about by technologies that contribute to social media usage, thus conveying the authority power of such media.

2.4 Chapter summary and contributions

The main purpose of this chapter was to conceptualize social media power in tourism and hospitality. Several theoretical discourses on power were discussed before a hierarchical structure for social media power was proposed. At the first level of the proposed model, power is not relational and is thus inapplicable to social media. At the second and third levels of the pyramid, social media power is defined as the ability of social media to influence and provide travel choices, respectively. Social power theory and media effect theories provide theoretical foundations of the sources of power at the second level. The pluralist approach to power is considered relevant at this level owing to the considerably large number of social agents that have power to influence travel choices (e.g., friends, relatives, tourists, service providers, and governments). The source of the third level of power is authority and control over decision making and non-decision making. Unlike the second level, agents possessing power to provide travel choices are limited; hence, the elitist approach is relevant for the third level.

This chapter provided examples of the attributes of each source of power. The sources of social media power can be seen as potential power (analogous to the gravitational energy of the apple on a tree). By contrast, its attributes are considered kinetic power (analogous to the energy of the falling apple) because they influence tourist behaviors by triggering potential power sources. Many of the technologies behind social media platforms can vary and change over time. Therefore, many of their attributes are not fundamental. The sources are, however, theoretically fundamental and can be triggered through the application of relevant and new technologies. The following two chapters provide an empirical analysis on the effect of expert power and reward power by testing fundamental attributes that have not been tested in a social media setting.

This conceptual model contributed to power theories through the proposal of a power pyramid with three levels. To date, the main division within literature has involved the power-to and power-over concepts. Although previous theories have suggested sources for each type of power, the hierarchical structure of relational power as the differentiation between influencers and providers of behavioral choices has been largely ignored. Given the many influencers in hospitality and tourism and the few providers of behavior choices, the hierarchical model can integrate pluralist and elitist views into a single framework.

Discussions provided a unique contribution to the literature by synthesizing the technological determinist view, which attributes power sources to a technology, and fundamental power theories developed for and attributed to social beings. In doing so, this thesis expanded the technological determinism perspective by arguing that the medium is the power. The conceptualization of a medium as a power agent provided fruitful groundwork for new media theories in the hospitality and tourism context.

Consideration of the technological features in relation to social media power provided meaningful contributions for practitioners. The attributes and sources of social media power at the second level of the pyramid demonstrated how service providers can influence tourists. For instance, tourist behaviors are influenced not only by an overall rating but also by the volume of reviewers. Therefore, managers should consider encouraging their customers to vote on popular social media sites. In this way, customers contribute to both the valence and volume of reviews. Social media platforms also provide a number of tools to create virtual communities, such as groups, pages, and forums. Service providers can use these technical features to enhance users' emotional attachment and a sense of belonging. This condition will trigger the referent power of service providers over their users and group members. The process of information collection can

also be made sophisticated by employing big data analytics and artificial intelligence. Tourism businesses and service providers are encouraged to use the wide range of technical tools provided by social media platforms to deliver more personalized services/offers to their targeted customers.

CHAPTER 3 EXPERT POWER OF SOCIAL MEDIA PLATFORMS: EMPIRICAL STUDY 1

This chapter has five sections. It conceptualized and empirically tested the working mechanism of the expert power of social media platforms. The first section set the background information, articulated the attributes of expert power, defined the main constructs, and emphasized the purpose of this study. The second section developed a conceptual model for the working mechanism of the expert power of social media platforms through hypotheses. The third section described the methodology and methods employed in this study. The fourth section presented the results. Finally, the fifth section summarized findings and articulated the contributions of this empirical study.

3.1 Research background

The CASA paradigm (Nass & Moon, 2000; Reeves & Nass, 1996) provides evidence that consumers evaluate computers, technologies, and media sources by applying social rules and manners. As an example, the term "expert" is a social characteristic that may be applied to the source credibility of humans and computers. Non-human actors, including social media platforms, may be viewed as social actors that possess expert power, and certain technical features influence user perceptions about such platforms.

Expert power is present when a social actor "is seen as having superior knowledge or ability in very specific areas" (French & Raven, 1959, p. 268). It is the second level of power and is thus defined as the ability to influence behavioral choices. Usually, one should possess certain attributes (e.g., a specific university degree and work experience) to be perceived as an expert. In considering application to non-human actors, identifying the technical attributes that enhance the

expert power of social media platforms is meaningful. According to social power theory, those who are perceived to have a certain domain expertise are also perceived as providing more credible recommendations and information. Put otherwise, social power theory suggests that, compared to non-experts, experts are more fit to provide recommendations and information. This notion can be conceptualized as information-task-fit, which refers to the quality of task-oriented information (Dedeke, 2016). The information-task-fit of a social actor (a social media platform in the case of this thesis) then becomes the mediator of influence with an ultimate effect on behavioral intentions.

As discussed, the attributes of expert power can vary. Technological mechanisms are diverse, and they change and vary over time. By drawing upon deliberate practice theory (Ericsson, Krampe, & Tesch-Römer, 1993), this empirical study focuses on two fundamental attributes of expert power that may be applied to social media platforms and are likely not to change over time: specialization and experience. According to the theory, the more time allocated to a certain skill/sector by an agent, the greater the relevant expertise acquired. Similarly, social media platforms with greater experience and a particular specialization may possess a higher level of expert power.

When the focus involves a specific information domain, specialist social media platforms (e.g., OpenRice in the restaurant sector) may be perceived as possessing more "knowledge" (information) and, consequently, more expertise than generalists about a given area (Carnabuci & Bruggeman, 2009). Considering specialization, the operational definition of expert power of social media is social media platforms that can be perceived as a specialist platform. Social media platforms that have several years of experience may be perceived as more "knowledgeable" and as possessing more expertise than more recently established counterparts.

In this regard, another operational definition of expert power of social media is social media platforms with several years of experience that can be perceived as high experience. A debate is ongoing as to whether expertise is a sub-dimension or an outcome of specialization and experience, but the connection of the three concepts is unequivocal (Jacoby, Troutman, Kuss, & Mazursky, 1986; Ullén et al., 2016).

Intuitively, it seems fair to assume that specialization and experience should be attributes of expert power, though the interaction between the two attributes has not been tested in tourism or in other disciplines. Furthermore, social media power is a relational phenomenon. Hence, the power of an influencer also interacts with the power of the influenced (French & Raven, 1959). Psychology literature has explained how individuals in powerful or powerless conditions react differently to given information. Tourists' subjective perceptions about their own power ("user power" hereafter) may influence how each attribute of a social media platform's expert power affects the perceptions toward the site and behavioral intentions. This background prompts the following RQ: What are the relationships among platform experience, platform specialization, and user power?

This study investigates the working mechanism of the expert power of a social media platform by using articulation specialization and experience as its fundamental attributes and tests the psychological effects of such power on tourist perceptions and behavioral intentions. In the particular context of online review sites, this empirical study seeks to 1) test the interaction effects between platform specialization, platform experience (the two attributes of expert power of an influencer), and user power (the power of the influenced) on perceived information-task-fit and 2) examine the role of perceived information-task-fit in mediating the effects of expert power on behavioral intentions.

3.2 Developing the conceptual model

3.2.1 Attributes of expert power

In social relations, experts are generally believed to influence other members of society (Kurz-Milcke & Gigerenzer, 2004). Expert power occurs when an individual possesses certain attributes that affect others' perceptions toward his/her expertise (Raven & French, 1958). Deliberate practice theory (Ericsson et al., 1993) suggests that expertise is achieved through systematic and purposeful practice by a social agent. Specifically, the more time and effort one spends in a certain area, the more expertise is acquired. For example, the expertise of a senior scholar who has been practicing research for several years will be perceived as higher than that of a less experienced and junior scholar. Psychology scholars have suggested that expertise is acquired through the "process of specialization, in which an individual invests time, effort, and neural resources in order to optimize the performance of a limited set of tasks" (Ullén et al., 2016, p. 431). In other words, being an expert is not only about experience (time devoted to practice) but also about specialization (the skills that are developed during this time). In extending the previous analogy, a junior scholar may possess the same or an even higher level of expertise (compared to a more senior scholar) in a specific research area. In this regard, experience and specialization can both be articulated as fundamental attributes of expert power.

In applying this discussion to social media platforms (the terms "platform," "site," and "website" will be used interchangeably hereafter), some may position themselves as specializing in a specific sub-sector of tourism, while others could be more general and include reviews about various types of products and services. For example, OpenRice has a narrow specialization in the restaurant sector. Similarly, Hotels.com focuses solely on the hotel sector. However, TripAdvisor includes reviews about sectors across the tourism domain, including restaurants, hotels, and

activities. The Yelp site has a broader coverage, with reviews on various service sectors such as cleaners, landscapers, painters, and the hospitality sector. Compared with generalist (non-specialized) platforms, those specializing in the restaurant or hotel sector may be perceived as having greater expert power in their respective area. The expertise of platforms also varies according to their years of operation. Compared with their newer platform counterparts, those with greater experience would be perceived as possessing higher expert power.

3.2.1.1 Effects of specialization on perceived information-task-fit

The concept of specialization originated primarily from the differences between generalists and specialists (Makarevich, 2018). Specifically, it originated from the zoological distinctions between specialist and generalist species or those that thrive in only a narrow or in a wider variety of environmental conditions, respectively (Hanski, Hansson, & Henttonen, 1991). Social scientists have drawn parallels and have applied the concepts in a variety of contexts, including education, career paths, and firms. As stated by Prasad (2009, p. 381), "[a]gents who have a relative advantage in one task are called specialists, whereas agents who are equally able at several tasks are called generalists."

The application of specialization in the realms of technologies and digital media in business has a long history, though it has received minimal scholarly interest (Koh & Sundar, 2010). One example is the use of Kindle to replace generalist devices, such as PDAs. The popularity of specialist platforms, such as weather.com (weather forecasting website) and Hotels.com (hotel room reservation online travel agency), has increased recently. Koh and Sundar (2010) investigated the psychological effects of specialization in media websites on audiences. They concluded that specialist media are perceived to have greater expertise than

generalist ones. Similar findings were observed when humans interact with generalist or specialist robots (Sah, Yoo, & Sundar, 2011).

Two academic papers have discussed the differences between specialist and generalist media in tourism (Choi, Hickerson, et al., 2018; Lim & Yoo, 2012). Lim and Yoo (2012) conceptualized specialization in terms of geographical region by comparing a generalist tourism website (i.e., TripAdvisor) with a specialist one (i.e., NYCGO.com). The authors suggested that the fundamental differences are associated with technical assets and the scale of the relevant websites. Choi, Hickerson, et al. (2018) defined specialization on the basis of information provided on the website and compared the psychological effects of generalist and tourism-specialist websites. Their findings suggested that tourists consider specialized tourism websites as more credible when making destination selections.

Within the wider business domain, specialization is a scope strategy. Organizations that adopt a generalist strategy focus on multiple tasks and aim to harness the benefits of being a "one-stop shop" by offering a spectrum of products and services (Chatain & Zemsky, 2007). By contrast, firms that deploy a specialist strategy "do only one type of task and have an organizational design optimized for that task" (Chatain & Zemsky, 2007, p. 563). Alternative strategies have strengths and weaknesses, but specialists have an absolute advantage over generalists in relation to information and knowledge about a certain task in which the agent is specialized (Prasad, 2009).

The construct of information-task-fit offers a dimension of website quality (Loiacono, Watson, & Goodhue, 2002). This construct may be useful compared with the broader concept of information quality. As argued by Dedeke (2016, p. 543), "[i]nformation-task fit construct, focuses on the contextual dimension of information quality." The said construct refers to the

extent to which users believe the information provided in the website is appropriate and meets their needs (Loiacono et al., 2002). Put otherwise, information-task-fit involves the quality of task-oriented information (Dedeke, 2016). To this end, relevant scholarly and practitioner discussions have clearly illustrated that for relevant consumer tasks, the quality of task-oriented information will be perceived as better in the case of specialist rather than generalist platforms. This discussion can then be applied to social media platforms. An online review site is a useful setting for investigating the effect of specialization on information-task-fit. Tourists rely on various sources of information for recommendations about suitable places to eat, particularly in unfamiliar destinations. They use a variety of online review sites as sources of recommendations. Thus, specialist restaurant review sites will likely be perceived as having a higher information-task-fit than do generalist review sites in such contexts.

3.2.1.2 Moderating role of experience

As discussed, experience is another crucial attribute of expert power, along with specialization. Review sites with multiple years of experience can affect information-task-fit substantially regardless of whether such sites are specialists or generalists. Founded in 2004, Yelp is a good example of a generalist provider offering reviews on diverse services and products while enjoying a high reputation in restaurant-specific information. Given that specialization and experience are key attributes of expert power and are anticipated to influence information-task-fit, the question then becomes how their effects interact.

Ericsson (2004) suggested that only a certain level of expertise may be accumulated by an individual through practice. Specifically, the researcher found that 10 years of career expertise (though varying on the basis of industry/sector) may only be maintained and not necessarily increased. Gompers, Kovner, and Lerner (2009) examined the effect of specialization on firm

performance and concluded that "[w]hen the individual investment professionals are highly specialized themselves, the marginal effect of increasing overall firm specialization is much weaker" (Gompers et al., 2009, p. 817). Zhang et al. (2016) investigated the effect of self-styled "expert reviews" in an online review platform. They found that while expert reviews affect rating behaviors positively, the effect grows only marginally when the number of expert reviews increases. Collectively, these studies implied that the effect of expert power does not increase linearly but may reach a maximum threshold. Once tourist perceptions are increased by the specific attributes of an expert, further enhancements become progressively more difficult. That is, the effect of an expert platform might be significant compared to that of a non-expert counterpart. However, when comparing the effect of two expert platforms for which one has high expertise and the other has very high expertise, the effect might be marginal. Accordingly, the interaction between specialization and experience may be hypothesized as follows: If tourist perceptions (in terms of information-task-fit) toward an experienced review platform are already high, then specialization will have only a minor or trivial effect on perceived information-task-fit. However, in the case of a platform that is lacking in experience, tourist perceptions (in terms of information-task-fit) will be lower and thus the effect of specialization will be higher.

3.2.2 Moderating role of user power

The psychological state of power is crucial in determining how and whether individual consumers will be influenced (Choi, Mattila, Van Hoof, & Quadri-Felitti, 2016). The power of individuals may be defined as "asymmetric control in relation to other people" (Liu & Mattila, 2017; Rucker, Dubois, & Galinsky, 2010). Several tourism studies (Choi & Mattila, 2016; Choi et al., 2016; Liu & Mattila, 2017; Zhang, 2015; Zhang & Hanks, 2015) identified a moderating role for tourists' sense of power relative to influence in various settings. One explanation for

such moderation is that the powerful and the powerless process and react to information differently (Smith & Trope, 2006). Psychology literature indicates that the powerless tend to make more neutral evaluations, whereas the powerful state their opinions more confidently about what they (dis)like and react to informational cues accordingly (Kim, 2018; Magee, Galinsky, & Gruenfeld, 2007). Possessing a sense of power facilitates both positive and negative decisions when reacting to given information. For instance, the powerful are more likely to take concrete actions when treated unjustly, whereas the powerless are less sensitive (Sawaoka, Hughes, & Ambady, 2015). Studies have also shown that powerful people are inclined to make judgments by relying on first impressions, whereas the powerless are more conservative (Briñol, Petty, & Stavraki, 2012). Psychology literature provides ample evidence that perceptions by the powerful toward the quality of task-oriented information in expert versus non-expert platforms differ substantially. Powerless people, however, tend to have neutral reactions and mindsets. Specialization and experience have lesser effects on perceptions of information-task-fit when users are powerless. This situation removes the occurrence of two-way interactions between experience and specialization. Powerful people will tend to judge the quality of the task-oriented information in expert and non-expert platforms on the basis of first impressions. Their perceptions toward information-task-fit will be higher for specialist and experienced platforms compared with those for generalist and non-experienced equivalents. Thus, the interaction between experience and specialization will occur when users are powerful. This assertion leads to the first research hypothesis and its sub-hypotheses below:

H1. A significant three-way interaction occurs among platform experience, platform specialization, and user power on perceived information-task-fit.

H1a. The two-way interaction effect between platform experience and platform specialization on perceived information-task-fit will be significant when users are in a powerful condition. Specifically, the effect of specialization on perceived information-task-fit will be higher in a platform of low experience (compared with a counterpart with high experience) when users are powerful.

H1b. A two-way interaction effect between platform experience and platform specialization on perceived information-task-fit will not be significant when users are in a powerless condition.

3.2.3 Mediating role of perceived information-task-fit

Previous studies have shown that specialization affects behavioral intentions (Choi et al., 2018; Gompers et al., 2009). The effect of information-task-fit on behavioral intentions has also been confirmed in various contexts (Dedeke, 2016). For the purposes of this thesis, behavioral intention is operationalized as tourists' intention to use a social media platform. According to social power theory (French & Raven, 1959), individuals perceive experts to be more "fit to the task" of giving recommendations in their respective areas of expertise. Consequently, when a question and/or uncertainty arises, individuals approach experts to request recommendations. Given that restaurant-specialist review platforms are seen as "expert platforms," it is suggested that a higher intention to use a specialist rather than a generalist review platform will be present because tourists have higher perceptions of the information-task-fit of the former. Thus, the mediation role of perceived information-task-fit is hypothesized. Figure 1 depicts the proposed conceptual model with hypotheses.

H2. Perceived information-task-fit will mediate the effect of specialization on intention to use.
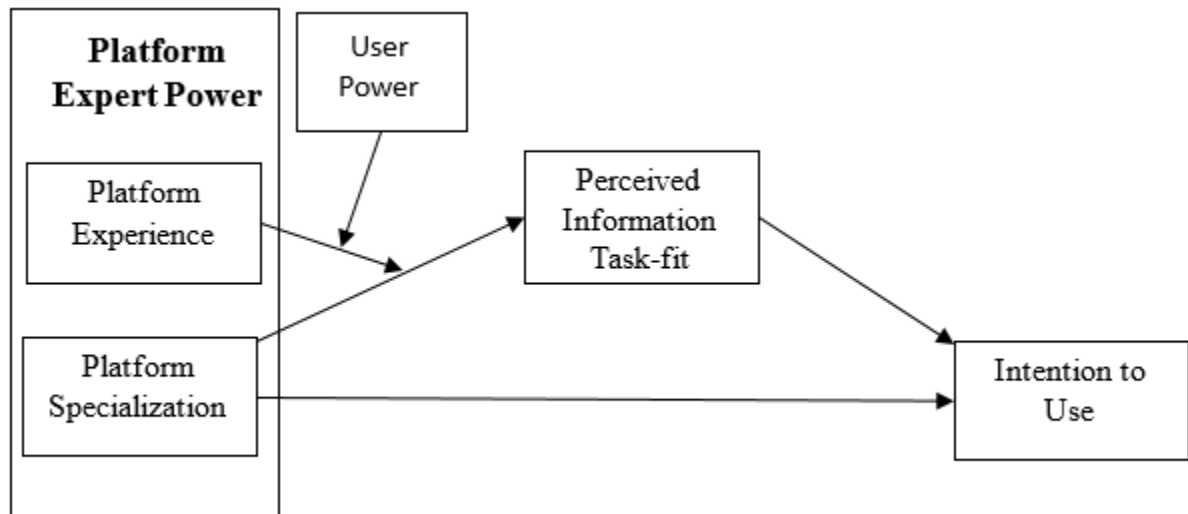

Figure 3.1. Working mechanism of the expert power of social media platforms

3.3 Methodology

Experimental design is considered to be an appropriate method for the empirical parts of this thesis because of several reasons. First, experimental designs have been widely adopted to test theories and causal relationships in social sciences (Oh, Kim, & Shin, 2004). The present study applies and tests social power theory taken from social sciences in the context of social media platform power. Experimental design is regarded as a suitable approach for examining the effects of expert power on tourist perceptions and behavioral intention, especially for articulating the theoretical effects rather than testing statistical significance for a given population (Highhouse, 2009).

The existing literature also suggests that using experimental design becomes especially important if the examined theory is related to psychological effects, and thus has been widely used in the psychology domain (Kuhfeld, Tobias, & Garratt, 1994). Social power theory refers to

the psychological perceptions of the influenced individuals regarding their own power and the power of the influencer. This description further justifies the choice of experimental design.

Compared to other methods (e.g., surveys), experimental design is considered a more appropriate approach to examine causal relationships (Bradley & Sparks, 2012) because researchers can control the effects of other extraneous variables (Fong, Law, Tang, & Yap, 2016). This study specifically focuses on the causal relationship between power variables.

Examining causal effects is not only beneficial for theoretical purposes but also provides meaningful implications for real-world practices (Leung & Law, 2007). Consequently, experimental designs are widely used in management and marketing, thereby producing useful practical outcomes (Kuhfeld et al., 1994). As the practical outcomes of this study are expected to be relevant and useful for social media and tourism marketers, experimental studies are appropriate for generating the managerial outcomes of this thesis.

Despite the many strengths of experiments, few experimental studies exist in the tourism and hospitality settings. Although tourism and hospitality literature has substantial marketing investigations using social science theories (Xiao & Smith, 2006), experimental studies in this field surprisingly remain limited (Line & Runyan, 2012).

Calls for additional experimental studies in tourism and hospitality mainly started in the early 2000s. In their conceptual paper, Lynn and Lynn (2003) advocated the use of and called for more experimental studies by hospitality researchers to enrich the impact of studies focusing on causal relationships. Mattila (2004) suggested that the advancement of technology has provided researchers with greater opportunities to conduct experimental studies and encouraged scholars to use this approach more in tourism and hospitality investigations. Namasivayam (2004) asserted that experimental studies can enhance the robustness of research by increasing internal

validity. In a similar way, other scholars (Dolnicar & Ring, 2014; Tasci, Gartner, & Cavusgil, 2007) call for additional experimental studies in a tourism and hospitality setting. The recent literature review study by Fong et al. (2016) revealed that the share of experimental studies in tourism and hospitality literature still remains very low, thereby inducing the authors to encourage scholars to use this approach. Thus, using experimental design will contribute to tourism and hospitality literature in terms of diversifying and advancing methodology. Specific techniques of different types of experimental design with respect to their strengths and weaknesses will be discussed in the following sections.

3.3.1 Pilot study

Social media platforms are relatively new and no testing of platform experience levels has been conducted. Thus, engaging in a sensitive development of the stimuli that are intended to manipulate the experience of a review platform is crucial. The difference in years between new and experienced platforms should be realistic and applicable to the experience profiles of existing review platforms. A pilot study with one factorial (platform experience: low vs. high) between-subjects experiment was conducted to test the psychological effects of platform experience. A total of 101 U.S. residents were recruited as participants via MTurk, with each participant receiving US$0.50 as compensation. MTurk has recently become a popular source of data in tourism research (Choi, Hickerson, et al., 2018; Liu & Mattila, 2017) because of its reliability, validity, and time and cost effectiveness (Buhrmester, Kwang, & Gosling, 2011; Casler, Bickel, & Hackett, 2013; Hauser & Schwarz, 2016; Paolacci, Chandler, & Ipeirotis, 2010).

Participants were asked to imagine themselves traveling to an unfamiliar destination. While thinking about places to eat, they see a Facebook advertisement about an online review

site. They were further asked to examine the website and make careful examination of its features. The participants were randomly exposed to an advertisement of an online review site with either low or high experience. To manipulate the extent of experience, the logo of the platform showed either "Since 2017" or "Since 2008." Respective messages indicating that the given website is celebrating its "1st" or "10th" anniversary were added to the advertisement. The earliest review platforms in hospitality and restaurant contexts were founded in the mid-to-late 2000s (e.g., Yelp). On this basis, 10 years of experience was employed in this study to represent a high experience of the platform. Ten-year experience also seems high compared with 1-year experience. Stimuli were pretested before the conduct of the pilot study.

Following their exposure to the stimuli, participants were asked questions related to the platform. Two questions were asked to check the manipulation as follows: "The website has several years of experience in what they do." The perceived realism of the stimuli was measured using two items adapted from Sparks and Browning (2011): "I think the advertisement was realistic" and "I could imagine seeing this advertisement in a real world." For perceived information-task-fit, three items were adopted from Dedeke (2016): "The information on the website is pretty much what I need to carry out my tasks," "The website adequately meets my information needs," and "The information on the website is effective." All measures used a five-point Likert scale (1 = strongly disagree, 5 = strongly agree), were pretested and slightly modified before the conduct of the pilot study. In particular, manipulation check question for experience originally stated: "The website is experienced in what they do". However, several participants during pretest stated that the term experience may have multiple meanings and suggested to clarify which meaning this items refers to. Given that manipulation of experience

was based solely on the years of experience, the item was replaced by "The website has several years of experience in what they do" for clarity.

Participants in the low-experience condition (M = 2.12, SD = 1.24) gave significantly lower ratings (t = −10.66, p<0.01) than those in the high-experience condition (M = 4.25, SD = 0.71) in response to manipulation check questions about the experience level in terms of years. This outcome suggests that the manipulation was effective. The Cronbach's alpha of perceived realism and information-task-fit were 0.74 and 0.84, respectively. Both scenarios had high realism and showed no significant differences (t = −1.04, p = 0.3) between low-experience (M = 3.84, SD = 0.72) and high-experience conditions (M = 3.98, SD = 0.62). Participant perceptions toward information-task-fit differed significantly (t = −2.10, p < 0.05) between low-experience (M = 3.55, SD = 0.81) and high-experience conditions (M = 3.85, SD = 0.66). Findings suggest that the main study could be conducted.

3.3.2   Main study design and participants

To test the effects of experience, specialization, and user power, a 2 (platform experience: low or high) × 2 (platform specialization: generalist or specialist) × 2 (user power: powerful or powerless) between-subjects experiment was conducted containing eight cells. A total of 411 participants living in the US were recruited via MTurk for a compensation of US$0.50.

3.3.3   Procedure and stimuli

After agreeing to participate in the experiment, respondents were randomly assigned to one of two manipulations for user power. First, the participants' sense of power (user power) was manipulated using Liu and Mattila's (2017) two-step manipulation guideline. Participants were asked to recall a specific incident where they were powerful (or powerless) and then to describe it. They were subsequently asked to create a grammatically correct sentence with two given sets

of words. These words were related to either having power or being powerless. Psychology literature widely supported the reliability of such methods that manipulate the power of participants (Galinsky, Gruenfeld, & Magee, 2003; Magee et al., 2007). After the participants' sense of power was manipulated, they were asked to imagine another unrelated scenario: specifically, they are on a trip in an unfamiliar destination and while considering somewhere to eat found a Facebook advertisement about an online review site. The participants were instructed to make a careful examination of the features of the website. They were then assigned randomly to one of four platform scenarios: low experience and generalist (Figure 3.2), low experience and specialist (Figure 3.3), high experience and generalist (Figure 3.4), and high experience and specialist (Figure 3.5). Similar to the treatment in Study 1, platform experience was manipulated with a logo of either "Since 2017" or "Since 2008." The advertisement also displayed a message stating that the platform will soon celebrate its 1st (or 10th) anniversary. In the manipulation of specialization, the review categories of a generalist platform were adapted from Yelp.com with the presentation of relevant pictures in each category. The specialist platform was a specialist in restaurant reviews and was confined to categories of cuisine (e.g., burgers and sushi). Consistent with these characteristics, the platform was named either "A Recommender" or a "Food Recommender."

Figure 3.2. Platform features: low experience, generalist

FooD Recommender

Sponsored ·

Since 2017

Like Page

Choose a restaurant category you are looking for

Steakhouse

Sushi

Burger

Mexicano

Pizza

Explore more food choices

Food Recommender is celebrating its 1st anniversary!

Founded in 2017, Food Recommender is a trusted community with 1 year of experience for people to rate, review and evaluate restaurants. No matter what kind of food you require, you will get tons of restaurant choices. Visit our website to join our community or simply to read and evaluate what restaurants are out there.

Figure 3.3. Platform features: low experience, specialist

A Recommender
Sponsored ·

Choose a service or product category you are looking for

Restaurants

Furniture

Home Maintenance

Car Maintenance

Shopping

Looking for other services?
EXPLORE MORE

A Recommender is celebrating its 10th anniversary!

Founded in 2008, A Recommender is a trusted community with 10 years of experience for people to rate, review and evaluate variety of services and products such as restaurants, maintenance, shopping, etc. No matter what kind of service or product you require, you will get tons of choices. Visit our website to join our community or simply to read and evaluate what offers are out there.

Figure 3.4. Platform features: high experience, generalist

Figure 3.5. Platform features: high experience, specialist

3.3.4   Measures

To check the manipulation of user power, one question asked participants the extent to which they felt powerful (1 = not at all powerful, 5 = extremely powerful). Participants were asked to indicate how strongly they disagree/agree with the following items on a five-point Likert scale (1 = strongly disagree, 5 = strongly agree): for specialization manipulation, "The website is specialized in restaurant reviews," and for experience manipulation, "The website has several years of experience in what they do."

Perceived information-task-fit was measured with three items adopted from Dedeke (2016). Intention to use was measured with three items adapted from Ayeh, Au, and Law (2013): "I would intend to search for restaurants and evaluate them through this website," "I would not hesitate to search for restaurants and evaluate them through this website," and "I would be very likely to search for restaurants and evaluate them through this website." Perceived platform attractiveness was included as a covariate to eliminate the effect of any visual and aesthetic appeal that could be derived from the color and/or picture differences between generalist and specialist websites. Three of the items that were deployed were adapted from Harris and Goode (2010): "The website is visually attractive," "The website is aesthetically appealing," and "I like the way the website looks." A five-point Likert scale (1 = strongly disagree, 5 = strongly agree) was used to measure items of user perceptions and intention to use.

3.4 Results

3.4.1 Demographic profile

There was a close to even distribution of male and female participants (49.4% and 50.6%, respectively). Most participants were in the 30–39 age group (34.1%), married (49.2%), had a

bachelor's degree (41.6%), and an annual household income of US$25.000–$50.000 (28.2%).

Table 3.1 illustrates the demographic characteristics of the study participants.

Table 3.1 Demographic profile of the participants of the first empirical study

		Frequency	Percentage
Gender	Male	202	49.4
	Female	207	50.6
Age	Under 20	6	1.46
	20–29	118	28.71
	30–39	140	34.06
	40–49	69	16.79
	50–59	41	9.98
	60 or more	36	8.76
Education	Elementary school	1	0.24
	High school	81	19.71
	Associate's degree	83	20.19
	Bachelor's degree	171	41.61
	Master's degree	54	13.14
	Doctorate	19	4.62
Marital status	Single	186	45.26
	Married	202	49.15
	Other	20	4.87
Annual household income (in USS)	25,000 or less	44	10.71
	25,001–50,000	124	30.17
	50,000–75,000	116	28.22
	75,001–100,000	62	15.09
	100,001–125,000	27	6.57
	125,001–150,000	15	3.65
	150,001–175,000	9	2.19
	175,001–200,000	4	0.97
	200,001 or more	9	2.19

3.4.2 Manipulation check

In terms of perceived sense of power, the empowered (M = 2.78, SD = 1.04) scored significantly higher (t = 4.75, p<0.01) than those in a powerless condition (M = 2.29, SD = 1.08). The participants exposed to an advertisement from experienced platforms rated significantly higher (t = 23.82, p<0.01, M = 4.10, SD = 0.74) on manipulation check questions about platform experience than those exposed to a low-experience platform advertisement (M = 1.96, SD = 1.06). The participants in specialist platform conditions rated significantly higher on specialization (t = 16.08, p<0.01, M = 4.20, SD = 0.72) than those in generalist platform conditions (M = 2.66, SD = 1.18). Clearly, all three manipulations were successful.

3.4.3 Perceived information-task-fit

To test H1, a three-way ANCOVA was performed on perceived information-task-fit with perceived attractiveness included as a covariate. Platform experience, platform specialization, user power, and their two-way and three-way interactions were included as independent variables. Table 3.2 lists the means and standard deviations for each condition, and Table 3.3 presents the ANCOVA results.

Table 3.2 Means and standard deviations of perceived information-task-fit

User Power	Experience	Specialization	Mean	SD	Frequency
Powerless	Low	Generalist	3.66	0.80	54
		Specialist	3.76	0.47	50
	High	Generalist	3.80	0.74	52
		Specialist	4.02	0.63	51
Powerful	Low	Generalist	3.34	0.86	53
		Specialist	4.02	0.64	51
	High	Generalist	3.87	0.67	49
		Specialist	3.96	0.80	51

Note: The covariates appearing in the model are evaluated using the following value: perceived attractiveness = 3.49.

Table 3.3 ANCOVA on perceived information-task-fit

Source	Type III SS	DF	MS	F	Partial Eta Squared
Intercept	229.357	1	229.357	565.051**	0.584
Test Effects					
User power (UP)	0.035	1	0.035	0.086	0.000
Platform experience (PE)	4.870	1	4.870	11.998**	0.029
Platform specialization (PS)	7.512	1	7.512	18.507**	0.044
UP × PE	0.034	1	0.034	0.084	0.000
UP × PS	1.271	1	1.271	3.131	0.008
PE × PS	1.420	1	1.420	3.499	0.009
UP × PE × PS	3.263	1	3.263	8.0385*	0.020
Covariates					
Perceived attractiveness	41.100	1	41.100	101.255**	0.201
Error	163.173	402	0.406		
Total	6160.667	411			

*Note: * p < 0.01, ** p < 0.001*

The main effects of platform experience ($F(1, 402) = 11.998$, $p < 0.001$) and platform specialization ($F(1, 402) = 18.507$, $p < 0.001$) were significant. The covariate perceived attractiveness also had a significant positive impact on perceived information-task-fit ($F(1, 402) = 101.255$, $p < 0.001$). Importantly, a significant three-way interaction effect among user power, platform experience, and platform specialization ($F(1, 402) = 8.039$, $p < 0.01$) was found. The dataset was then divided into two to acquire a stronger insight into the interaction effect. One sub-dataset included only participants in a powerful condition and the other sub-dataset included only those in a powerless condition. A two-way ANCOVA was conducted separately with perceived attractiveness as a covariate. A significant two-way interaction effect between platform experience and platform specialization ($F(1, 199) = 10.181$, $p < 0.01$) was found for the powerful (Figure 3.6). Specialization had a significant positive impact on perceived information-task-fit in low-experience conditions ($F(1, 199) = 26.372$, $p < 0.01$), whereas the effect of specialization was insignificant in high-experience conditions ($F(1, 199) = 0.338$, $p = 0.56$). The

two-way interaction between platform experience and platform specialization was not significant when participants were in a powerless condition ($F(1, 202) = 0.436$, $p = 0.51$). The impact of specialization on perceived information-task-fit was insignificant in low-experience conditions ($F(1, 202) = 0.904$, $p = 0.34$), and marginally significant in high-experience conditions ($F(1, 202) = 3.558$, $p = 0.06$). The findings support H1, thereby suggesting that user power moderates the moderation effect of platform experience on the relationship between platform specialization and perceived information-task-fit.
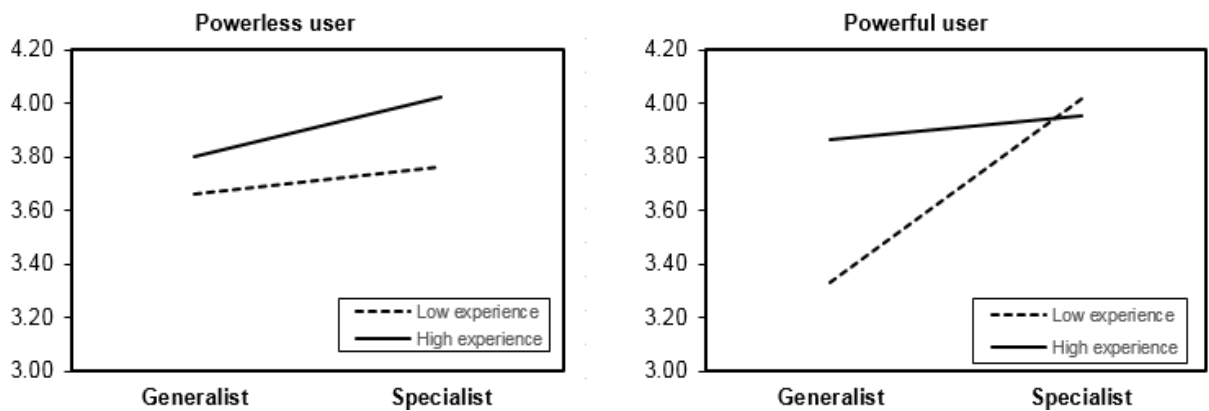
Figure 3.6. Three-way interaction effect among user power, platform experience, and platform specialization on perceived information-task-fit

3.4.4 Mediation analysis

A moderated moderated mediation analysis was conducted to test H2, following the guidelines by Hayes (2013; bootstrap = 5000, Model 11). Platform specialization was entered as the predictor variable (X), platform experience as the level 1 moderator (W), user power as the level 2 moderator (Z), intention to use as the outcome variable (Y), perceived information-task-fit as the mediator variable (M), and perceived attractiveness as the covariate. Consistent with the ANCOVA results, the three-way interaction was significant among user power, platform experience, and platform specialization on perceived information-task-fit ($b = -0.71$, $t(402) =$

−2.84, p < 0.01). Perceived information-task-fit was positively related with intention to use (b = 0.67, t(407) = 13.67, p < 0.001) (Table 3.4). Perceived information-task-fit mediated the effect of the thee-way interaction among user power, platform experience, and platform specialization on intention to use (index of moderated moderated mediation = −0.48, 95% CI = −0.85 to −0.15). That is, the effect of specialization on intention to use through perceived information-task-fit was significant only when users are powerful and platform experience is low (b = 0.46, 95% CI = 0.27 to 0.68). The effect was insignificant for the other three conditions (Table 3.5).

Table 3.4 Regression coefficients of moderated mediation analysis

	Perceived Information-task-fit		Intention to use	
	Coeff.	95% CI	Coeff.	95% CI
Test Effects				
Perceived information-task-fit			0.6723***	0 .5756, 0.7691
Platform specialization (PS)	0.1005	−0.1464, 0.3474	−0.0453	−0.1750. 0.0843
Platform experience (PE)	0.1390	−0.1044, 0.3825		
User power (UP)	−0.3263*	−0.5686, −0.0841		
UP × PE	0.1214	−0.2273, 0.4701		
UP × PS	0.5793**	0.2316, 0.9269		
PE × PS	0.3933	0.0456, 0.7409		
UP × PE × PS	−0.7135**	−1.2082, −0.2188		
Covariates				
Perceived attractiveness	0.3153***	0.2537, 0.3769	0.2189***	0.1493, 0.2886
Constant	2.5627***	2.2999, 2.8254	0.4652**	0.1291, 0.8013
	$R^2 = 0.29$		$R^2 = 0.49$	
	F(8,402) = 20.3**		F(3,407) = 1269.06***	

*Note: * p < 0.05, ** p < 0.01, *** p < 0.001*

Table 3.5 Conditional indirect effect of platform specialization on intention to use through perceived information-task-fit

User power	Platform experience	Effect	95% CI	Index	95% CI
Powerless	Low	0.0676	−0.0842, 0.2208	0.0816	−0.1378, 0.3178
	High	0.1492	−0.0102, 0.3229		
Powerful	Low	**0.4570**	0.2660, 0.6847	−0.3981	−0.6760, −0.1522
	High	0.0590	−0.1118, 0.2399		

Note: Index of moderated moderated mediation = −0.48, 95% CI = −0.85 to −0.15; Value in bold type denotes significant conditional indirect effect.

3.5 Chapter summary and contributions

The frequency and intensity of human–computer interactions is rapidly increasing in the contemporary era of digital transformation. Growing numbers of tourists rely on a variety of smart technologies before, during, and after taking a trip (Buhalis & Law, 2008; Neuhofer, Buhalis, & Ladkin, 2015). Social media platforms are increasingly essential to the facilitation of human–computer interactions (Chung et al., 2015). The platform through which a message is distributed can substantially influence how users perceive the message (Sundar & Nass, 2001). In this regard, social media platforms can be legitimately viewed as social actors. Humans interact with them according to social rules and schemes.

In supporting the CASA paradigm (Nass & Moon, 2000; Reeves & Nass, 1996), this study applied power theories and discussions that were previously used to explain human–human interactions to the tourism and hospitality context of social media sites, thereby encompassing human–technology interactions. In particular, the interaction effect between the experience and specialization of a platform (power of an influencer) and user power (power of the influenced) on information-task-fit and on behavioral intentions were tested.

The study findings offered meaningful theoretical contributions. First, they contributed to discourses about power by articulating two fundamental attributes of expert power and

explaining the psychological mechanism of the workings of the expert power of social media platforms. This research confirmed that expert power occurs when platforms seem to have experience or specialization. Tourist perceptions of information-task-fit about a social agent and behavioral intentions were influenced by these two attributes of expert power. This work may provide an example that can be applied to other power theories and constructs in the context of diverse media technologies. Further applications of power theories may potentially contribute to the media technology and tourism literatures.

Second, this study made an important contribution through the interaction effects that were shown to occur between the power of the influencer and the influenced. Many power discourses, including social power theory, view the power of the influenced as a barrier to influence. This study revealed a contrary relationship. A significant three-way interaction suggested that the psychological effect of platform expert power depends on both the influencer (online review platform) and the influenced (Hauser & Schwarz). The findings are consistent with the psychology literature confirming that individuals in a powerless state tend to be neutral (Kim, 2018; Magee et al., 2007). In other words, tourists' sense of powerlessness would generate similar perceptions about the quality of task-oriented information in expert and non-expert platforms. Tourists in a powerful psychological state, however, clearly notice the differences between the two platforms and act accordingly. In political science, the concept of power often has negative connotations (Haugaard, 2002) in that influence commonly occurs when the influenced are powerless. From a social media marketing perspective, however, power is not necessarily a malevolent presence. Interestingly, the power of the influenced became the facilitator of the influence. The findings showed that user power not only has positive effects on the perceptions of information-task-fit but also works in two opposite directions. Individual

reactions increase as a consequence of a sense of power so that user perceptions increase or decrease toward expert and non-expert platforms, respectively. The lowest perceptions apply to new and generalist platforms. These findings confirm Briñol et al.'s (2012) observation that individuals who are in a powerful state tend to make judgments based on first impressions.

Third, the findings suggested that the effect of expert power may have a threshold, particularly when more than one attribute of expert power is presented. The interaction between platform experience and platform specialization was found to be significant when users are powerful. This finding suggests that a single attribute of expert power may suffice to alter user perceptions toward a platform. The effect of the second attribute may be marginal. The findings are consistent with previous literature suggesting limits to the effects of experience (Ericsson, 2004), specialization (Gompers et al., 2009), and expertise (Zhang et al., 2016). There seems to be a threshold or point beyond which expert power increases no further. This study provided theoretical means to test the interaction effect between the attributes of other types of power.

Fourth, this study contributed to research about the quality of information by examining the mediating role of perceived information-task-fit between specialization and behavioral intention. The moderated moderated mediation model illustrated that perceived information-task-fit mediates the conditional effects of specialization to intention to use. As a sub-dimension of information quality, information-task-fit, which refers to the quality of task-oriented information, has been less widely tested as an antecedent of attitude and behaviors. The findings suggest that user perceptions toward a platform determine the extent of their intended use. When powerful individuals viewed a new generalist platform, they were less likely to proceed to use it compared with specialist and/or experienced platforms. Tourism and hospitality literature has suggested that platforms can influence tourist behaviors by using various informational cues (Choi et al.,

2018). Future researchers are encouraged to test the effects of perceived information-task-fit and user power when tourists are exposed to different informational cues. The cues may be presented by human and non-human social actors.

Fifth, the findings also revealed that perceived attractiveness has a significant positive effect on information-task-fit and intention to use. Previous studies confirmed the effect of perceived attractiveness on behavioral intentions (Harris & Goode, 2010), but its effect on information-task-fit was unanticipated and deserves future attention from researchers. In terms of interface design, future studies should articulate the distinctive effects of various aesthetic features of online review platforms.

In today's online market where review platforms must compete constantly with existing and new platforms, the study findings provided useful practical implications for platform developers, marketers, and tourists. First, the findings suggested that the effects of expert power depend on the power of users. Therefore, marketing strategies of expert versus non-expert platforms should focus on the relevant target audience. Prior research has suggested that power is strongly associated with structural factors in individual social environments (Liu & Mattila, 2017; Rucker, Galinsky, & Dubois, 2012). For instance, zip codes can be used as a proxy of socioeconomic status and power of individuals living in certain neighborhoods (Liu & Mattila, 2017). Platforms with low levels of expert power attributes (i.e., generalist platforms with no experience) should consider targeting areas with a low socioeconomic status. That is, they will lose competition to expert platforms in areas with high socioeconomic status. The latter should be the target of platforms with at least one attribute of expert power. In areas with low socioeconomic status, expert platforms lose their competitive advantage to non-expert counterparts.

The results also suggested that one attribute might be sufficient to be perceived as experts, and the effect of a second one could be trivial. Thus, scope-specialization strategies are recommended for newcomers with low experience to be perceived as experts. Specialist platforms with several years of experience may consider diversification strategies and extend their business scope to other sectors. Their experience may be sufficient to be positioned as experts and alter behavior.

CHAPTER 4 REWARD POWER OF SOCIAL MEDIA PLATFORMS: EMPIRICAL STUDY 2

Chapter 4 focused on the working mechanism of the reward power of social media platforms. Similar to the previous chapter, this chapter has five sections. The first section defined the constructs used and emphasized the attributes of reward power and the purpose of this study. The second section developed a conceptual model through the hypotheses on how the reward power of social media platforms works. The third section explained the methods employed in this study. The fourth section illustrated the results. The fifth section presented a summary of the findings and the contributions of this study.

4.1 Research background

Reward power has been previously used in various fields and settings, including social development (Abuhatoum, Howe, Della Porta, & DeHart, 2018; Della Porta, Howe, & Persram, 2019), criminology (Steiner, Hester, Makarios, & Travis, 2012), economic psychology (Drouvelis, Nosenzo, & Sefton, 2017), sports management (Rylander, 2016), education management (Bayrak, Altinkurt, & Yilmaz, 2014; Sakoda, Tanaka, & Fuchigami, 2004; Wagner & Hess, 1999), conflict management (Kozan, Ergin, & Varoglu, 2014), leadership and business management (Håvold & Håvold, 2019; Hoppner, Griffith, & Yeo, 2014; Raghuram & Fang, 2014; Salehi, Darestani, & Mofidi, 2011; Yahaya et al., 2011; Zhao, Huo, Flynn, & Yeung, 2008), organizational culture (Ebadisharafabad, Gharetapeh, Mousaloo, & Gharetapeh, 2016), business-to-business relationships (Chae, Choi, & Hur, 2017; Clauss & Bouncken, 2019; Harness, Ranaweera, Karjaluoto, & Jayawardhena, 2018; Reimann, Shen, & Kaufmann, 2016; Reimann, Shen, & Kaufmann, 2017), and business ethics (Reiley & Jacobs, 2016). No study in

tourism and hospitality has exclusively focused on reward power directly. However, as Church and Coles (2007, p. xii) stated, "power does feature widely in the tourism research agenda, albeit too often in indirect or uncertain ways." Similarly, reward power features in the tourism field in indirect ways.

French and Raven (1959, p. 263) defined reward power as "power whose basis is the ability to reward." Thus, those who promise rewards aim to influence the behavioral choices of others. Specifically, reward power can be defined as the ability to influence choices by promising rewards and benefits (French & Raven, 1959). The question then becomes, "What are the most salient benefits customers look for when using social media platforms?" According to O'Connor (2003), the most salient benefit tourists consider when using platforms is saving money. Then, the strongest rewards companies can offer is to promise customers that they will get *the best price* available anywhere. In other words, companies may provide a best price guarantee as a fundamental source of reward power. This approach is a popular strategy adopted by many tourism and hospitality companies (e.g., Hyatt) as well as social media platforms (e.g., Hotels.com).

Another increasingly popular strategy brought about by Web 2.0 technologies is the provision of available prices across different websites. For example, TripAdvisor and Kayak employ a price comparison strategy to influence customers. Hyatt hotels utilize both best price guarantee and price comparison strategies to reemphasize the provision of best available price. Best price guarantee and price comparison (when it illustrates the lowest price) can be seen as two attributes of reward power. The question then becomes whether these two attributes interact with each other. Furthermore, power is predominantly seen as relational and its effect highly depends on the influenced party, as discussed in prior chapters (French & Raven, 1959; Hobbes,

1968). Similar to Empirical Study 1, an intriguing query then emerges as to whether an interaction exists between the two attributes of reward power (best price guarantee and price comparison) and user power.

The purpose of this empirical work is to examine the working mechanism of the reward power of social media platforms. Pricing literature was reviewed to understand the potential mediator of such a reward. Extensive review suggested that perceived value mediates the effect of reward power on behavioral intention.

4.2 Developing the conceptual model

4.2.1 Attributes of reward power

4.2.1.1 Effects of best price guarantee

As mentioned, this empirical work focused on the reward power of social media platforms as a way to influence tourist behavior. Some platforms promise a best price guarantee that rewards tourists with the best price deals to influence their behavior. Best price guarantee is a revenue management strategy that has been explored mainly in the tourism and hospitality field. Such guarantee assures potential customers that the proposed rate is the lowest available that a customer could get from any company, with the obvious exclusion of special discounted rates, such as company rates and group rates (Rohlfs & Kimes, 2007). In this regard, reward power of social media platforms can be operationally defined as ability to provide the lowest rate to tourists. Rohlfs and Kimes (2007) claimed that Hotels.com was one of the first platforms to introduce the best price guarantee strategy in the early 2000s. Its competitors, such as Expedia, Priceline, and Orbitz, promptly followed by introducing the same policy (Rohlfs & Kimes,

2007). Jiang and Erdem (2018) reviewed and synthesized four common features of the majority

of price guarantee policies suggested by Rohlfs and Kimes (2007):

> (1) guests must have a confirmed reservation from one of the
> hotel's booking channels (some hotels do not require this); (2)
> guests need to find a lower available rate ("lower rate") on another
> booking channel (except for an "opaque" or "last minute" channel)
> for the same accommodations (same hotel, same room type, same
> dates and length of stay, same number of guests, same advance
> purchase policies, and the same terms and conditions governing the
> room rate); (3) guests need to submit the claim form within 24 h of
> making the reservation; and (4) the BRG does not apply to
> "opaque" websites, hotel packages, or travel packages, nor to any
> discounted or negotiated rates (membership, group, or company
> rates). (Jiang & Erdem, 2018, pp. 428-429)

The strategy of promising best prices is not new in tourism and hospitality research.

However, its working mechanism as a power variable, such as its interaction with user power

and other attributes of reward power, has not been tested. Toh, Raven, and DeKay (2011)

emphasized that hotels must maintain the best price guarantee strategy to increase sales through

their websites. Sun, Law, and Tse (2015) showed that best rates are frequently promised in

diverse platforms but the policy is not necessarily followed. Similarly, Demirciftci, Cobanoglu,

Beldona, and Cummings (2010) suggested that despite their promise, hotel chains do not

necessarily offer the lowest prices. That is, many platforms offer the same or lower prices than hotel websites. Empirical analysis by Hui, Law, and Ye (2009) revealed that depending on the hotel's class, the lowest prices are available in different channels. In particular, for upscale and luxury hotels, the best rates are provided by local and travel agency websites. For mid-priced hotels, the lowest prices are available through national online travel agency websites. Jiang and Erdem (2018) suggested that hotels cannot keep their best price guarantee policies because some intermediaries leverage special company discounts and sell rooms for cheaper prices (O'Connor & Murphy, 2008). Carvell and Quan (2008) criticized current best price guarantee policies as ineffective and proposed a formula to optimize them.

Best price guarantee has been tested as an antecedent of price fairness, just price, reasonableness, acceptability, honesty, and behavioral intentions (Jiang & Erdem, 2018; Rohlfs & Kimes, 2007). Previous literature on best price guarantee has suggested that its main aim is to create value for customers and influence their booking (Carvell & Quan, 2008; O'Connor, 2003). As O'Connor (2003, p. 90) stated, good value "in consumer's mind translates into low prices." Similarly, Carvell and Quan (2008, p. 162) asserted that companies structure a best price guarantee to provide value for consumers. The aforementioned observations clearly illustrated that social media platforms with a best price guarantee will have a positive effect on perceived value.

Value has four dimensions: acquisition value, transaction value, in-use value, and redemption value (Grewal, Iyer, Krishnan, & Sharma, 2003). Acquisition value is defined as the customer's overall assessment of a product or a service according to what the individual receives compared to what he/she gives (Grewal et al., 2003). Hsiao and Chen (2017, p. 436) defined acquisition value as the "consumer's cognitive evaluation of the tradeoff between all 'get' and

'give' components in regards to the acquisition of a product." Clearly, such value is associated with the acquired product or service itself rather than a platform (Grewal et al., 2003). Perceived transaction value, however, is associated with the transaction itself. As Grewal, Monroe, and Krishnan (1998, p. 48) defined, perceived transaction value is "the perception of psychological satisfaction or pleasure obtained from taking advantage of the financial terms of the price deal." Conveniently, transaction value is applicable to social media platforms. In-use value and redemption value are associated with post-purchase/booking phase.

4.2.1.2 Moderating effect of price comparison

Some companies strengthen the effect of a best price guarantee by visualizing it in a more explicit way through a price comparison function. Customers can see that the best price guarantee is not just a promise by comparing the offered price to those in other platforms. The theoretical basis of price comparison lies in the literature on reference price, which is one of the most examined concepts in pricing research (Choi, Joe, & Mattila, 2018). According to adaptation-level theory (Helson, 1964), people judge stimuli according to adaptation levels. In pricing research, reference price denotes the adaptation levels and offered price represents the judged stimuli. If a newly encountered price is lower than a reference price, then the former will be favored (Monroe, 1990).

Various categorizations of reference prices exist (Bolton, Warlop, & Alba, 2003; Briesch, Krishnamurthi, Mazumdar, & Raj, 1997; Kalyanaram & Winer, 1995), but two research streams are widely popular: internal reference price and external reference price. The former is a memory-based price judgment. That is, customers judge the proposed price on the basis of their previous experience. To provide an example in tourism and hospitality, when booking a hotel, customers would judge the offered price according to the prices they remember from their

previous search. An external reference price, however, is a stimulus-based price judgment (Choi & Mattila, 2018). This judgment emerges when consumers rely on external environments, such as checking various prices for the same product on different distribution channels. Conveniently, the price comparison function of social media platforms fits into a stimulus-based or external reference price category. Such function informs the customers of the competitive prices available in external environments (i.e., in various platforms).

The effects of available reference price on perceived value has been tested and confirmed in various settings (Chung & Kim, 2016; Grewal et al., 1998). The resulting discussions provide a basis to suggest that the price comparison function (in which the offered price is lower than the reference prices) will have positive effects on perceived value. However, as Empirical Study 1 illustrated, a certain point seems to exist after which power might be ineffective. In this study, both best price guarantee and price comparison promise the same reward to consumers: they will get the lowest price deal available. Therefore, it can be suggested that when the best price comparison is present, the effect of best price guarantee on perceived transaction value will not be significant because the price comparison will be sufficient to raise the perceived value of the transaction.

4.2.2 Moderating role of user power

As discussed throughout this thesis, power is relational and a psychological state of power determines whether consumers will be influenced (Choi et al., 2016). As with Empirical Study 1, the power of consumers can be defined as "asymmetric control in relation to other people" (Liu & Mattila, 2017; Rucker et al., 2010). Following the previous steps, it is rational to suggest that powerful and powerless people will react differently to social media platforms with and without reward power. Specifically, the powerless tend to be more neutral in their judgments (Kim, 2018;

Magee et al., 2007). Therefore, for them, the values of platforms with and without reward will not differ substantially. Consequently, the interaction effect between price comparison and best price guarantee on perceived value will not occur because neither will significantly affect perceived value.

Powerful individuals, however, make judgments based on their first impressions (Briñol et al., 2012). Therefore, a consumer in a powerful psychological state will notice significant differences between social media platforms that possess or lack reward power. Price comparison and best price guarantee can individually affect perceived value. However, when one is present, the effect of the other will not be significant. Aforementioned discussions provide solid grounds to hypothesize a three-way interaction effect among user power, price comparison, and best price guarantee on perceived value.

H1. A significant three-way interaction exists among best price guarantee, price comparison, and user power on perceived transaction value.

H1a. A two-way interaction effect between best price guarantee and price comparison on perceived transaction value will be significant when users are in a powerful condition. Specifically, when users are powerful, the effect of best price guarantee on perceived information-task-fit will be higher in the absence of price comparison (compared with the presence of price comparison).

H1b. A two-way interaction effect between best price guarantee and price comparison on perceived transaction value will not be significant when users are in a powerless condition.

4.2.3 Mediating role of perceived transaction value

Studies showed that a negative relationship exists between price and perceived value (Dodds, Monroe, & Grewal, 1991). The mediation effect of perceived transaction value between the provision of low prices and behavioral intention has also been observed (Grewal et al., 1998). Thus, enough evidence is available to reasonably hypothesize the following mediation effect and conceptualize the working mechanism of the reward power of social media platforms (Figure 4.1).

H2. Perceived transaction value will mediate the effect of best price guarantee on intention to use.
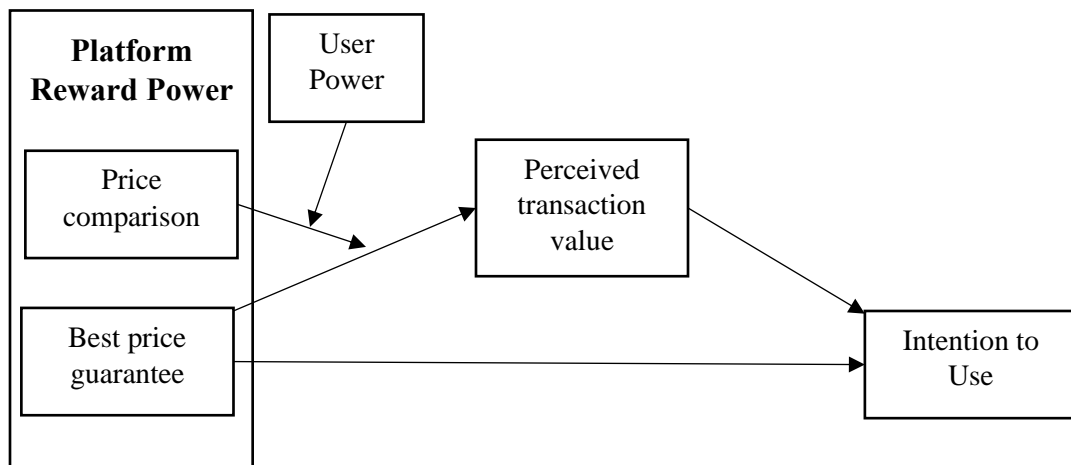
Figure 4.1. Working mechanism of the reward power of social media platforms

4.3 Methodology

Similar to the previous study in Chapter 3, an experimental design was adopted in this section. An experimental approach is appropriate for theory testing.

4.3.1 Main study design and participants

To test the effects of best price guarantee, price comparison, and user power, a 2 (best price guarantee: presence or absence) × 2 (price comparison: presence or absence) × 2 (user power: powerful or powerless) between-subjects experiment was conducted. Hence, this experiment contained eight conditions. A total of 292 participants living in US were recruited via MTurk for a compensation of US$0.50.

4.3.2 Procedure and stimuli

Procedure and setting were relevant to the previous study. In particular, the participants' sense of power (user power) was manipulated after they agreed to participate in the experiment. Liu and Mattila's (2017) two-step manipulation guideline was used in this experiment. Participants assigned to a powerful condition were asked to recall a specific incident in which they were powerful and then describe it. Those assigned to a powerless condition were asked to recall and describe an incident in which they were powerless. Subsequently, two given sets of words were provided to participants, and they were asked to create a grammatically correct sentence with these words. Depending on the condition, the provided words were related to either having power or being powerless. As discussed, the aforementioned two-step manipulation was supported and applied in psychology literature (Galinsky et al., 2003; Magee et al., 2007). Following the manipulations of their sense of power, the participants were asked to imagine another unrelated scenario:

> For your vacation in the early next month, you are planning to travel to Singapore. You will travel alone for one week. Yesterday, you browsed several websites to find out hotel information for your stay on the trip. One of the websites you used is called

"Travel Deals". On this website, you were looking for a 3-4 star

business hotel in the city center. Among many options, you gave a

serious thought to book a room in Jade Horizon Hotel. The room

price was US$130 per night, seemingly somewhat similar to the

prices of nearby hotels in this destination. However, you hesitated

to make a final decision and left the website without completing

your booking. Today, you received a promotional reminder e-mail

from Travel Deals to complete the booking. Please carefully read

the following e-mail message.

Note that Travel Deals and Jade Horizon Hotel are hypothetical names and do not exist in

real life. Participants were then randomly assigned to one of four website scenarios: 1) best price

guarantee absent and price comparison absent (Figure 4.2), 2) best price guarantee absent and

price comparison present (Figure 4.3), 3) best price guarantee present and price comparison

absent (Figure 4.4), and 4) best price guarantee present and price comparison present (Figure

4.5). The reminder e-mail was based on similar promotional emails of Hotels.com, TripAdvisor,

and Kayak.com. In all scenarios, the provided price was constant - US$130. This hypothetical

price was what participants saw in their previous search. Best price guarantee was manipulated

with a logo and a short text explaining what best price guarantee means. Price comparison was

manipulated by including prices of the same hotels in other reputable websites, particularly,

Booking.com, Hotels.com, and Expedia.com. In the pricing studies, the reference prices were

illustrated as higher than the proposed price. Note that in the hotel sector, several distribution

channels can usually offer the lowest price. Reference prices were either the same as the amount

suggested by "Travel Deals" (US$130) or higher. It is also worth noting that to increase realism,

the e-mail included several other choices other than Jade Horizon hotel. In particular, two hotels (slightly cheaper and slightly more expensive options) were available at the bottom of the promotional e-mail followed by "load more alternative". This was available in all four scenarios and thus should not interfere with the results.

Figure 4.2. Control group

Figure 4.3. Best price guarantee present, price comparison absent

Travel Deals

Still interested in Jade Horizon Hotel? Don't miss it!

For your stay in Singapore

Jade Horizon Hotel

USD 130
nightly price

- 0.6 miles to City center
- 15 miles to Airport
- Breakfast included

View Deal

Good 3.8/5 (221 Reviews)

We compare all available prices to offer you the best!

booking.com	hotels.com	expedia.com	View other
USD 130	USD 130	USD 133	price deals

Other great places nearby

Grand Tower Resort
- 0.2 miles away from Jade Horizon Hotel

Good 3.6/5 (336 Reviews)

USD 122
nightly price

FX Hotel & Suites
- 0.3 miles away from Jade Horizon Hotel

Very Good 4.1/5 (453 Reviews)

USD 137
nightly price

Load more alternatives

Figure 4.4. Best price guarantee absent, price comparison present

Figure 4.5. Best price guarantee present, price comparison present

4.3.3 Measures

Following Liu and Mattila's (2017) guidelines, one question asked participants about the extent to which they felt powerful (1 = not at all powerful, 5 = extremely powerful) to check whether their sense of power was manipulated successfully. To check the manipulation of best price guarantee, one question asked participants to indicate how strongly they disagree/agree with the following item: "Travel Deals has a BPG (Best Price Guarantee) policy." For the price comparison manipulation check, the participants were asked the item "Travel Deals shows and compares prices of different websites." A five-point Likert scale (1 = strongly disagree, 5 = strongly agree) was used for both manipulation check items.

Three five-point Likert scale (1 = strongly disagree, 5 = strongly agree) items were adapted from Al-Sabbahy, Ekinci, and Riley (2004) to measure perceived transaction value: "Reflecting on the price I would pay, I feel that I would get a good deal," "It adds to my pleasure knowing that I would get a good deal on the price," "Beyond saving money, there is a good feeling attached to making a good deal—as would be the case here." Similarly, a five-point Likert scale was deployed to measure intention to use with three items adapted from Ayeh et al. (2013): "I would intend to book a room in Jade Horizon hotel through Travel Deals," "I would not hesitate to book a room in Jade Horizon hotel through Travel Deals," and "I am very likely to book a room in Jade Horizon Hotel through Travel Deals." Two potential covariates were considered in this study. Similar to Experiment 1, the perceptions toward website attractiveness and the realism of scenarios were asked. Attractiveness was measured with three items adapted from Harris and Goode (2010): "The reminder e-mail is visually attractive," "The reminder e-mail is aesthetically appealing," and "I like the way the reminder e-mail looks." Realism was measured with three items adapted from Sparks and Browning (2011): "I think the reminder e-

mail was realistic," "I could imagine seeing this reminder e-mail in a real world," "For the purpose of this survey I was able to imagine using Travel Deals to book a hotel room." Attractiveness and realism were measured on a five-point Likert scale (1 = strongly disagree, 5 = strongly agree). All items were pretested before the conducted of the main study.

4.4 Results

4.4.1 Demographic profile

Table 4.1 presents the demographic profile of the respondents. Females (54.1 %) slightly outnumbered the males (45.9%). Most participants were in the age group 30–39 years (34.9%), had a bachelor's degree (44.5%), were married (51.7%), and had an annual household income of US$50,000–75.000 (27.1%).

Table 4.1 Demographic profile of the participants of the second empirical study

		Frequency	Percentage
Gender	Male	134	45.9
	Female	158	54.1
Age	Under 20	1	0.3
	20–29	74	25.3
	30–39	102	34.9
	40–49	56	19.2
	50–59	35	12.0
	60 or older	24	8.2
Education	Elementary school	1	0.3
	High school	52	17.8
	Associate's degree	53	18.2
	Bachelor's degree	130	44.5
	Master's degree	45	15.4
	Doctorate	11	3.8
Marital status	Single	132	45.2

	Married	151	51.7
	Other	9	3.1
Annual household income (in US$)	25,000 or less	36	12.3
	25,001–50,000	72	24.7
	50,000–75,000	79	27.1
	75,001–100,000	47	16.1
	100,001–125,000	28	9.6
	125,001–150,000	14	4.8
	150,001–175,000	10	3.4
	175,001–200,000	2	0.7
	200,001 or more	4	1.4

4.4.2 Manipulation check

In terms of perceived sense of power, those in a powerful condition (M = 2.79, SD = 1.03) scored significantly higher (t = 4.12, p<0.01) than those in a powerless one (M = 2.27, SD = 1.13). Participants exposed to a reminder e-mail with a best price guarantee rated significantly higher (t = 11.06, p<0.01, M = 4.30, SD = 0.70) on relevant manipulation check questions than those exposed to a reminder e-mail without such policy (M = 3.19, SD = 0.98). Participants exposed to an e-mail with a price comparison rated significantly higher on the relevant manipulation check question (t = 4.96, p<0.01, M = 4.07, SD = 0.83) than those who saw an email without a price comparison (M = 3.45, SD = 1.27). Clearly, all manipulations were successful.

4.4.3 Perceived transaction value

A three-way ANCOVA was performed on perceived transaction value to test H1, with perceived attractiveness and perceived realism included as covariates. Best price guarantee, price comparison, user power, and their two-way and three-way interactions were included as

independent variables. Table 4.2 presents the means and standard deviations for each condition by accounting for the effect of covariates. Table 4.3 lists the ANCOVA results.

Table 4.2 Means and standard deviation of transaction value

User power	Best price guarantee	Price comparison	Mean	SD
Powerless	Absent	Absent	3.80	0.631
		Present	3.77	0.617
	Present	Absent	3.88	0.954
		Present	3.81	0.669
Powerful	Absent	Absent	3.53	0.825
		Present	3.95	0.596
	Present	Absent	3.96	0.587
		Present	3.80	0.696

Note: Mean values account for covariates appearing in the model which are evaluated using the following values: attractiveness = 3.70; realism = 4.15

Table 4.3 ANCOVA on transaction value

Source	Type III SS	DF	MS	F	Partial Eta Squared
Intercept	8.670	1	8.670	26.391**	0.086
Test Effects					
User power (UP)	0.155	1	0.155	0.471	0.002
Best price guarantee (BPG)	0.176	1	0.176	0.535	0.002
Platform comparison (PC)	0.587	1	0.587	1.786	0.006
UP × BPG	0.479	1	0.479	1.459	0.005
UP × PC	0.199	1	0.199	0.604	0.002
BPG × PC	1.743	1	1.743	5.305*	0.018
UP × BPG × PC	1.354	1	1.354	4.123*	0.014
Covariates					
Perceived attractiveness	11.924	1	11.924	36.293**	0.114
Perceived realism	14.089	1	14.089	42.885**	0.132
Error	92.648	282	0.329		
Total	4394.111	292			

*Note: * $p < 0.05$, ** $p < 0.001$*

A significant two-way interaction was found between price comparison and best price guarantee ($F(1, 282) = 5.305$, $p < 0.05$). Both covariates of perceived attractiveness ($F(1, 282) = 11.924$, $p < 0.001$) and perceived realism ($F(1, 282) = 14.089$, $p < 0.001$) had a significant

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positive impact on perceived transaction value. Notably, a significant three-way interaction effect was found among user power, best price guarantee, and price comparison ($F_{(1, 282)}$ = 4.123, $p < 0.05$).

Similar to Empirical Study 1, the dataset was then divided into two groups, namely, those in powerful and powerless conditions, to gain a stronger insight into the interaction effect. Subsequently, a two-way ANCOVA was conducted for each group. Perceived attractiveness and perceived realism were used as covariates. A significant two-way interaction effect was found between best price guarantee and price comparison ($F_{(1, 139)}$ = 8.199, $p < 0.01$) in the dataset with users in a powerful condition (Figure 4.6). Best price guarantee had a significant positive impact on perceived transaction value in the condition with the absence of price comparison ($F_{(1, 139)}$ = 8.721, $p < 0.01$), whereas the effect of best price guarantee was not statistically significant when price comparison was present ($F_{(1, 139)}$ = 1.222, $p = 0.27$).

Different results were obtained for the participants in a powerless condition. That is, the two-way interaction between best price guarantee and price comparison was not statistically significant ($F_{(1, 141)}$ = 0.048, $p = 0.83$). The impact of best price guarantee on perceived transaction value was not statistically significant in both the absence ($F_{(1, 141)}$ = 0.045, $p = 0.83$) and the presence of price comparison ($F_{(1, 141)}$ = 0.262, $p = 0.61$). Thus, the findings supported H1, suggesting that user power moderates the moderation effect of price comparison on the relationship between best price guarantee and transaction value.
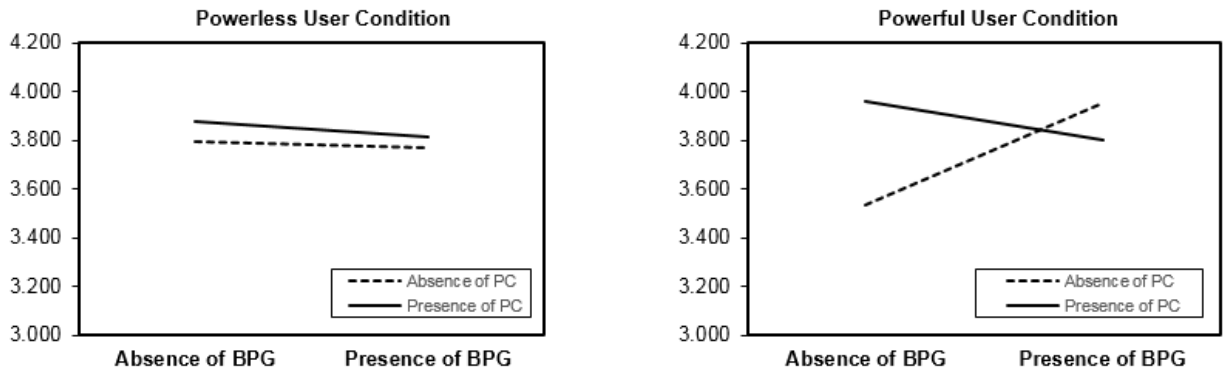
Figure 4.6. Three-way interaction effect among user power, price comparison, and best price guarantee on perceived transaction value

4.4.5 Mediation analysis

Following Hayes's (2013; bootstrap = 5000, Model 11) guidelines, a moderated moderated mediation analysis was performed to test H2. Best price guarantee was entered as the predictor variable (X), price comparison as the level 1 moderator (W), user power as the level 2 moderator (Z), intention to use as the outcome variable (Y), perceived transaction value as the mediator variable (M), and perceived attractiveness and perceived realism as the covariates. The results were consistent with the ANOVA outcomes. A significant two-way interaction effect between best price guarantee and user power (b = 0.44, t(282) = 2.30, p < 0.05) and a significant three-way interaction effect among user power, price comparison, and best price guarantee (b = −0.55, t(282) = −2.03, p < 0.05) on perceived transaction value were found. Perceived transaction value was positively related with intention to use (b = 0.63, t(287) = 9.91, p < 0.001) (Table 4.4). The effect of the three-way interaction among user power, price comparison, and best price guarantee on intention to use was mediated by perceived transaction value (index of moderated moderated mediation = −0.34, 95% CI = −0.75 to −0.01). Specifically, the effect of best price guarantee on intention to use through perceived transaction value was significant only in one condition: when

users are powerful and price comparison is absent (b = 0.27, 95% CI = 0.07 to 0.51). In the other

three conditions, the effect was not statistically significant (Table 4.5).

Table 4.4 Regression coefficients of moderated mediation analysis

	Perceived transaction value		Intention to use	
	Coeff.	95% CI	Coeff.	95% CI
Test Effects				
Perceived transaction value			0.6295***	0 .5045, 0.7545
Best price guarantee (BPG))	−0.0135	−0.2747, 0.2478	0.1477*	0.0030. 0.2924
Price comparison (PC	0.0563	−0.2118, 0.3245		
User power (UP)	−0.3165*	−0.5830, −0.0500		
UP × BPG	0.4351*	0.0635, 0.8067		
UP × PC	0.3781	−0.0026, 0.7588		
BPG × PC	−0.0371	−0.4098, 0.3356		
UP × BPG × PC	−0.5452*	−1.0737, −0.0166		
Covariates				
Perceived attractiveness	0.2946***	0.1983, 0.3908	0.2030***	0.0925, 0.3134
Perceived realism	0.3769***	0.2636, 0.4902	−0.0097	−0.1403, 0.1209
Constant	1.1696***	0.6904, 1.6488	0.2906	−0.2080, 0.7891
	R² = 0.37		R² = 0.44	
	F(9,282) = 18.27***		F(4,287) = 56.48***	

*Note: * p < 0.05, *** p < 0.001*

Table 4.5 Conditional indirect effect of best price guarantee on intention to use through
perceived transaction value

User power	Price comparison	Effect	95% CI	Index	95% CI
Powerless	Absent	−0.0085	−0.1440, 0.1184	−0.0233	−0.2331, 0.2121
	Present	−0.0318	−0.1957, 0.1591		
Powerful	Absent	**0.2654**	0.0657, 0.5073	−0.3665	−0.6688, −0.1082
	Present	−0.1011	−0.2623, 0.0413		

Note: Index of moderated moderated mediation = −0.3432, 95% CI = −0.7472 to −0.0148
Significant conditional indirect effects are presented in bold type.

4.5 Chapter summary and contributions

With the increasing competition between various social media platforms, the provision of low prices seems to be a dominant strategy to influence tourists. By rewarding customers with the lowest price, social media platforms try to influence their purchase behavior. One of the longstanding methods is to guarantee the best price. Another emerging method is to provide price comparison functions, a strategy mainly adopted by hotels to reassure customers that they are getting the best price. To the author's best knowledge, the theoretical underpinnings of a price comparison function has not been tested in tourism and hospitality. Although several studies have been conducted on best price guarantee, no investigation has tested the interaction effect of best price guarantee, price comparison, and user power.

The study findings offered meaningful theoretical contributions. First, the findings contributed to discourses about power. This study articulated the two attributes of reward power and explained the psychological working mechanism when applied to social media platforms. It showed that tourist perceptions of transaction value about a social agent and behavioral intentions were influenced by best price guarantee and price comparison. In addition to Empirical Study 1, this study extended an example that could be applied to other power theories and constructs in the social media context. The findings also proposed that the attributes of reward power tested in this study or similar technical features could be extended to diverse media technologies.

Second, this study contributed to theory extension by revealing the interaction effects that occur between the power of the influencer (social media platform) and the influenced (user). Similar to Empirical Study 1, this study argued against the traditional view that the power of the influenced is a barrier to influence. A contrary relationship was revealed. The psychological

effect of reward power depends on both the influencer (social media platform) and the influenced (user) such that the latter supports the influence. In line with psychology literature, this work suggested that powerless individuals tend to be neutral (Kim, 2018; Magee et al., 2007). In particular, tourists' psychological state of powerlessness generate similar perceptions about the transaction value of social media platforms with and without reward power. However, those in a powerful state clearly notice the differences and act accordingly. As mentioned, the concept of power in political science is often negative (Haugaard, 2002). Influence commonly occurs when the influenced are powerless. From a social media marketing perspective, however, the power of the influenced facilitated the influence. User power works in two opposite directions. Sense of power increases or decreases user perceptions toward the transaction value of platforms with and without reward power, respectively. Similar to the outcomes in Empirical Study 1, these findings confirmed Briñol et al.'s (2012) argument that individuals in a powerful state make judgments based on first impressions.

Third, similar to the effect of expert power, this study's finding indicated that reward power also has a threshold. The interaction between best price guarantee and price comparison was significant when users are in a powerful state. A single attribute of reward power may be sufficient to alter the value perceptions of users toward a platform. A second attribute may have marginal or no effect, as was the case in this study.

Fourth, this study contributed to testing the mediating role of perceived transaction value between best price guarantee and behavioral intention. An analysis of the moderated moderated mediation model confirmed that perceived transaction value mediates the conditional effects of best price guarantee to intention to use. Although many studies have suggested such a relationship, transaction value was surprisingly absent in previous models. The findings showed

that rewarding pricing strategies by platforms, particularly best price guarantee, affects users' intention to use because of the transaction value. When powerful individuals view a platform with best price guarantee, they are less likely to use it compared with platforms that do not promise the best price. Future research may test the effects of perceived transaction value and user power when different pricing strategies are adopted.

Fifth, this work revealed that perceived attractiveness and perceived realism have significant positive effects on perceived transaction value. Such effects were not anticipated and provided directions for future research.

The findings provide important practical implications for practitioners. In particular, pricing strategies should be chosen according to the targeted audience. Not all platforms or hoteliers have the means to provide lowest prices. In such instances, it is reasonable to target potential customers from less powerful neighborhoods, as controversial as it may sound. As discussed, zip codes can be used for such practices because in such communities, platforms that have reward power lose their competitive advantage. For powerless individuals, the value of making a transaction from platforms with reward power (best price guarantee and/or price comparison) and without it is not significantly different. Therefore, platforms that do not guarantee the best price can easily compete with those who guarantee it in such neighborhoods.

Conversely, social media platforms (e.g., Hotels.com) that guarantee the best price should target neighborhoods with a powerful background. Powerful people can distinguish the value of transactions through such platforms and give preference to them rather than to those that do not provide lowest prices. Therefore, platforms with a best price guarantee will have a competitive advantage over those without it in communities with powerful individuals.

Finally, providing a price comparison is unnecessary and does not increase the effect of a price guarantee. Many hotels, however, employ both features. Analysis revealed that the value of booking through a platform that has the best price guarantee without a price comparison is not higher than that of booking through a platform that has both best price guarantee and price comparison. An intriguing future RQ relates to the effect of price comparison when reference prices are lower. This condition, however, cannot be interpreted as reward power, given that it would not promise the lowest price.

CHAPTER 5 DISCUSSION

To date, studies on social media in hospitality and tourism have focused excessively on discussing and articulating the influential power of social media (e.g., Filieri, 2016; Hudson, Roth, Madden, & Hudson, 2015; Tsao et al., 2015). To the best of the author's knowledge, the present study is the first attempt to connect power theories and social media and provide theoretical grounds that conceptualize social media power and explain its working mechanisms.

5.1 Theoretical contributions

The aim of this thesis was to conceptualize and test social media power in tourism and hospitality. To do so, conceptual and empirical studies were conducted in Chapters 2 to 4. The end of each chapter summarized its corresponding contribution. This chapter is particularly devoted to addressing how this thesis responded to the RQs raised in Chapter 1.

5.1.1 Answering Research Question 1

The literature review section (Chapter 2) of this thesis synthesized the groundwork of power and media discourses to conceptualize what social media power is. The power of social media extends beyond being influential and involves the ability to provide behavioral choices. The hierarchical model of social media power provides theoretical guidelines for future studies on power dynamics in hospitality and tourism by integrating the role and power of social media in shaping tourist behaviors. The first RQ asked: **"What is social media power?"** The following are its constituents and answers.

RQ1a. How can social media power be defined?

Within the first research question, first objective of this thesis was to provide the definition of social media power for tourism and hospitality. Social media power is hierarchical and has two levels. Each level represents different aspects of social media power. One aspect involves 1) the ability of social media platforms to influence choices. At the upper level, social media power is defined as 2) the ability of social media to provide choices.

RQ1b. What are the sources of social media power?

Second objective was to explain the sources of social media power. Each level of social media power has its own sources. Regarding the influential ability of social media, the sources of social power theory, more specifically, expert power, reward power, coercive power, socialized legitimate power, referent power, and framing power, constitute the sources of social media power. For the upper level of the power pyramid, provisional ability, authority, and control power constitute the sources of social media power.

RQ1c. What platform attributes generate social media power?

Third objective was to examine the attributes that generate social media power. A review of social media literature shows that several attributes can generate social media power. These attributes can be referred to as "kinetic power" because they trigger the potential sources. Specifically, for each source of power, different and diverse attributes exist. For example, the volume feature of social media platforms makes its power socialized and triggers legitimate power. The technological mechanisms are dynamic. Therefore, some attributes are likely to change over time. However, other attributes, such as experience or specialization, are more fundamental.

RQ1d. What are the effects of social media power on tourists?

Fourth objective was to explain the effect of social media power on tourist perceptions and behavior. The answer to this question lies in the very definition of social media power. Fundamental power discourses revealed that social media power is mainly used to influence tourist behavior. Diverse attributes that generate influence on tourist behavior have been tested but without exploring the theoretical underpinnings of why and how. This observation reemphasizes the earlier quote that "power does feature widely in the tourism research agenda, albeit too often in indirect or uncertain ways" (Church & Coles, 2007, p. xii). Social media power also features widely in the tourism and hospitality field, but is only a part of it. Researchers frequently test behavioral intention or (at best) the behavior of tourists as dependent variables. The question then becomes about the provisional ability of power, an aspect Bachrach and Baratz (1962) referred to as the second or unseen face of power, and which Clegg and Haugaard (2009) described as influence over non-decision making or non-behavior. In particular, scholars (e.g., Clegg, 1989) have questioned the possibility of proving the existence of the second face of power at all, given that it can never be seen just as non-behavior that cannot be measured. The conceptual section of this thesis takes a step toward explaining the working mechanism of the provisional power of social media platforms, but methodological studies to measure such power remain lacking.

5.1.2 Answering Research Question 2

The empirical part of this thesis focused on the working mechanisms of the seen face of social media power, that is, the ability to influence choices. In particular, two studies were conducted to reveal the working mechanisms of the expert power (Chapter 3) and reward power (Chapter 4) of social media platform. The first empirical study aimed to answer the RQ about the working mechanism of the expert power of social media platform: **RQ2. What is the working**

mechanism of the expert power of social media? The sub-question can be revisited and answered as follows:

RQ2a. What platform attributes of social media generate expert power?

Within the second research question, first objective of this thesis was to articulate the attributes that generate expert power of social media platforms. As discussed, diverse approaches can be taken to articulate expert power. Any attribute that allows a platform to be perceived as more expert than others generates expert power. Deliberate practice theory suggests two fundamental attributes that are likely not temporal: experience and specialization. In particular, social media platforms with experience or with specialization can be seen as having superior expertise.

RQ2b. Does expert power of social media affect tourists' behavioral intentions?

Second objective was to test the effect of expert power of social media platforms on tourists' behavioral intention. The short answer to the aforementioned question is "Yes." This thesis particularly focused on the conditional effect of specialization. Empirical results revealed that specialization has an indirect conditional effect on behavioral intention.

RQ2c. What mediates the effect of the expert power of social media on tourists' behavioral intentions?

Third objective was to articulate and test what mediates the effect of expert power of social media on tourists' behavioral intention. Social power theory suggests that experts are favored because they fit to provide recommendations. This thesis conceptualized the aforementioned as "information-task-fit," which is the quality of the task-oriented information. The findings showed that perceived information-task-fit mediates the conditional effect of specialization on behavioral intention. This finding extends social power theory by providing

empirical evidence to understand why experts are more influential. This result is also intriguing in that just like human actors, social media platforms are seen experts or non-experts.

RQ2d. Is there an interaction effect between the expert power of social media (i.e., the influencer) and the power of tourists (i.e., the influenced) in affecting tourist perceptions and behavioral intentions?

Fourth objective was to test an interaction effect between the expert power of social media and the power of tourists in affecting tourist perceptions. The short answer to the aforementioned question is "Yes, there is." A three-way interaction was found. Specifically, what this thesis defined as "user power" moderated the moderation effect of platform experience on the relationship between platform specialization and perceived information-task-fit. This effect was then carried out to behavioral intention through information-task-fit. The power of the influenced determines whether the expert power of the influencer is influential. Powerless people are not influenced due to their neutral mindsets toward expert and non-expert platforms. However, powerful people judge expert and non-expert platforms differently.

5.1.3 Answering Research Question 3

The second empirical study asked similar RQs as the first but focused on the working mechanism of reward power: **RQ3. What is the working mechanism of the reward power of social media?** The essential constituents of this RQ are answered below.

RQ3a. What attributes of social media generate reward power?

Within the third research question, first objective of this thesis was to articulate the attributes that generate reward power of social media platforms. Similar to other sources of power, the attributes of reward power vary. For example, tourists can be promised "rewarding" experiences by illustrating high average ratings. The effect of voting feature on tourist

experience has been tested in previous literature. However, as O'Connor (2003) claimed, the main reason tourists book online is to save money. "No other benefit—whether saving time, getting bonus loyalty-club points, more control, or obtaining better information—came close to this level of response" (O'Connor, 2003, p. 89). The most salient reward power attribute then becomes the ability to provide the lowest rate available. The most popular strategy in this context is to provide a "best price guarantee." An emerging feature is the price comparison function. So long as reference price is higher or equal to the proposed price, the former also serves as a fundamental attribute of reward power.

RQ3b. Does the reward power of social media affect tourists' behavioral intentions?

Second objective was to test the effect of reward power of social media platforms on tourists' behavioral intention, This thesis provided empirical evidence that the best price guarantee affects the intention to use the social media platform. The conditional and indirect effects are discussed as follows.

RQ3c. What mediates the effect of the reward power of social media on tourist intention to behave?

Third objective was to articulate and test what mediates the effect of reward power of social media on tourists' behavioral intention. Surprisingly, although many researchers suggested value to be the main reason tourists favor best price guarantee, it has never been tested as a mediator. Grounded on pricing literature, this study hypothesized and confirmed that perceived value mediates the effect of the reward power of social media platforms on intention to use. Notably, in the context of social media platforms, the transaction dimension of value is most relevant. To conclude, perceived transaction value mediates the conditional effect of reward power on behavioral intention.

RQ3d. Is there an interaction effect between the reward power of social media (i.e., the influencer) and the power of tourist (i.e., the influenced) in affecting tourist perceptions and behavioral intentions?

Fourth objective was to test an interaction effect between the reward power of social media and the power of tourists in affecting tourist perceptions. A significant three-way interaction provided a positive response to this question. The interaction effect interestingly worked in a similar way as in Empirical Study 1. In simple terms, powerful people are influenced by the reward power of social media platforms while powerless individuals are not. However, the three-way interaction involves other suggestions. This thesis provided evidence that reward power also seems to have a threshold. Having an additional attribute of reward power (i.e., price comparison) does not necessarily increase user perception toward the value of social media platforms that already have an attribute of reward power (i.e., best price guarantee).

Notably, the answers to the second and third research questions complement those to the first research question. That is, while the conceptual study showed what social media power is and what it does, the empirical studies showed the unique working mechanism of how its specific power sources work.

5.2 Practical contributions

Similar to theoretical contributions, the practical contributions of the conceptual study (Chapter 2) as well as the first (Chapter 3) and second (Chapter 4) empirical studies are unique on their own and were discussed in detail, in the final section of the relevant chapter. A brief summary can be made in this section by revisiting the three RQs.

The answer to the first RQ illustrated that social media power is not only about influencing customers but also about providing them with choices. For the tourism and hospitality industry, a call to revisit their long-term strategies is crucial. Using diverse social media platforms is important to reach out and influence customers. However, the more companies rely on social media platforms for information or product distribution purposes, the more powerful the platforms become. Relying exclusively on social media platforms can be costly in the long term. In today's world, tourists are likely to use digital media more and more as providers of travel choices. As platforms become more powerful, ads and commission rates are like to increase. It is easier for bigger-scale companies (e.g., hotel chains) to develop their own media, and smaller-scale companies can unite their efforts to create alternative media for tourists' access. Governments can consider initiating destination-specific media to empower small-scale service providers and increase their revenues. Having such an alternative popular online medium that is run collectively by service providers seems to be the key in the fight for communication and distribution channels. In terms of short-term strategies, sources and attributes presented at the second level of the social media power pyramid serve as a summary of the literature on how service providers can influence tourists (Section 2.4).

The answer to the second RQ also illustrated valuable implications for tourism and hospitality practitioners. Practitioners should provide more attention to performing social media marketing strategies either through experienced or specialized social media platforms. Those who use non-expert platforms may consider targeting users from non-powerful social backgrounds. Section 3.5 discussed the implications for new and experienced social media platforms.

The answer to the third RQ provided equally valuable implications for tourism and hospitality practitioners. The emphasis this time was on the pricing strategies employed by social media platforms and hotel companies as tools to reward tourists in their hotel choices. Best price guarantee was proven to be a valuable strategy. However, it does not impact all tourists in a similar fashion. Specifically, hotels and social media platforms that can provide the lowest prices should give further emphasize targeting powerful individuals in relevant neighborhoods. Providing price comparison in addition to best price guarantee is not necessary. Section 4.5 presented a discussion of the detailed implications for social media platforms with and without best price guarantee and price comparison functions.

CHAPTER 6 CONCLUSIONS AND OPPORTUNITIES FOR FUTURE RESEARCH

This chapter has two sections. In the first section, the main findings of the conceptual study were summarized. Emphasis was then given to highlight the consistent and unique findings of the two empirical studies to reveal patterns of how social media power works. In the second section, several future RQs were introduced.

6.1 Summary of findings

The literature review in Chapter 2 went beyond descriptive discussions. First, various definitions of social media were reviewed, and their shortcomings and inaccuracies were critically discussed to synthesize a more accurate definition that could be used as a reference point. Many platforms fit under this definition of social media. The evolutions of different social media platforms and their implications for tourism and hospitality were also discussed.

Groundworks of power discourses were revisited and synthesized under the three levels of power. The hierarchical structure of power was discussed by embedding diverse theorizations and approaches. This conceptualization of power could be used as a reference point in power discourses. Media discourses were also reviewed and embedded into the hierarchical structure of power. The proposed hierarchical social media power models articulated the definitions, sources, and attributes of power, thereby addressing the first RQ. In line with answering important RQs, the discussions also introduced a set of questions worth considering. The discussions in this thesis revealed that technological changes (e.g., ubiquitous computing) facilitate the concentration of power in certain platforms.

Two empirical studies were conducted to reveal the working mechanisms of expert power and reward power, thereby addressing the second and third RQs. Their unique contribution to

theory and practice were discussed in relevant chapters. Drawing upon these findings could reveal the common patterns of social media power.

The findings revealed that the working mechanism of each source of power is unique in terms of their attributes and mediators. For expert power, information-task-fit implied in social power theory serves as the mediator of influence. For reward power in terms of providing lowest price, transaction value becomes the mediator of the influence of social media platforms. The conceptual models pave a way for conducting further studies on other sources of social media power. It is intriguing to learn what constructs mediate the effects of coercive power, socialized legitimate power, referent power, and framing power of social media platforms. The examples of attributes that generate relevant power were shown.

Furthermore, the working mechanism of social media power seems unique in terms of its relational nature. Both empirical studies found an interaction between the power of a social media platform and the power of the user, which respectively denote the influencer and influenced. In both instances, the power of the influencer became the facilitator of influence. The findings open a promising line of discussion about how empowering society can benefit those who currently wield power. Powerful individuals within the society may accept the influence of other powerful actors who are in charge (e.g., policymakers, major corporations, and community leaders) when they can provide resolution about certain tasks. The present study offered some theoretical means that could lead to a call for further research to test the social relations between tourism stakeholders in settings where power is not abused by the elite. Notably, when power is abused and has negative connotations, empowering society may be seen as a barrier to influence. For example, Macleod (2010) argued that, due to their lack of power, African ethnic groups in

the Dominican Republic have largely been ignored by government officials when promoting heritage.

Finally, another consistency was found on the interaction effect between two power attributes of social media (influencer). When users are powerful, specialization interacted with experience, and best price guarantee interacted with price comparison. French and Raven (1959, p. 268) argued "[F]or all five types, the stronger the basis of power the greater the power." According to two of the tested sources, this thesis is inclined to reject French and Raven's argument on power being ever-increasing with more basis. If the mediator of influence is the same (e.g., information-task-fit for attributes of expert power), then more attributes will not necessarily generate more power. A certain threshold should exist for each source of power that can be mediated through a relevant construct.

6.3 Limitations and future research directions

This thesis aimed to bridge discourses of power and social media based on the CASA paradigm in tourism and hospitality. With multitudinous associated theories and perspectives, power is a critical discourse in the social sciences. This thesis introduced many research questions and directions, thereby contributing in its own right. Potential research directions were mentioned throughout the discussion. The main limitation of this work is its empirical focus on expert and reward power. Consistent findings, however, pave the way for future conceptualizations of other sources of power. Another limitation can be drawn from the diversity of social media platforms. Tentatively, experience, specialization, and ability to provide low prices can be applied to different platform categories. However, this possibility needs further confirmation. Finally, given that this research primarily concentrated on theory testing,

hypothetical scenarios were preferred to gain higher internal validity. Field experiments should help future studies to confirm the external validity of the findings.

This thesis provided several valuable future research directions. One critical question is "How social is the power of social media?" The idea of "you" becoming the person of the year has raised expectations toward the ability of social media to decentralize power. In this regard, the question to discuss is the extent to which social media power is held by society and/or those in charge of popular platforms (e.g., owners and chief executive officers). Chapter 2 provided ample evidence regarding the concentration of power in certain platforms.

Recent concerns regarding data privacy and security (e.g., Facebook and Cambridge Analytica scandal) have led many governments to be more critical toward access to social media data granted to third parties and develop new legislations to regulate user rights. The implications of new legislations in the power dynamics among stakeholders in hospitality and tourism raise many questions. For example, who will benefit from the ban on third parties' usage of open social media data for analytical purposes? Ironically, the assumption is that the ban can empower popular platforms even further by giving them exclusive rights to big data analytics. With big data analytics being one important research focus in the field, the new legislations are likely to affect academia as well. While the future of power dynamics remains unknown, power studies in tourism and hospitality must clearly consider the role of social media power in shaping stakeholder relations.

Another set of RQs is related to the interaction effect between the power of the influencer and of the influenced. Both empirical studies provided evidence confirming that power is relational. Contrary to common belief, the power of the influencer was found to be a facilitator rather than a barrier to influence. The question then focuses on the instances in which user power

will be a barrier. Powerful people are seemingly influenced because they see a benefit in it. For example, powerful people see higher value in best price guarantee compared to the powerless. However, what will happen if a platform promises best price guarantee but fails to deliver? Arguably, compared to the powerless, powerful people will have a more significantly negative reaction. Specifically, the power of the influencer may have a negative influence on the perceptions of powerful users.

Another set of RQs can be introduced with regard to the interaction effect between attributes of social media power. As discussed, findings provide ample evidence that the power attributes of the influencer interacts with one another. However, the attributes tested in this thesis pertained to the same source of power (i.e., expert or reward power). The question then becomes whether different sources of social media power (e.g., expert power and reward power) interact with one another. Such interaction does not occur because the mediators of influence are different for each source. Nevertheless, there must be a certain threshold to a power of a social agent.

To conclude, saying social media are powerful in tourism and hospitality is the top of an iceberg. This thesis aimed to be at the frontier in paving the groundwork for these discourses and providing foundations for further theorizations. Future studies may use this work as a reference point to conceptualize and test the attributes and working mechanisms of each source of power (coercive, legitimate, referent, and authority and control) in diverse settings, including social media.

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APPENDIX A. EXTRACT FROM THE QUESTIONNAIRE OF EMPIRICAL STUDY 1

Dear participants,

The purpose of this study is to understand customers' perception of an online review website.

If you choose to complete this survey we will be asking you to answer a series of questions requiring approximately 10 - 15 minutes.

To complete the survey, you must: be a native English speaker; use your desktop or laptop; be attentive at all times. There are attention check questions in the survey.

Failing to meet any of the conditions above will result in the rejection of payment.

Participation in this research is voluntary. By completing the survey you are providing your implied consent to participate in this investigation. There is no anticipated risk to you in participating in this research. Your identity is confidential and will not be known by any outside party. All identifiers will be kept strictly confidential and will be known only by the principal investigator, Fuad Mehraliyev. If you have questions or concerns please contact Fuad Mehraliyev (fuadmehraliyev@   ).

Thank you for helping us with this research project. Your input is invaluable and will certainly help us answer important research questions.

    o I agree to participate in this study
    o I decline to participate in this study.

Thank you for participating in the survey.

The following questions will ask you to **recall a specific incident** that has happened to you.

Please answer **as honest as possible**. Remember that there are **no right or wrong answers.**

Please recall a particular incident in which someone else had power over you.

By power, we mean a situation in which someone else had control over your ability to get something you wanted, or was in a position to evaluate you.

Imagine reliving that moment in which **you were powerless** and then describe in the box below, what happened then and how you felt.

¶

The following 2 questions will give you a set of words and ask you to make a grammatically correct sentence.

Please use the following words to make a grammatically correct sentence:
Obey, passive, plan

¶

Please use the following words to make a grammatically correct sentence:
 Janitor, comply, depart

¶

On the following scale, please indicate the extent to which you currently feel powerful.

	not at all powerful	somewhat powerful	powerful	very powerful	extremely powerful
I current feel:	○	○	○	○	○

Now, please imagine the following unrelated scenario:

You are currently **on a vacation** in a destination you do not have much information about. Dinner time is approaching and **you are thinking about where to eat**.

While you are browsing Facebook, you find **an advertisement by a review website specialized in restaurants with 10 years of experience**. The website has reviews about **different types of food and restaurants such as steakhouses, sushi bars, burger restaurants, Mexican restaurants, pizza places etc**.

You will be asked questions about your perceptions towards **using this website to search for restaurants** during your vacation.

In the next page, you will see *an advertisement by a review website specialized in restaurants with 10 years of experience*.

Please take **at least 30 seconds** and **carefully examine the features of this website.** You will be asked questions about your experience.

Food Recommender is celebrating its **10th anniversary!**

Founded in 2008, Food Recommender is a trusted community with 10 years of experience for people to rate, review and evaluate restaurants. No matter what kind of food you require, you will get tons of restaurant choices. Visit our website to join our community or simply to read and evaluate what restaurants are out there.

The following questions are about the review website you have just seen.

Please be reminded that there are no right or wrong answers.

Please indicate how much you agree with the following statement.

	Strongly disagree	Disagree	Neither disagree nor agree	Agree	Strongly agree
This website has many years of experience in what they do	○	○	○	○	○

Please indicate how much you agree with the following statement.

	Strongly disagree	Disagree	Neither disagree nor agree	Agree	Strongly agree
This website is specialized in restaurant reviews	○	○	○	○	○

Please continue answering the following questions about the review website.

Please indicate how much you agree with the following statement.	Strongly disagree	Disagree	Neither disagree nor agree	Agree	Strongly agree
	○	○	○	○	○
The information on the website is pretty much what I need to carry out my tasks	○	○	○	○	○
The website adequately meets my information needs	○	○	○	○	○
The information on the website is effective					

Please indicate how much you agree with the following statement.	Strongly disagree	Disagree	Neither disagree nor agree	Agree	Strongly agree
	○	○	○	○	○
I would intend to search for restaurants and evaluate them through this website	○	○	○	○	○
I would not hesitate to search for restaurants and evaluate them through this website	○	○	○	○	○

I would be very likely to search for restaurants and evaluate them through this website

Please indicate how much you agree with the following statement.

	Strongly disagree	Disagree	Neither disagree nor agree	Agree	Strongly agree
	○	○	○	○	○
	○	○	○	○	○

The website is visually attractive

I like the way the website looks

Please choose strongly disagree.

	Strongly disagree	Disagree	Neither disagree nor agree	Agree	Strongly agree
This is an attention check question. Please chooose strongly disagree here.	○	○	○	○	○

This is an attention check question. According to the survey scenario, what kind of information were you looking for?

○ information about hotels

○ information about food and restaurants

○ information about home furniture

The following questions are about yourself and your experience.

What kind of device are you using to take this survey?

○ Desktop   ○ Laptop   ○ Tablet   ○ Mobile phone   ○ Other

How many times did you use review websites for searching or evaluating restaurants in the past 12 months?

○ 0   ○ 1   ○ 2   ○ 3   ○ 4 or more

What kind of device are you using to take this survey?

○ Male ○ Female

What is your age?

○ Under 20 ○ 20-29 ○ 30-39 ○ 40-49 ○ 50-59

What is the highest level of education you have completed?

○ Elementary school ○ High school ○ 2-year college (Associate's degree)

○ 4-year college (Bachelor's degree) ○ Graduate studies (Master's degree)

○ Post-graduate studies (Doctorate)

Which of the following best describes your marital status?

○ Single ○ Married ○ Other

Please check your range of income (total for your household):

○ < US$ 25,000 ○ US$ 25,001 - US$ 50,000 ○ US$ 50,001 - US$ 75,000

○ US$ 75,001 - US$ 100,000 ○ US$ 100,001 - US$ 125,000 ○ US$ 125,001 - US$ 150,000

○ US$ 15,001 - US$ 175,000 ○ US$ 175,001 - US$ 200,000 ○ > US$ 200,000

APPENDIX B. EXTRACT FROM THE QUESTIONNAIRE OF EMPIRICAL STUDY 2

Dear participants,

The purpose of this study is to understand customers' perception of an online booking platform.

If you choose to complete this survey, please note that we will be asking you to answer a series of questions that will take approximately 15 - 20 minutes.

To complete the survey, you must:

be a native English speaker;
have had an online booking experience (of a hotel room) in the past 12 months
have stayed in a hotel in the past 12 months.
use your desktop or laptop;
be attentive at all times. There are attention check questions in the survey.

Failing to meet any of the conditions above will result in the rejection of payment.

Participation in this research is voluntary. By completing the survey, you are providing your implied consent to participate in this investigation. There is no anticipated risk to you in participating in this research. Your identity is confidential and will not be known by any outside party. All identifiers will be kept strictly confidential and will be known only by the principal investigator, Fuad Mehraliyev. If you have questions or concerns please contact Fuad Mehraliyev (fuadmehraliyev@   ).

Thank you for helping us with this research project. Your input is invaluable and will certainly help us answer important research questions.

○ I agree to participate in this study.
○ I decline to participate in this study.

Thank you for participating in the survey.

The following questions will ask you to **recall a specific incident** that has happened to you.

Please answer **as honest as possible**. Remember that there are **no right or wrong answers.**

Please recall a particular incident in which someone else had power over you.

By power, we mean a situation in which someone else had control over your ability to get something you wanted, or was in a position to evaluate you.

Imagine reliving that moment in which **you were powerless** and then describe in the box below, what happened then and how you felt.

¶

The following 2 questions will give you a set of words and ask you to make a grammatically correct sentence.

Please use the following words to make a grammatically correct sentence:
Obey, passive, plan

¶

Please use the following words to make a grammatically correct sentence:
Janitor, comply, depart

¶

On the following scale, please indicate the extent to which you currently feel powerful.

	not at all powerful	somewhat powerful	powerful	very powerful	extremely powerful
I current feel:	○	○	○	○	○

The following is **the second scenario**.
Please note that **it is not related to the previous scenario**.

Now, please imagine the following scenario:

For your vacation in the early next month, you are planning to travel to Singapore. You will travel alone for one week. Yesterday, you browsed several websites to find out hotel information for your stay on the trip. One of the websites you used is called "**Travel Deals**".

On this website, you were looking for a 3-4 star business hotel in the city center. Among many options, you gave a serious thought to book a room in Jade Horizon Hotel. The room price was **US$130 per night**, seemingly somewhat similar to the prices of nearby hotels in this destination. However, you hesitated to make a final decision and left the website without completing your booking.

Today, you received a promotional reminder e-mail from Travel Deals to complete the booking. Please carefully read the following e-mail message.

The following is the **promotional e-mail from Travel Deals**.

Please take **at least 40 seconds** and **carefully read all information in the e-mail.** You will be asked questions about the email message and Travel Deals.

Note that Travel Deals provides best price guarantee.

Travel Deals

Still interested in Jade Horizon Hotel? Don't miss it!

For your stay in Singapore

Jade Horizon Hotel

USD 130
nightly price

- 0.6 miles to City center
- 15 miles to Airport
- Breakfast included

View Deal

Good 3.8/5 (221 Reviews)

We guarantee you the best price!
If you find a cheaper price, we will reimburse the difference.

Other great places nearby

Grand Tower Resort
- 0.2 miles away from Jade Horizon Hotel

Good 3.6/5 (336 Reviews)

USD 122
nightly price

FX Hotel & Suites
- 0.3 miles away from Jade Horizon Hotel

Very Good 4.1/5 (453 Reviews)

USD 137
nightly price

Load more alternatives

The following questions are about the booking platform you have just seen - "Travel Deals".

Please indicate how much you agree with the following statement.

	Strongly disagree	Disagree	Neither disagree nor agree	Agree	Strongly agree
Travel Deals has a BPG (Best Price Guarantee) policy	○	○	○	○	○

Please indicate how much you agree with the following statement.

	Strongly disagree	Disagree	Neither disagree nor agree	Agree	Strongly agree
Travel Deals shows and compares prices of different websites	○	○	○	○	○

Please answer the following questions about **the promotional e-mail of Travel Deals**.

Please indicate how much you agree with the following statement.	Strongly disagree	Disagree	Neither disagree nor agree	Agree	Strongly agree
	○	○	○	○	○
Reflecting on the price I would pay, I feel that I would get a good deal	○	○	○	○	○
It adds to my pleasure knowing that I would get a good deal on the price	○	○	○	○	○
Beyond saving money, there is a good feeling attached to making a good deal—as would be the case here					

Please indicate how much you agree with the following statement.

	Strongly disagree	Disagree	Neither disagree nor agree	Agree	Strongly agree
	○	○	○	○	○
I would intend to book a room in Jade Horizon hotel through Travel Deals	○	○	○	○	○
I would not hesitate to book a room in Jade Horizon hotel through Travel Deals	○	○	○	○	○

I am very likely to book a room in Jade Horizon hotel through Travel Deals

Please indicate how much you agree with the following statement.

	Strongly disagree	Disagree	Neither disagree nor agree	Agree	Strongly agree
	○	○	○	○	○
	○	○	○	○	○
The reminder e-mail is visually attractive	○	○	○	○	○

The reminder e-mail is aesthetically appealing

I like the way the reminder e-mail looks

Please indicate how much you agree with the following statement.

	Strongly disagree	Disagree	Neither disagree nor agree	Agree	Strongly agree
	○	○	○	○	○
	○	○	○	○	○
I think the reminder e-mail was realistic	○	○	○	○	○

I could imagine seeing this reminder e-mail in a real world

For the purpose of this survey I was able to imagine using Travel Deals to book a hotel room

---

Please choose strongly disagree.

	Strongly disagree	Disagree	Neither disagree nor agree	Agree	Strongly agree
This is an attention check question. Please chooose strongly disagree here.	○	○	○	○	○

This is an attention check question. According to the survey scenario, what kind of information were you looking for?

○ Hotel   ○ Restaurant   ○ Furniture   ○ Smartphone

The following questions are about yourself and your experience.

What kind of device are you using to take this survey?

○ Desktop   ○ Laptop   ○ Tablet   ○ Mobile phone   ○ Other

How many times have you stayed in a hotel in the past 12 months?

○ 0   ○ 1   ○ 2   ○ 3   ○ 4 or more

How many times have you used online platforms to search or book a hotel room in the past 12 months?

○ 0   ○ 1   ○ 2   ○ 3   ○ 4 or more

What kind of device are you using to take this survey?

○ Male   ○ Female

What is your age?

○ Under 20   ○ 20-29   ○ 30-39   ○ 40-49   ○ 50-59

What is the highest level of education you have completed?

○ Elementary school   ○ High school   ○ 2-year college (Associate's degree)

○ 4-year college (Bachelor's degree)   ○ Graduate studies (Master's degree)

○ Post-graduate studies (Doctorate)

Which of the following best describes your marital status?

○ Single   ○ Married   ○ Other

Please check your range of income (total for your household):

○ < US$ 25,000   ○ US$ 25,001 - US$ 50,000   ○ US$ 50,001 - US$ 75,000

○ US$ 75,001 - US$ 100,000   ○ US$ 100,001 - US$ 125,000   ○ US$ 125,001 - US$ 150,000

○ US$ 15,001 - US$ 175,000   ○ US$ 175,001 - US$ 200,000   ○ > US$ 200,000