

Destination Online Travel Reviews  
An argumentative and textual genre perspective

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## Abstract

Information and communication practices relating to tourism, as they occur in the frame of the so-called web 2.0, constitute a peculiar context where communicative interactions assume specific features. Prospective tourists face several challenges when making travel decisions because of the very nature of tourism products, which are intangible and perishable, and because of the extraordinary variety of available options. The outcome of decisions concerning tourism products, thus, can hardly be foreseen and cannot be substantially changed; it implies a high level of uncertainty and a certain risk. In the case of experiential goods, the most influential source of information is Word-of-mouth (WOM). Web 2.0 – or ‘read and write web’ – is giving new significance to WOM, which encompasses a variety of media forms and types of websites, providing consumers with a number of opportunities to voice their opinions. This content is known as User Generated Contents (UGC) and can equate to electronic word-of-mouth (eWOM). Consumers increasingly rely on eWOM to make a variety of decisions, thanks to their easiness of access and multiplicity of contributors. Online Travel Reviews (OTR) are the most accessible and prevalent form of eWOM in the field of eTourism. They represent people’s wish to share their travel experiences online, recommend a tourism product or complain about it.

This dissertation adopts a communicative approach, to investigate how OTR contribute to and inform travel decision-making. To answer the question: “which kind of communicative event is an OTR?”, its communicative purpose, the strategies adopted to pursue the purpose, its textual structure, its content patterns and the contexts where it is produced (i.e. technological, cultural and individual context) were analyzed. A corpus of 138 OTR about destination Rome, collected from TripAdvisor, underwent a two stage analytical process. In the first stage, OTR were characterized as an emergent textual genre, which presents singular properties and differentiates itself from other travel genres and online genres. *Congruity Theory* has been adopted for the semantic-pragmatic analysis of the corpus. Congruity Theory is a theory of discourse relations, which combines rhetorical relations and speech acts in one single construct, namely the *connective predicate* (CP). CP are high level pragmatic predicates that characterize an utterance or the connection of two or more utterances in terms of the action that the author, with such utterance or connection of utterances, realizes towards the addressee. The CP governing an OTR was reconstructed, the pre-conditions as well as the entailments it brings about were pointed out, and dominant CP’s were distinguished from subordinate CP’s. The CP governing an OTR is one of *advice*, which the reviewer proposes to the reader to engage in a course of action – i.e. visit/not visit a destination -

because of the desirability of the outcome. This reasoning chain corresponds, indeed, to the argumentation scheme of *practical reasoning* (or pragmatic argumentation).

In a second phase of the research, the argumentative texture of an OTR has been specifically considered. The standpoint is constituted by the travel advice, and the argument is the reviewer's opinion about the destination. This argument works, in turn, as standpoint for a lower level argumentative move, where data are provided by the reviewer to support her opinion; data can be, for instance, descriptions of attractions or reports of travel events. Through *analytical overviews*, the configuration of standpoints and arguments of some texts was reconstructed in detail, in order to visualize typical argumentative strategies. Finally, the three most representative *argument schemes*, that are the inferential principles at play in the argumentative process, were pointed out.

The research has a number of implications both at the theoretical as well as at the practical level. It represents, in fact, a contribution both to the field of genre studies and to the research on argumentation in context. Theoretical results, then, may be applied to improve marketing strategies and to develop automated strategies, both for filtering 'good-quality' OTR and for selecting relevant ones according to information needs and travel expectations.

*A mio marito Nicola, a mio figlio Francesco  
A mia madre e a mio padre  
Con amore,  
per il viaggio fatto insieme*

## Acknowledgements

Your first-hand experiences really help other travelers. Thanks!

Your overall rating of this attraction



Click to rate

Title of your review

A wonderful journey, the most wonderful company!

Your review

(100 character minimum)

The story I am telling you is about a five-years journey, one which leaves vivid traces in one's life.

I am a kind of tourist who likes travelling without too much planning, who let herself to be amazed by unpredictable events and unexpected itinerary changes. I think that the travel company is essential to enjoy the journey. For this reason, in my review I will tell you more about the people I met during my trip and the experiences we shared together than about the places I visited.

My best travel company was my **husband**, who accompanied me along bumpy paths, always supporting and encouraging. Even if from a distance, **mum** and **dad**, **Tello**, **Stefania** and **Simone** followed all my adventures, sometimes joining them, always rejoicing and suffering with me.

My solid point of reference during the whole journey was **prof. Lorenzo Cantoni**, who constantly challenged me to do my best, gave directions but also gave the freedom to get lost and find my way again.

When my journey started, we were a group of 5 guys, 2 girls and 3 boys, who hadn't ever met before, but became good friends. **Chrysi**, who came from Greece, was a lively exotic person, very curious and open. **Andreas** was a German guy, but very different from the stereotype of the rigid and austere German; it was not a mystery that he had a Second Lif! **Emanuele** and **Luca** were Italians, and because of our (beautiful) common language, we were used to speculate, destroying and re-making the world, especially the academic world, in front of a dish of pasta and a glass of wine. We were best known as the **Red-Ink** company. Our journey was sponsored by the **Swiss National Science Foundation**, which I would like to thank. I am also grateful to **Luca Botturi**, for inviting me to join the group. We have been travelling together for three years, then each one of us decided to explore different paths.

During the first three years of the journey, I was supported by a group of wonderful colleagues, headed by **Stefano Tardini**, who besides being a big fan of the Italian football team Juventus, was also a big fan of the Red-Ink company. I have great memories of the days I spent in the 'flowered' *eLab* developing eLearning courses with **Goran**, **Christian**, **Marcone**, **Mauro** and, even if for a short time, with **Elisabetta** and **Mattia**.

The colleagues of *NewMinE Lab* are part of these memories: **Isa, Sara, Anna, Francesca, Marta, Chiara, Paolo** made me curious with their stories about Brazil, South Africa, Mozambique, Camerun, ...

There is a time in a long journey when you would like to turn and go back home; a time when you cannot see an end, you are tired and demotivated. For me that happened when I was about halfway, but at that point I met **prof. Andrea Rocci**, who indicated me a new path, which meant starting a new adventure. I decided to follow it, and the journey became even more surprising, step by step.

Along the new path I was not alone, I joined a travel company, mostly made up of dynamic girls fond of travelling, who never renounce to a beer out after work. I am grateful to the *webatelier.net* 'dream team': **Nadzeya, Giulio, Elena, Alessandro, Asta, Cristina, Aimara**.

However, my beers with them were not too many, because, for the second time, my travel plans changed unexpectedly. I met **prof. Ulrike Gretzel** (Ulli), who not only a valuable scientific interlocutor, but had the effect of a catalyst in my life journey! I was planning to leave Switzerland to visit her in Texas, but she moved to Australia and invited me to follow her. Australia was so far away but so attractive ... Nicola and I decided to get married, and to leave together for Wollongong. After a while, **Francesco**, our son, joined us: he was an 'inside' travel companion, who made our experience unique. The Aussie company grew and grew: along the way we met **Sara, Maria, Kylie, Nadia, Juanna, Malu, Heather, Aaron, Clifford, Michelle, Logi** and his wife, **Emil, Jamie, Stacie, Father Richard**, and a number of 'uncles' and 'aunties' who joined our family.

After one year Down-under, we went back to Switzerland. There I found the 'old' company and joined a new one: the guys from the Institute of Argumentation, Linguistics and Semiotics, who have been a reliable support in the last hard part of the journey. **Prof. Eddo Rigotti, Rudi, Chiara, Marta, Margherita** helped me to reach the final destination. **Sara Greco Morasso** was my best interlocutor to share desires and concerns of a 'migrant mother'.

In the end, I want to thank my 'walking sticks', who supported me despite changes and uncertainties: **Sarina, Paola, P. Marcelo, Andrè, Andrè-Luis, Stefy & the kids, Grazia, Maurizio, Matteo, nonna Agnese, nonna Maria** and the whole group of **Bergamo** uncles, aunties and cousins.

I wish everyone leaving for a journey to meet a wonderful company, as it happened to me!

Silvia

What sort of visit was this?



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## List of abbreviations

eWOM = electronic Word-Of-Mouth

OTR = Online Travel Review

UGC = User Generated Content

UGM = User Generated Media

DMO = Destination Management Organization

TA = TripAdvisor

CT = Congruity Theory

CP = Connective Predicate

DCP = Dominant Connective Predicate

SCP = Subordinate Connective Predicate

Spk = Speaker

Hr = Hearer

U = utterance

Xcg = common ground

Rwr = Reviewer

Rd = Reader

D = Destination

T = Text

IS = Interaction Scheme

Stdp = standpoint

Arg = argument

AMT = Argumentum Model of Topics

AD = Argument Diagram

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## Introduction

“We are but travellers here.”

(Epigraph on the tomb of St. Mary of the Cross MacKillop,  
Sydney, Australia)

### i. Decision-making in the field of online tourism: an argumentative practice based on testimony

Chaim Perelman and Lucie Olbrechts-Tyteca (1969) proposed that argumentation is **the form of reasoning used for decision-making**. One of the most important assertions in their *Treatise on Argumentation* was that the argument is the logical basis for practical reasoning, that is, when one has to make a decision, she engages in an argumentative process. Argumentation is, indeed, a common practice everyone performs during a day for a number of tasks, which implies, more or less clearly, making a decision; among them are: understanding the meaning of a message, explaining a natural fact or a human behaviour, clarifying a doubt, taking position in a debate, solving a conflict, counselling, increasing knowledge, establishing an opinion, or persuading oneself as well as others. Actually, argumentation takes place every time that one is – directly or indirectly – asked to give reasons for her opinion or action.

Van Eemeren and Grootendorst (2004, p. 1) define argumentation as “a verbal, social and rational activity aimed at convincing a reasonable critic of the acceptability of a standpoint by putting forward a constellation of propositions justifying or refuting the proposition expressed in the standpoint”. This definition points out the key aspects of argumentation: a) it is an *activity*, b) which makes use of *language*, c) in order to provoke a change in the *context* where it takes place, d) by following *rational* rules of development. These elements are now discussed.

a) Since argumentation aims at influencing opinions and behaviors of an audience, it has to be considered as a proper *action*. In fact, if an action can be reductively described as a process intentionally carried out by an agent to reach a goal, in the case of argumentation the agent is represented by a speaker whose aim is to convince her interlocutor about his position. According to Searle (1969), argumentation should be

classified as a specific type of *speech act*. Rigotti and Greco (2009, p. 20) emphasize that argumentation “does not concern knowledge but action, which does not operate in the sphere of general principles and solid structures but in the field of things that can be changed, made, or destroyed by human intervention”.

b) To be more precise, argumentation is a *communicative interaction*. It is ‘communicative’ because it occurs by means of language and towards an interlocutor - thus, an argument is a linguistic device. It is an ‘interaction’ because it implicates the presence and the action of another person who is asked to join or reject the standpoint put forward by the arguer.

c) Arguing, in fact, always happens towards a **decision-maker**, who can be a person, a group of people or the arguer himself. The argument is a linguistic device used by the arguer to attract the decision-maker’s mind towards the standpoint, soliciting him by showing the reasonableness of his position. The decision-maker is, therefore, not only a spectator, but a real stakeholder, who is interested in argumentation, since he has to take a free decision. A group of friends who have to choose the destination for a trip, a court who has to judge on a defendant’s guilt, the board of directors of a bank who has to approve the strategic plan, a scholar who has to choose the research method to employ: these all are decision-makers who have to make a decision among a series of alternatives. Perelman and Olbrechts-Tyteca devoted a large part of their Treatise to the concept of audience. They held that the “orator” shapes her discourse trying to achieve the greatest adherence of her ideal audience. They used the term “orator” to generically indicate the person who advances an argument and the term “audience” to indicate the individual or collective person she is talking to, that is the interlocutor or decision-maker. In written text, the audience is represented by the ideal public the writer has in mind while writing; in a soliloquy, instead, the interlocutor is the self, since one tries to figure out arguments and counterarguments to take the best alternative for the position she has to deliberate on. The knowledge of the audience one aims at convincing is a necessary condition for the success of argumentation. A reason which results to be convincing – ‘good’ – for an audience, can turn to be unacceptable, weak or misunderstood by another. This happens because of the non-necessary nature of the premises in an argumentation: they are, in fact, **endoxa**, that are common opinions or beliefs shared by a community. The Aristotelian notion of *endoxon* refers to the set of propositions which constitute the common ground of a community and are, as a consequence, generally accepted, reliable and credited within that community. The use of endoxa helps to understand the process of grounding a standpoint: they are employed as implicit or explicit premises in the argumentative interaction, this way letting the conclusion (standpoint) to follow from the premises (argument) (Tardini,



2005). An *endoxon* works as implicit premise for the inferential chain of reasoning underlying an argument. Indeed, most of the content of communication is normally left implicit because it is thought to be easily retrieved by the interlocutor exactly thanks to the *endoxa*. In fact, when speaking with others, or when reading a text, what is understood is always more than what is explicitly said: the reconstruction of the meaning of the message is left to the interlocutor's/reader's inference, according to the Gricean maxim of quantity "be as informative as necessary for the purpose of agreement but avoid being more informative than is necessary" (Grice 1975, p. 45). The meaning of a text is linguistically built through the interconnection of the logical-semantic level and the pragmatic level, that is through the words and the syntax used as well as the context in which it is communicated (Rigotti & Rocci, 2001; Reboul & Moeschler, 1998).

Argumentation plays a central role in shaping the communicative practices occurring in different **contexts**: it is both rooted in the contexts in which it takes place and is significantly determined by them. The context where argumentation occurs plays a decisive role to clarify the function of utterances, and thus to help identify if they may have or not an argumentative function in the discourse. The knowledge of the context is, therefore, essential to find out arguments and to correctly reconstruct and evaluate them.

d) Rigotti and Greco Morasso (2009) use a synthetic but very fitting expression, when they say that "argumentation is reason applied to life". The term reason, here, is not referred to rationality but rather to reasonableness. Rationality is the logical coherence of a reasoning which guarantees that the truth of the conclusion derives from the truth of the premises. A discourse is rational if it avoids inconsistency, that is if it does not contain contradictory statements. Rationality is a fundamental requirement for a sound argumentation, but is not the only requirement. Human interaction, in fact, is ruled by possibility, which implies to take a decision among alternatives, selecting the best one on the base of the goals one is pursuing and their hierarchy, the context, the audience and all the other factors that are relevant for the concerned issue. When someone advances an argument to support her position (or a counterargument to challenge the position of someone else), she makes an **appeal to reasonableness**, in the sense that she silently assumes that her interlocutor will evaluate her argument in a reasonable way (van Eemeren, 2001).

## ii. **Web 2.0: a new context for the argumentative discourse**

**Information and communication practices** related to tourism, as they occur in the frame of web 2.0 (Cantoni & Tardini, 2010), constitute a peculiar context where argumentation assumes specific features. **Prospective tourists** face several challenges

when making travel decisions – e.g. destination to visit, accommodation to stay, activities and attractions to enjoy, carriers to use – because of the very nature of many tourism products, which are intangible and perishable, and because of the extraordinary variety of options available. Since they cannot be viewed or trailed prior to purchase, the decision of which product to purchase requires considerable time and effort. Tourism services are, then, a class of products regarded as high risk, and consumers are often led to engage in extensive information search (Ballantyne et al. 2009). The evaluation of alternatives in the decision process is based on the information obtained, and crossed with a set of endoxa comprising personal aspects like expectations, desires, values and beliefs, and socio-cultural elements related to the experience of travelling and to the tourism product itself. My own decision to visit Cairns (Queensland, Australia) during my permanence in Australia instead of other destinations within the country, and to spend my four days snorkeling in the Great Barrier Reef, going to the beach and visiting a crocodile farm, were based, for instance, on:

- information I collected before the journey about top Australian destinations;
- information I obtained in loco as well as recommendations by local residents about attractions worth to visiting and activities to be done;
- a set of endoxa comprising: my personal expectations on Cairns as a unique place from a naturalistic point of view, my desire to enjoy the tropical environment escaping this way from the cold and windy winter of New South Wales (the place I was staying in the period of the visit), the value I ascribe to small destinations instead of big and crowded ones;
- as well as to the social perception of holidays, as a time when to combine relaxing moments and cultural experiences, or on the criteria commonly used in my culture (Italian culture) to select accommodation, that is cleanliness, or restaurants, that is quality food.

All these aspects, then, were discussed and negotiated with my husband, who was my best travel company.

One element playing an important role in risk and uncertainty reduction in travel decision-making is **the testimony of others**. The evidence of people who experienced a given tourism product is interesting because it represents a highly credited information source: perceived expertise is more a criterion than anything else for advice seeking (De Capua & Dunham, 1993), and because people reporting their experience are presumed not to lie, unless they have precise reasons to do so. The meaning of ‘**expert**’, here, comes directly from the definition of “experience”, indicating a person who has gone

through the ordeal and has acquired certain skills. **Experience** derives from the Latin *ex-perior* – meaning “to go through” – by means of a *periculum*, that is something difficult or even dangerous; according to the etymology, then, experience refers to an ordeal connected to a situation or to a state of affairs repeated quite evenly, through which a certain knowledge can be acquired and used to solve certain problems or take certain decisions (Giannini, Rossi & Pieretti, 2006). Aristotle denoted the concept of experience using three different words: 1) *aisthesis*, which corresponds to an immediate relationship with someone or something having an impact on ourselves; 2) *empiria*, which refers to the ability of making order and memorize the impressions gained from the outside; 3) *peira*, which is the ability, typical of the expert, to put to the test what he knows in order to develop more knowledge or to use it. In Latin, a single word denotes experience, comprising the three Aristotelian concepts: *experientia*. “In questo vocabolo, la valenza antropologico-esistenziale è centrale, per cui l’esperienza esprime il modo in cui il soggetto umano fa propria la realtà nella quale è chiamato a vivere.” [Trans. In this word, the anthropological-existential valence is central, for experience refers, in the first place, to the way in which the human person takes possession of the reality she lives in] (Giannini, Rossi & Pieretti, 2006, p. 3640) Constitutive elements of an experience are, thus, an event or a situation someone lived, which is kept in his memory, has been judged, and on which he has developed an opinion. A person is an expert not only because he knows (/knows how to do) something, but also, and more cogently, because he has an opinion on it and can justify this opinion on the base of evidence.

Experience is shared, mostly, by means of **Word of mouth** (WOM), which has always been an elective channel to spread and collect information, since it is a social dynamic naturally occurring in the interaction among people. Arguing about the opportunities and challenges of online feedback mechanisms (or Reputation Systems), Dellarocas (2003) picks up on that “word-of-mouth networks constitute a solution to a timeless problem of social organization: the elicitation of good conduct in communities of self-interested individuals who have short-term incentives to cheat one another”; thus, he assumes that WOM provides a reliable source of information for taking decisions, because it reduces the risk of deceptions. Benson (1989) even considers WOM as the primary enabler of economic and social activity in most of the ancient and medieval communities, which had not yet established formal law systems of contract enforcement. Word-of-mouth has been showed to play a major role for customers’ buying decisions (Richins and Root-Shaffer, 1988), and WOM from friends and relatives has been found to be the most commonly used information source for travellers before they make a travel decision (Beiger and Laesser, 2004).

Web 2.0 – or ‘read and write web’ – is giving new significance to WOM, providing consumers with a number of opportunities to voice their opinions, which encompass a variety of media forms and types of websites: blogs, personal Web spaces, podcasts, wikis are only some of them. Such contents are known as User Generated Contents (UGC) and can equate electronic word-of-mouth (eWOM). Almost every kind of product or consumer experience can now be reviewed or commented online directly by the user: from brick-and-mortar business (see Epinions.com) to movies (see moviefone.com), from newspaper articles to travel experiences (see IgoUgo.com). Consumers increasingly rely on **eWOM** to make a variety of decisions, thanks to their easiness of access and multiplicity of contributors. eWOM communication can be defined as “any positive or negative statement made by potential, actual, or former customers about a product or company, which is made available to a multitude of people and institutions via the Internet” (Hennig-Thurau et al. 2004: 39). Dellarocas (2003) identifies three characteristics which make online feedback mechanisms different from the non-mediated WOM networks: the scale that can be achieved; the possibility information technology gives to control and monitor feedback mechanisms, through proper engineering of information systems that mediate them; new challenges introduced by the very nature of online interaction, as the difficulty of identifying the author, because of the lack of contextual cues and the easiness of changing online identity. In addition, eWOM includes many-to-many communication, since a comment may be left by a user, read by many, answered back or followed through by other users.

**Online Travel Reviews (OTR)** are a form in which content is created online: they are, indeed, the most accessible and prevalent form of eWOM in the field of tourism (Chatterjee 2001). They represent people’s wish to share their travel experiences online, recommending a tourism product or complaining about it. OTR share with the other types of UGC the fact that they are directed towards an unknown audience and are at free disposal. They then distinguish themselves for some characteristics: OTR are monographic texts longer, for instance, than forum posts, that are dialogical moves in an asynchronous discussion, but shorter than blogs, which resemble diaries; they report on and evaluate usually a single product or service or experience; they represent one-to-many communication and typically one-way information flows (Schindler and Bickart 2005).

### iii. The role of Online Travel Reviews in tourism decision-making

Given the growing impact Online Travel Reviews (OTR) are having on travel decisions, in the last few years a number of studies have investigated them under different respects, mostly from a consumer behaviour or marketing perspective. An extensive study on the role and impact of OTR dates to 2007 (Gretzel, Yoo & Purifoy) and has

received financial support from TripAdvisor, the most prominent online travel review platform in terms of use and content available. It was found out that looking at consumers' comments or other posted materials is the activity that people using the Internet take part in the most during their **trip planning**.

Decision-making in tourism is a "temporal, dynamic, successive, and multistage contingent decision process" (Jeng & Fesenmaier, 2002, p. 15), in which preferences for products and services are rather ill-defined, unless they are regularly experienced (Gretzel, 2011). The decision-maker (i.e. the prospective tourist), thus, needs to collect relevant information to increase his knowledge about the alternatives. He engages in an information search which involves time and effort and is limited by human cognitive capacity to process incoming information. Therefore, when looking online about a certain hotel, attraction, tourism service or, generally, a destination, people do not go through everything they retrieve from their search but select online resources they think can meet their needs. In order to do so, they need to make judgments regarding the search results. These judgments have to be quick, given the amount of information to be processed and, thus, are typically made based on a first impression of the results (Marchionini, 1995; Jang, 2004; Wöber, 2006). To support the first selection of sources, information retrieval systems display metadata such as title, URL, date. These metadata serve the function of overview and preview (Balatsoukas, Morris & O'Brien, 2009), and contribute to the creation of a **first impression** of an online resource (Pan & Fesenmaier, 2006; Xiang & Fesenmaier, 2006). The first impression is so crucial for online information search that a number of studies have investigated the decisive factors contributing to its creation (Kim & Fesenmaier, 2007, 2008). The same is likely to happen for online travel reviews. Since there is usually a huge number of reviews available for the same tourism product, the user has to make a first selection of those which seem to be most relevant. Some users might only browse through the titles without ever looking at the complete review text. A first analysis of properties and structure of OTR titles have been recently done (De Ascaniis & Gretzel, 2012), showing that, despite their short length, OTR titles are able to give basic information about the review, are quite representative of the review orientation and accomplish the general function of text titles in helping readers anticipate what follows in the text.

Studies on **when and how OTR are used** by travellers in their trip planning process, then, pointed out that they inform different stages of travel planning, with different aims: at the beginning of the trip planning for getting ideas, in the middle of it to narrow down choices, later on to confirm decisions, and even after the trip to compare and share experiences (Gretzel and Yoo, 2008).

OTR and, more in general, consumers' reviews, are perceived as trustworthy and reliable because they are written from a **consumer's perspective** (Bickart & Schindler, 2001), and as more credible than information provided by marketers (Smith et al., 2005). This is even more the case for high involvement products, as travel related products. Being the aim of marketers to increase the business of a product, the messages they use to advertise it are tailored to make it desirable and to highlight attractive aspects; reality may however be different from the prompted image. The arguments that are used by the supply side to promote a product may often differ from those which might be selected by a consumer. A recent study (Fedele, De Ascaniis & Cantoni, 2011) revealed that the reasons why tourists appreciate a certain destination (i.e. Malta) are only partially in line with the arguments used by the Destination Management Organization to promote it. While the reasons given by tourists online when commenting on their experience at the destination mostly concerned the friendly attitude of locals, the safe and relaxed atmosphere and the beautiful beaches, the brochure distributed by the DMO bets on culture and historical aspects and the diversity of tourists' attractions.

**Reviewers' credibility** is perceived to be based, above all, on the fact that they have travel experience, they engage in similar activities during the trip or travel for a similar purpose, and on the writing style, which is usually polite and friendly. In addition, if compared with the information provided by travel service providers, information posted online are considered more up-to-date, enjoyable and reliable (Gretzel, Yoo & Purifoy, 2007). Dickinger (2011) argues that it is important to make a difference between **trust** and trustworthiness, when measuring the impact and consumers' perception of online content. Trustworthiness deals with the trustor's *beliefs* about a trustee, described in terms of: the trustee's *ability* to provide competent information; his *integrity* in giving information that adheres to accepted rules of conduct, his honesty and attitude to keep promises; his *benevolence* in providing information which can really help the interlocutor. Trust, on the other side, deals with the trustor's *intention* to engage in a behavior that depends on the trustee, that his willingness to trust him (Gefen et al., 2008). Different dimensions of trustworthiness have been shown to be more or less relevant depending on the online channel used. The higher standing with respect to ability, benevolence and integrity has been found for contents provided by official authorities (editorial channel), such as tourist boards; in marketing channels, trust is strengthened by integrity, that is if the service provider is felt to be honest and sincere. For what concerns user-generated contents (personal channel), the main drivers for trust resulted to be informativeness and benevolence. The ability of users to provide accurate and timely information, instead, is doubted. This means that "well meaning of other travellers is honored by those who still search for information" (Dickinger, 2011: 387). These results highlight one proper characteristic of UGC, that is spontaneity: while an increasing number of

websites are soliciting and publishing consumers' feedback on products, services and even news articles for enhancing online marketplaces, UGC are mostly produced for a benevolent reason, that is for spreading an information which is thought to be beneficial for the reader.

Among the different **reasons** which may lead a consumer to engage in eWOM communication, the prominent one resulted to be: social benefits, economic incentives, concern for others and self-enhancement (Hennig-Thurau et al., 2004). If OTR are specifically considered, motivations are slightly different, and prominence is given to reasons directly related to social justice and benevolence. A study by Yoo and Gretzel (2008) has provided insights with respect to the motivations which drive travel review writers. The prominent reason seems to be the need to reciprocate positive experiences provided by travel and tourism companies, followed by the concern for other consumers (altruistic reason) and the wish to enjoy travel experiences and expertise with other travellers (hedonistic reason).

However, OTR present their 'dangerous' aspect, that is the absence of source cues. They can be, in fact, published without specific author information such as name, age or photo, and by a source that has little or no relationship with the message reader: they provide, this way, an opportunity for **deception** (Donath, 1999), for instance by the individual product or service provider, for the purpose of promoting his business. The issue of deceptive reviews identification has been investigated applying general communication and deception theories; nonetheless, because of the reduced cues for deception in online communication, only cues related to the text structure could have been considered, like the total number of words included in the review, their average length, the number of unique words, self-reference and the brand name (Yoo & Gretzel, 2009).

The question of which **aspects of a review** are considered important by readers when evaluating it, has also been addressed, showing that three types of information hold the top places: detailed description, type of website on which the review is posted and the date of the post. Additional relevant aspects are: the tone and clarity of the writing, the provision of facts, a balance between pros and cons, specific information and consistency with other reviews (Gretzel et al., 2007).

In order to understand how OTR contribute to and inform travel decision-making, however, an important aspect has still to be considered, that is the **reasoning texture** interweaving the text. This means going 'inside' the reviews, and looking at the logic and pragmatic aspects which constitute them as a specific type of communicative act, taking place in a quite defined mediated context. Even if aspects like reviewers' motivations for

writing, factors influencing their credibility, cues for detecting reviews authenticity and their use in the different stages of trip planning, contribute to an overall understanding of the phenomenon of attention, they do not tell us the whole story about how users read their fellow travellers' comments. Since prospective tourists must deliberate about their journey, they are primarily interested in the reasons why it is or it is not worthwhile to visit a certain destination, engage in certain activities or select one or the other accommodation (De Ascaniis & Greco-Morasso, 2011).

From the point of view of the reasoning at play during the decision-making process, what counts the most are the contents of the arguments upon which the final decision is anchored, which may be assumed as "the substance and the means" of the process (Macoubrie, 2003). Thus, it is worth investigating what is precisely said about the travel product reviewed. Both the logical consistency and the pragmatic appropriateness of OTR have to be analyzed, since the basis for a reasoning relies both on understanding the larger argument structure of the text, and on understanding the types of reasons used in terms of endoxa and argument schemes (Macoubrie, 2003).

Intuitively, then, it is clear that it makes a difference whether a tourist suggests a destination for a short visit or for a longer-term holiday; for a family trip, a honeymoon or a study stay. The target addressed with the text determines which arguments are appropriate and which ones should be avoided. An OTR, however, addresses an indefinite anonymous target, which implies that the author makes assumptions on the potential reader and on the aspects of the experience he is reporting about which may be of help and interest for him/her. An analysis of what is actually said in OTR, then, may put light on users' perceptions of and interaction in the online environment, as well as on how argumentative practices are moulded on such context.

Furthermore, having access to the reasons given by tourists when commenting on their travel experiences, and being able to study them, carries a lot of implications at the practical level. As a prime factor, it means understanding which features of a certain tourism product are appreciated the most, and why; then, on this basis, it means to improve their promotion.

The aim of this research is to investigate the above mentioned aspects related to one type of Online Travel Reviews (OTR), that are **destination reviews**. The investigation will be carried out analyzing a corpus of destination OTR as a communicative event, and focusing, in particular, on the reasoning structure which is developed to support travel decision-making. Different types of OTR have different characteristics at the level of the communicative event taking place; in the case of hotel reviews, for instance, two kinds of readers pursuing very distinct purposes (advice and feedback) may be foreseen:



travellers and dedicated hotel staff; many platforms, then, provide hotels the opportunity to respond, creating dialogue chains, which should be studied with appropriate analytical tools. Destination reviews were chosen in this dissertation because the decision about the destination to visit is the first step in trip planning, and because a destination may be somehow revealing of a 'tourism culture', in a sort of "tell me where you want to go, and I will tell you who you are!"<sup>1</sup>

#### iv. Structure of the dissertation

##### **Online Travel Reviews as a tool for decision-making**

In the first chapter, the process of decision-making is described as an argumentative practice, where practical judgments lead towards the realization of actions. 'Tourism product' has peculiar characteristics, which influence the whole process. It is an experiential good but not in the sense of something that can be experienced, as a technological device or a special food, but rather in the sense that it is a performance, an experience per se, like a concert or a night out with friends. Tourism experiences are intangible, heterogeneous, inseparable, perishable and expensive. Tourism-related decisions, thus, can be considered high-risk because of the uncertainty of the outcome. The quality and quantity of information have to be crossed with personal criteria and hierarchy of desires in order to compare alternatives and select the one which seems to best satisfy needs and expectations.

The issue of information search has been (and still is) studied and debated for a long time in the field of tourism. The chapter presents the main models for explaining information search in tourism and focuses on the role of the Internet, the behaviour of Internet users and the role of social media in information search. Within the online space of tourism, which represents the online accessible knowledge about the tourism domain and comprises both industry created content and user generated content, Online Travel Reviews (OTR) constitute one of the most present and used sources of information.

In this research, OTR are investigated adopting a communication perspective, which combines insights from Semantics, Pragmatics and Argumentation studies. According to such perspective, language is a social action and, therefore, communicative artefacts – as OTR – are speech acts conceived with a purpose and bringing entailments on the social reality. The research question driving this investigation concerns the properties of OTR as a communicative event on its own, specifically considering: its communicative purpose, content, structure and context, intended as the technological environment

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<sup>1</sup> Henceforth, when OTR will be addressed as the object of study of this research, it will always refer to *destination* OTR.

where OTR are created and consumed, cultural references backing reviewers' report and individual constellation of beliefs and values which emerge from the text.

### **Communicative functions of tourism-related User Generated Content**

In chapter 2, the literature having tourism-related User Generated Content as research object is reviewed and critically presented. The model of communication of Roman Jakobson (1960) is used both as a base for defining inclusion and exclusion criteria and as a rationale for classifying and discussing the studies reviewed.

In Jakobson's analysis of verbal communication, six elements are distinguished, each of them associated with a communicative function. When focusing on the addresser, the communication has an emotive or expressive function; when oriented toward the addressee, it has a conative function; when the object or fact to which the communication refers is the focus, a referential function is at play; when the point of interest is, instead, the object that is effectively exchanged in the communication, the respective function is the poetic one; the phatic function, then, is associated to a communication dealing with the channel; finally, the metalinguistic function, refers to the possibility for a communication to describe its communicative code. Each study in the literature review is classified according to the element of communication it focuses on. The most discussed issues around each element are then highlighted and discussed.

### **A semantic-pragmatic perspective on Online Travel Reviews**

In chapter 3, the theory driving the analysis of Online Travel Reviews is presented. It is a theory of discourse relations based on the notion of congruity called *Congruity Theory*. Like other contemporary theories of discourse semantics, it combines rhetorical relations and speech acts in one single construct, namely the *connective predicate*. Connective predicates are high level pragmatic predicates that characterize an utterance or the connection of two or more utterances in terms of the action that the author, with such utterance or connection of utterances, realizes towards the addressee. Like other predicates, connective predicates are defined in terms of their presuppositional pre-conditions as well as in terms of their entailments. They impose conditions upon the author (reviewer), the addressee (reader), the utterance or text they directly dominate, and finally upon co-textual and contextual information. Their entailments, on the other hand, have the status of pragmatic effects. The analysis of presuppositions and entailments imposed by the pragmatic predicate governing OTR upon its argument places, is the way adopted for defining OTR textual genre.

To reconstruct the pragmatic predicate governing OTR it needs, first of all, to point out its communicative purpose, that is the effect in social reality the reviewer wants to obtain with her text. The communicative purpose of OTR is identified taking into

account the semantic of the predicate ‘to make a review’, the strategic goal of TripAdvisor, and the guidelines provided by TripAdvisor to reviewers. TripAdvisor represents the major stakeholder in the publication of OTR, thus its understanding of what kind of communicative practice an OTR is, puts constraints on what is published and what is rejected.

Chapter 3 closes with the description of the corpus of OTR used for the analyses. The corpus is constituted by reviews posted on TripAdvisor in 2011 concerning the destination Rome, in English, German and Italian. The corpus will be analyzed using *UAM Corpus Tool*, a software for human and semi-automatic annotation of texts and images.

### **Online Travel Reviews as an emergent textual genre**

The last two chapters are devoted to the empirical analysis of the corpus of OTR. The fourth chapter, in particular, applies Congruity Theory to identify the types of connective predicates governing the utterances of OTR main text. Dominant connective predicates, which are directly connected with the main text act, are distinguished from subordinate connective predicates, which are indirectly linked with the dominant act. Eventually, major differences in the structure of reviews are looked for, to investigate if recurrent patterns emerge across languages and, possibly, on the base of the interplay among other variables.

### **The argumentative texture of Online Travel Reviews**

OTR are used in a decision-making process; more precisely, they are advices of a course of action – that is a visit recommendation – which provide the readers with arguments to ponder about the adequacy of such advice to their case. The last chapter is an argumentative analysis of the corpus, aimed at investigating the strategies used by reviewers to make their point. The argumentative structure of OTR is reconstructed in terms of standpoints and arguments, and the main inferential principles (i.e. argument schemes) adopted are analyzed, in order to evaluate their logic soundness and their appeal to the audience. Main contributions of the research, as well as its limits and some future openings are discussed in the conclusion.

## 1 Online Travel Reviews as a tool for decision-making

*In the first chapter, the scope of the inquiry, the issues addressed, the research object and the research goals are presented.*

*This dissertation looks at the process of decision-making in the field of tourism, focusing on the role of online content created by users.*

*The process of decision-making is firstly (in section 1.1) described as an argumentative practice, where practical judgments lead towards the realization of actions.*

*Section 1.2 shows how the characteristics of the product involved in the decision, that is an experiential good, influences the whole process.*

*To make decisions one needs to compare alternatives on the basis of available information. The issue of information search is addressed in section 1.3, starting with the presentation of the main models for explaining information search in tourism (1.3.1) and moving, then, to the role of the Internet (1.3.2), the behavior of Internet users (1.3.3) and, finally, the role of social media in information search (1.3.4).*

*The last section is devoted to place the research within the field of inquiry mentioned above. Online Travel Reviews are presented as one of the main online sources of information which work as a reliable basis for tourism decision-making. In section 1.4.1 the perspective adopted to investigate the research object is presented: it is a communicative perspective, which considers language as a social action and, thus, looks at Online Travel Reviews as communicative events conceived with a purpose. In section 1.4.2 the research question is made explicit, and the last section (1.4.3) specifies the sub-questions.*

## 1.1 Decision-making as an argumentative practice

When, speaking with my husband, we think back to our honey-moon, we agree that, even if it was only a short trip (five days all together!), it was well-orchestrated in terms of what we visited, the accommodations we booked and the food experiences we had. We particularly enjoyed the day we spent in Orvieto and the fast visit to Siena, and we have often made the resolution to visit both cities a second time. Recently, indeed, we decided to spend our next vacation taking a tour of Tuscany. Both the evaluative process through which my husband and I adhered to the (positive) opinion about our honey-moon – i.e. that it was well orchestrated – and the deliberative process to which we took the decision about our next vacation, represent decision-making processes, carried out through a comparison among reasonable alternative *choices*. ‘Decide’ comes from the Latin verb ‘decidēre’, formed by the prefix ‘de’, which indicates a removal, a separation, and the verb ‘caedēre’, which means to cut; to decide is, thus, to select, in a range of alternatives, the one that appears to be the best one, cutting off all the others. Choice inherently involves *uncertainty*, either because it commits the decision-maker to actions to be performed in the future – as it is the case for my next family vacation – or because it is not based on absolute knowledge or principles but rather on presumptive statements and opinions led by personal values, beliefs and prejudices – as it was the case for the judgment about the honey-moon. When a choice has to be made, argumentation comes into play.

“Argumentation and critical decision making describes a process by which you seek the best possible choices within a context of uncertainty and ambiguity. Most of the decision making people do occurs in this context. (...) The better you use the process, the better you are at making decisions. But unless you are genuinely willing to open your mind to alternative ideas (...) and accept the inevitable uncertainty of the outcome, you cannot make critical decisions” (Rieke, Sillars & Peterson, 2005, p. 17).

A distinction needs to be done between two types of decision-making. The shared opinion my husband and I formed on our honey-moon is about an event of the past, while the resolution about our next vacation concerns events of the future. In both cases a decision has been taken, but while in the first case the decision had an essential cognitive component, since we had to construct a *cognitive judgment* about a past event, in the second case, the decision was oriented towards the realization of an action, and thus we had to construct a *practical judgment* to lead our actions. Decision-making shall be, therefore, distinguished as *cognitive decision-making*, which brings a person to the adoption of a standpoint, and *practical decision-making*, which presupposes the activation of the person’s will towards the realization of an action (Greco Morasso, 2011). In ordinary

language, when we speak of decision-making, we normally refer to the second type, that is to a practical reasoning which leads to perform a certain action.

Decision-making is constituted by two steps: critical thinking and dialectic. *Critical thinking* is a personal phase, a sort of internal dialogue, where decisions are put to a critical test, trying to identify potential weaknesses, evaluate alternatives and imagine consequences. In cognitive decision-making, the personal moment consists in the adhesion to a certain opinion, in a personal commitment to have a certain belief, while in practical decision-making it asks to engage in a critical process whose result is the decision to make a certain action. *Dialectic* refers, instead, to the social dimension of argumentative practices: it is an external, social dialogue in which one seeks to come to an understanding and a resolution interacting with other people, learning by them and being open to change one's own mind (Rieke, Sillars & Peterson, 2005). In cognitive decision-making, the dialectic moment consists of the social commitment to defend the opinion to which one has adhered, while in practical decision-making, it corresponds to the resolution of performing a certain action, either at an individual or at a group level, to pursue a certain goal, and to accept its consequences.

To understand the factors driving someone to action, one needs to refer to a theory of action, and to consider controversial concepts as intention, willingness and desire, that is a task which goes beyond the goals of this research. I will briefly discuss the dynamics of decision-making tackling the concept of *plan*, for evaluating the adequacy and the desirability of an action, and broadly the concepts of *need* and *desire*, for explaining the selection of the criteria used for decision-making.

According to the decision-theoretic model (Skyrms, 1980; Jeffrey, 1983; Hargreaves, 1992), decisions can be explained in terms of maximum expected utility, that is, given a set of alternatives, a rational agent is expected to choose the one which ensures the maximum outcome. In this model, however, the agent is considered to decide what to do one act at a time, and the evaluation of the expected utility of an alternative is calculated locally, without considering the general plan where the action is embedded (Perez-Miranda, 1997). The principle of maximum-utility, then, is neither the only nor the primary motor which moves agents to action. "It may be rational to do something that, while quite satisfactory, does not maximize one's expected utility. Even if these processes involve simplifications, heuristics, or rules of thumb (...) it is not unreasonable to rely upon such approximation methods" (Perez-Miranda, 1997, pp. 436-437). Actions are directed towards the realization of *specific goals*, and deciding (to act) is beginning to pursue such goals. An action, then, may be one step in a longer causal chain aimed at pursuing one goal: each action at each step has its sub-goals, all of them aiming together towards that main goal.

Before and during our honey-moon, my husband and I had to take a series of decisions and engage in a series of actions, pursuing specific sub-goals time after time: booking accommodations to arrive at places and be sure to have a room to stay, collecting information on the places we wanted to visit to appreciate them more, calculating the routes beforehand to avoid losing time wandering here and there. According to the theory of planned-based rationality proposed by Perez-Miranda to explain practical decision-making, to calculate the value of an action (i.e. of a decision), the general *plan* where the action is embedded has to be taken into account. A theory of practical reasoning, thus, should incorporate the idea of plan and thinking to rational agents as planning systems. The concept of plan here, has to be understood within the concept of intention, that is defined as the result of the interaction between goals adoption and plan selection. Taking the example of the honey-moon, the goal my husband and myself pursued was rather specific: we wanted to do a short trip visiting cultural sites, without travelling too far from our place and being as autonomous as possible; therefore, we selected a travel plan that seemed to suit this goal the most; our intention was, as a result, to drive to a couple of historical cities in the close region of Tuscany and visit their historical sites. Even if one's actions are not performed as a main part of a calculated plan, they are always carried out on the basis of beliefs, expectations and dispositions, so that each action has to be considered as part of a broader personal plan aiming at achieving a certain goal (Perez-Miranda, 1997). "Critical decision making includes ultimately the willingness to make an act upon your decision, knowing that you may later regret it, or knowing, like President Truman, that history might condemn you more than a half-century later" (p. 23).

Decision is strictly bound to the dynamic of wanting, since to have a goal means to want something. An agent may *want* something either because she needs it or because she desires it. The identification of such a *need* or *desire* gives an answer to the question on the reason why an action has been performed (Greco-Morasso, 2011). Different goals, then, may satisfy the same desire: the desire to spend the week-end relaxing from work can be reached by organizing a trip out, by reading a book on the sofa, or by inviting friends to come over. A *set of criteria*, therefore, has to be applied to choose, among different objectives, the one that will be pursued to satisfy a certain need or desire. Criteria for decision-making depends on the type of decision to be made, on internal variables like personal beliefs and expectation, on external variables like time or space constraints and involvement of other decision-makers. In the field of tourism, the set of criteria for decision-making is defined principally by the characteristics of the tourism product, as it will be shown in the next section.

Another dimension to be taken into account for explaining the decision-making process is the *subjective hierarchy of desires*. According to the place a desire takes up in a person's hierarchy, the weight she attributes to the objective satisfying that desire is different. In my case, since one of my higher wishes is to buy a house to live in with my family, the desire I have to go on holiday to a nice place next summer has to be assessed against it and I have to set my objectives accordingly. As my main objective is to spare money on the long term goal to buy a house, the objective to find a beautiful place to spend the holidays must be reconsidered: either I will choose a close destination and a short holiday, or I will forgo spending my holidays away of my home

In order to be able to compare alternative choices and take the decision that appears to best satisfy needs or desires, the completeness of the *information* available is crucial. "The more information we have during plan adoption, the more stability the sequences of actions of this plan will have during its execution" (Perez-Miranda, 1997, p. 442). This is even more the case for high-risk decisions, as a travel decision can be considered because of the inherent characteristics of the tourism product, as it will be discussed in the next section.

## 1.2 Decision-making in tourism

### 1.2.1 Characteristics of the tourism product

Tourism products are fundamentally *experiences*, but not just in the sense that they are things that can be experienced, rather in the sense that they are performances, experiences *per se* (Dann, 1976; Murphy, 1985; Smith, 1994). During my honeymoon, my husband and I spent a day visiting Orvieto, a mediaeval city in Tuscany; we went for dinner in a tavern and ate a local dish, 'spaghetti alla carbonara'. We experienced the intense flavour and taste of the spaghetti, and we even took a picture of the plate. However, spaghetti is not an experience *per se*, but rather something that we experienced in the context of our tourism experience, which comprised of the atmosphere in the tavern and its location in the old city centre, the hospitality of the host and the attitude of the other people dining there. Spaghetti alla carbonara could have also been experienced in another context, for instance we could have asked the host to prepare a take-away serve and then consumed it somewhere else, or it could have been only partially experienced, for instance giving it just a try and then deciding to eat something different.

The function of a tourism product is "the facilitation of travel and activity of individuals away from their usual home" (Smith, 1994, p. 583). If one asks of a tourist the main reason for her travel, with a high probability a very common answer would be "to relax and get away from it all" (Dann, 1976, p. 22). Another experiential product is, for



instance, a movie, which is thought to entertain people and let them share for a moment the life of the characters. This is explicit, indeed, in the mission statement of The Walt Disney Company: “we seek to develop the most creative, innovative and profitable entertainment experiences in the world”.

Smith (1994) argues that the tourism product consists of five elements which can be represented as concentric circles going from the core to the shell (Figure 1). The model acknowledges the role of human experience in the tourism product including material and organizational components – i.e. physical plant and service – as well as components of experience – hospitality, freedom of choice and involvement.

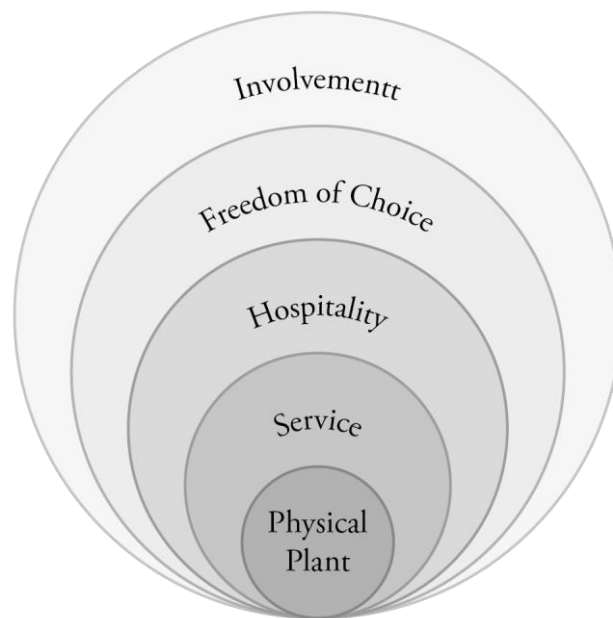


Figure 1: The generic tourism product (adapted from Smith, 1994, p. 587).

The *physical plant* is the core of any tourism product; it refers to the physical resources, like a site, a hotel, the wildlife, or to the conditions of the physical environment, such as weather or crowding of a place. The *service* is what lets the physical plant be used by tourists to meet their needs; for a site to become a tourism attraction, for instance, it needs some kind of management, maintenance and promotion. *Hospitality* refers to the attitude the service is provided with, and can be considered an expression of welcome by local residents. The tourism product – i.e. one’s tourism experience – will be different if the hotel staff behaves friendly and welcoming to the tourist, or if they show an indifferent and reluctant attitude towards his/her requests. For a tourism experience to meet the expectations and needs of the tourist, there has to be an acceptable range of

options among which to choose. The degree of *freedom of choice* varies according to the traveller's budget, previous experience, expectations, types of travel, and so on, but it represents, in any case, an important element for the success of the tourism experience, since tourism-related decisions in whatever stage of the travel – and even in the most rigid business trip – are moulded on the traveller's characteristics. The last element of the model is the tourist's *involvement* in the delivery of services. It does not only include physical participation, but more than that the personal engagement and focus on the activities important to the purpose of the trip. During my honeymoon dining experience in the Orvieto tavern, involvement meant to strike up a conversation with the host, to enjoy food without being aware of the time spent dining and to enjoy the outside panorama of the Medieval town. Going from the centre to the shell of the circular model, there is a decline of direct management control, an increase of consumer involvement, an increase of intangibility and a decrease of potential for empirical measurement. The five elements are strictly correlated, and the tourism product is more than the sum of its parts. The more each element is integrated with the others, the greater is the success of the product to meet the needs of tourists.

The fact that the tourism product is an experience determines its main characteristic: *intangibility*. It is not a physical object, and therefore it cannot be viewed or trialled prior to purchase. Intangibility implies that the value offered by tourism service providers or the value of a self-organized trip is difficult to evaluate in advance (Sirakaya & Woodside, 2005; Ballantyne et al., 2009). In the second place, tourism products are *heterogeneous*, since they differ substantially across providers; in order to effectively compare different alternatives, one has to be clear about the personal set of criteria and hierarchy of desires and, nonetheless, deciding which one to purchase requires considerable time and effort. The third characteristic is *inseparability*; according to Sirakaya and Woodside (2005), it represents the fact that in tourism purchase and consumption occur at the same time. However, most of the time it is possible to buy a tourism product as a night-stay in a hotel or dining in a restaurant and pay before or, sometimes, after the consumption. I would, therefore, explain the *inseparability* of tourism products as the fact that the travel experience cannot be cut into pieces and consumed in different times and locations, but once it has started, if the planned process is interrupted, it cannot be resumed. Tourism products, then, are *perishable*, because they cannot be stored and consumed at a later point in time, and they do not hold over time except in the memory of the tourist. In the end, tourism products tend to be *expensive* and do not give a return on investment except souvenirs (Ballantyne et al., 2009).

The outcome of decisions concerning tourism products, thus, can hardly be foreseen and cannot be substantially changed; for this reason, they represent *high risk decisions*. Since perceived risk and extent of information search are positively correlated, the ultimate choice about a tourism product depends, from one side, on the quantity and quality of information available (Fodness & Murray, 1997, 1999; Snepenger et al., 1990) and, from the other side, on the criteria adopted and goals pursued. In the next section I will approach the discussion about the factors driving tourism decision-making, which represents a topic of great interest in the field.

### 1.2.2 Factors driving tourism decision-making

The issue of the identification of factors driving travel decision-making and the relationship among them has been investigated from different points of view, mainly relying on psychological models for explaining consumer behaviour, and emphasizing the role either of internal (i.e. psychological) or external (i.e. environmental) variables. Interactions among such variables have been mostly modelled according to individual ‘decision-making styles’ (Sirakaya and Woodside, 2004). A *decision-making style* can be defined as “the learned, habitual response pattern exhibited by an individual when confronted with a decision situation. It is not a personality trait, but a habit-based propensity to react in a certain way in a specific decision context.” (Scott & Bruce, 1995, p. 820). The classification of decision-making styles has been mainly a matter of cognitive sciences, but most of the studies on the topic remain on a conceptual level (Harren, 1979; Phillips et al., 1984; Hunt et al., 1989). It was thanks to Scott and Bruce (1995) that a generally, psychometrically sound instrument for measuring decision style was developed and validated, taking into consideration all relevant factors. They identified five decision styles on the base of previous literature and of their empirical study: rational, intuitive, dependent, avoidant and spontaneous. Findings showed, in addition, that decision-making styles are neither context dependent nor problem specific. Rather they are reflective of individual cognitive style and that people use a combination of decision-making styles in making important decisions.

A methodology for specifically profiling *consumers’ decision-making style* had been proposed some years before by Sproles and Kendall (1986). They built on the assumption that consumers use a variety of decision-making styles, although they can be categorized according to one prominent style. Consumer decision-making style is: “a mental orientation characterizing a consumer’s approach to making choices. [...] it is a basic consumer personality, analogous to the concept of personality in psychology.” (Sproles & Kendal, 1986, p. 268). They conceptualized and measured eight basic characteristics of such styles by developing a Consumer Styles Inventory: perfectionism or high-quality consciousness, brand consciousness, novelty-fashion consciousness, recreational

hedonistic, shopping consciousness, impulsiveness, confusion from over-choice and habitual brand-loyal orientation towards consumption. Findings confirmed that many consumers have patterns of one or two dominant characteristics and that a consumer may have different consumer styles for different product categories.

The profiles of individual and consumers' decision-making styles modelled by Scott and Bruce (1995) and by Sproles and Kendall (1986) represent a base for developing marketing segmentation strategies, as well as for educating clients about their mental approaches to decision-making and for helping individuals to meet their goals as consumers. When it comes to tourism products, however, other elements than personal decision-making styles have to be considered.

Sirakaya and Woodside (2004) undertook a comprehensive review of tourism literature tackling the issue of decision-making and describing the trends in the development of models, which they claim are mainly based on the "grand models" of decision-making in consumer research. The authors critically discuss strong and weak elements of the models presented: they do not provide a meta-analysis of such models, that is they do not combine findings to draw conclusions about the overall association among variables, but rather they build a *meta-theory*, that is a set of associated propositions based on prior models, to drive the development of further theories. The main criticism that Sirakaya and Woodside make to the models developed so far for explaining travel decision-making, is that many of them do not move beyond borrowing the main concepts from the grand models of decision-making in consumer research. The grand models, however, were built to explain decision-making for manufactured products, which are fundamentally different from tourism products. Tourism decision-making, in fact, reflects the unique characteristics of tourism products, that are intangibility, heterogeneity, inseparability, perishability and high cost.

Besides that, travel decision-making has to be seen not as a static behaviour but rather as a process which follows temporal, dynamic, successive and multistage contingent steps (Vogt & Fesenmaier, 1998). Decisions have to be taken at different levels of the travel planning: *core decision* refers to the destination to visit; *secondary decisions* include the selection of secondary destinations close to the main one, activities to do and attractions to visit, types of accommodation and trip route. Secondary decisions are usually considered before the trip, but are likely to be finalized once at the destination and adapted to the circumstances. There are, finally, the so-called *en route decisions*, that are the 'decisions on the go', to be taken during the travel experience, like where to eat, which events to attend and where to go shopping. The *specificity* of the travel decision to be taken determines the decision frame that guides the decision-making process of tourists (Gretzel et al., 2006). Jeng and Fesenmaier (2000, 2002) elaborated a model of

trip decision called *Travel Decision Net Model* where the decision-making process is represented as a net structure: one sub-decision relates directly or indirectly to all other sub-decisions and, as a consequence, a change in a sub-decision may influence other sub-decisions. In the case of my honey-moon, once my husband and I agreed to spend our time visiting some cultural destinations in Tuscany, we decided the type of accommodations and the trip route; then, day after day, we collected information among local people and made decisions on the hotels to book, the restaurants to dine at and the attractions to see. Before leaving for our honey-moon, then, we planned to spend two days in Siena, but many people we met recommended for us to visit Civita di Bagno Regio, that is a Medieval town in Viterbo province, built on a tuff hill, and accessible only through a long narrow bridge. This change to our itinerary led to a series of other changes: we had to forego visiting a number of attractions in Siena, we had to collect information about Civita di Bagno Regio at its location (while usually we prefer to learn about the destination beforehand) and we had to call the B&B in Siena telling that we would be arriving late in the evening instead that in the morning. From the other side, though, we had an opportunity to taste polenta with boar sauce, which is a typical local dish.

At each stage of the travel decision process, one needs to make a comparison among alternative opportunities on the base of the information at hand and the needs or desires she has. The search for information can be considered a first ‘selection’ of information and, thus, the first step in the decision process, since one moulds her search strategy according to her goals. In the next section, the variables at play in the tourism information search will be discussed.

### **1.3 Tourism information search**

From a consumer behaviour perspective, information search is defined as “the motivated activation of knowledge stored in memory or acquisition of information from the environment” (Engel et al., 1995). This definition suggests that the search can be either internal or external. *Internal search* is the retrieval and processing of knowledge from memory, while *external search* is the set of activities performed for collecting information from the different sources available in the environment. Both kinds of searches have been considered in the literature, although past research has focused mainly on the elements which shape external search strategies, such as aspects of the environment, situational variables, consumer and product characteristics (Srinivasan, 1990; Schmidt & Spreng, 1996).

#### **1.3.1 Models of tourism information search and variables interplay**

One of the most influential models in the field of consumer behaviour and marketing for describing tourists’ information search behaviour has been developed by Fodness

and Murray (1999). They examined, for the first time, the correlates of tourists' choices of information sources, building on the assumption that the combination of information sources represents tourists' information search strategies. According to their model (Figure 2), there are at least three strategies for information search: the spatial strategy, which reflects the focus of search activity (internal or external); the temporal one, which represents the timing of search activity (ongoing or pre-purchase); the operational strategy, which concerns the conduct of search and the sources used (contributory or decisive).

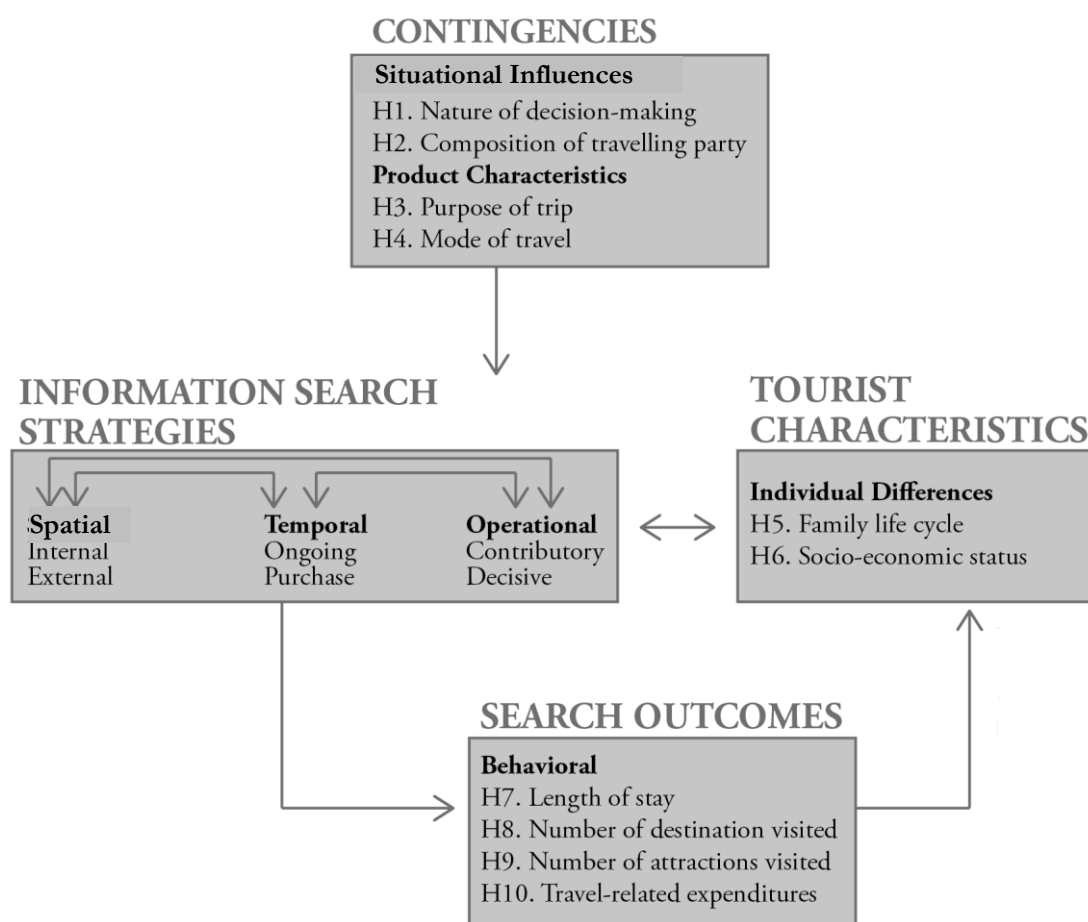


Figure 2 Model of the tourism information search strategy process (adapted from Fodness and Murray, 1999 p. 221).

The model posits that the choice of the information search strategy is determined by the interrelation of three dimensions: *search contingencies*, that are the nature of the decision-making, travelling party composition, purpose of trip and mode of travel; *tourist characteristics*, in particular family life cycle and socio-economic status; and *expected search*

*outcomes*, which are related to the length of stay, the number of destinations and attractions visited and travel-related expenditures. In the study, relations among each factor belonging to the three dimensions and the information search pattern were tested. It transpired that all the relations, except for the family life cycle, are significant and actually determine the choice of information search strategy. That is to say that the information search strategy adopted by a prospective tourist will get a different configuration if the decision to take will be a routine one, like visiting friends, or if it requires extensive problem-solving, like in the case of a long journey to a new destination (nature of the decision-making); if she will travel alone or with a group of friends (travelling party composition); if she travels for business or for pleasure (purpose of trip); if she takes an airplane or drives (mode of travel); if she can afford luxury trips or has to travel on a budget (socio-economic status); if she is planning a long stay or a quick one (length of stay); if the destination to be visited offers a wide range of attractions and if the tourist is willing to take advantage of them (number of destinations visited and travel-related expenditures). Fodness and Murray's contribution to the topic of tourist information search behaviour has been regarded as decisive; as they themselves state the "research represent a much-needed contribution to the literature in terms of 'who, what, when, where and how' of tourist information search" (1999, p. 230). Nonetheless, they acknowledge that "it is an incomplete model, as it is missing what is perhaps its most useful and interesting element, 'why'", that is to say that the model does not include the factors, which may explain the motivations for engaging in tourism information search.

Studies have shown that people search for travel related information not only to make more conscious travel decisions but they may have other leisure and recreation-based motivations, such as information for social, entertainment, visual and creativity purposes (Hirschman, 1980, 1984; Hirschman & Holbrook, 1982; Williams et al., 1992). Vogt and Fesenmaier (1998) proposed an expanded model of information needs (Figure 3) including functional, hedonic, innovation, aesthetic and sign motives, and developed a reliable scale to measure such needs. Findings showed that travel-related information is collected mainly, but not only, for *functional needs*, that is for increasing product knowledge, reducing uncertainty, making comparisons and considering different aspects of the product. However, other kinds of information needs arose, representing additional motivations. A tourist may search for information before the journey for *innovation needs*, that is for finding out opportunities for novel or diverse experiences; she may have *aesthetic needs*, where she sees information as a stimulus to visual thinking, imagery and envisioning a place that is real and obtainable; she may be led by *hedonic needs* that are represented by the excitement and pleasure experience that accompany

consumption. However, the plethora of needs driving the search for information is directed, ultimately, towards the goal of shaping a personal unique travel experience.

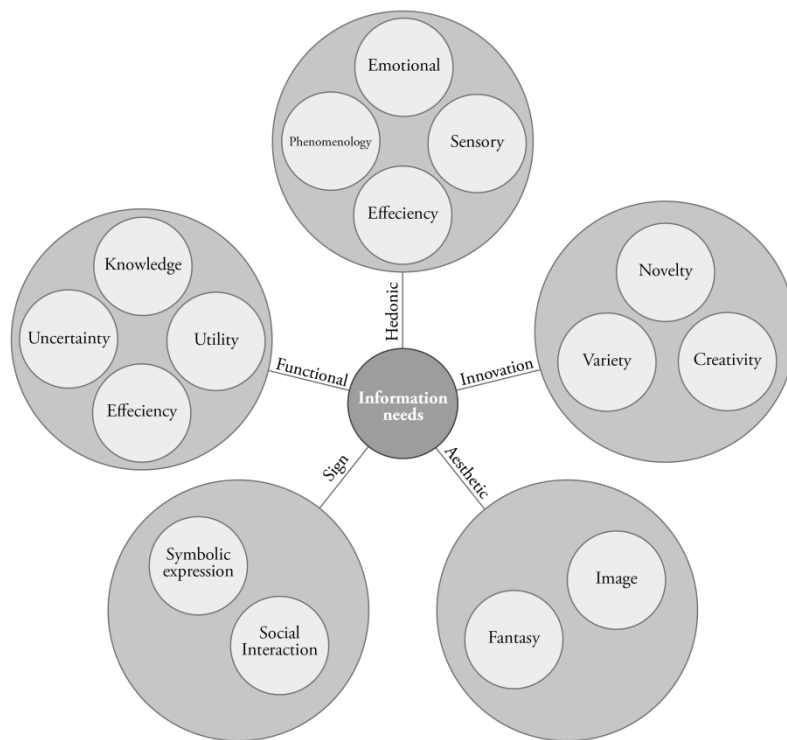


Figure 3: Model of Information Needs (adapted from Vogt and Fesenmaier, 1998, p. 555).

The topic of how tourists hunt for pre-purchase information has been one of the most examined in tourism marketing, and past research has focused on developing typologies of factors that are likely to influence external search strategies (Schmidt and Spreng 1996). Gursoy and McCleary (2004) identified three major theoretical streams of consumer information search literature: the psychological/motivational, the economics, and the information processing approach. They made an attempt to unify the three different approaches, developing a theoretical model that integrates their main constructs. The model incorporates 21 theoretical propositions, which intend to provide bases and directions for future studies. The strength of their model is that it is based on an extensive review of published research; its weakness, however, is that it has not been empirically tested, so it cannot confirm or disconfirm the existence of the relationships proposed. The model stresses the influence of *prior product knowledge* on search behaviour strategies, arguing that most of the effects of the other variables are mediated by this



factor. Prior product knowledge has a significant influence on decision-making process because it enables the tourist to evaluate the attractiveness of a destination by retrieving, from personal experience or acquired knowledge, information related to the destination attributes and touristic value. In fact, whatever destination one chooses, she is implicitly selecting some advantages and deciding to bear some disadvantages. “One could say that each touristic destination has different positive and negative traits and, say, one ‘best feature’ or ‘touristic value’” (De Ascaniis & Greco Morasso, 2011, p. 134). Prior product knowledge is argued to have two components: *familiarity* and *expertise*. Familiarity is a subjective knowledge referring to what a consumer thinks she knows about the product, and it results from ongoing search activities such as advertising exposure, talking to friends and reading guide-books. The report of others’ experience with the same product/service increases familiarity because the consumer can easily put herself in their shoes, and guess her personal future experience. Expertise is, instead, a rather objective knowledge of the product and refers to the ability to perform product-related tasks; it is the result of advertising exposure, information search and purchasing. Gursoy and McCleary (2004) suggest that, in order to develop effective communication strategies, destination managers should differentiate communication according to different information source utilization patterns. Expert tourists, for instance, look for detailed information about the destination’s attributes, while unfamiliar tourists, since they have a limited ability to process product related information, are likely to rely on word-of-mouth. Then, “because positive word-of-mouth is the result of satisfaction, special attention needs to be given to customer satisfaction and complaint handling” (Gursoy & McCleary, 2004, p. 368).

In high-risk decisions, indeed, word-of-mouth represents a more influential source of information than impersonal or official media sources (Murphy, Mascardo & Benckendorff, 2007); because of their perceived high reliability, they play a major role for customers’ buying decisions (Richins & Root-Shaffer, 1988), and are considered to reduce the risk of deceptions (Dellarocas, 2003). Word-Of-Mouth (WOM) from friends and relatives are the most commonly used information source for travellers before they make a travel decision (Bieger & Laesser, 2004), and are a major information source for en-route decisions. Therefore, looking at the type and content of the information that is spread through word-of-mouth is of pivotal importance to understanding people’s decisions.

Today, the Internet provides easy access to word-of-mouth discourses about almost every kind of consumer and experiential goods. Its role in tourism information search and selection is the topic of the next section.

### 1.3.2 The role of the Internet in tourism information search

The role of the Internet in tourism information seeking behaviour has been specifically considered by a study of Pan and Fesenmaier (2006) who denounced the fact that the Internet had been ignored for a long time as a proper source of information search. Their study explored in detail the micro-level process of vacation planning on the Internet, complementing the many previous studies focusing on the macro-level dynamics of consumers'/tourists' information search (that is: needs, determinants, antecedents and outcomes of the search) (Snepenger et al., 1990; Fodness & Murray, 1997, 1999; Vogt & Fesenmaier, 1998). They looked at the information processing and decision behaviour involved in vacation planning, trying to answer questions like: how does a tourist move from one website to another, once she has decided to use the Internet as a source for vacation planning? How does she shift from one choice to another? The study comprised two steps. In the first one, they investigated personal micro-level structures of online travel planning by generating unique navigation graphs for each participant, on the base of a search protocol derived from the triangulation of different sets of data (verbalization of thoughts throughout the vacation planning exercise, screen activities, websites visited, facial expressions and movements). It came out that the complex trip-planning problem was dealt with by the participants in different "chapters", representing one decision and sub-problem, each of which could be further divided into individual "episodes", which represent the evaluation of alternative solutions for each sub-problem. In the second phase of the study, the semantic models of the subjects involved were generated, analysing the pre-exercise interviews where they were asked to describe the destination; then, these semantic models were compared with the semantic model of the online space of the destination. It emerged, not surprisingly, that every subject had a unique and idiosyncratic mental model. The online space – that refers to all the websites which are related to a certain domain and can be potentially – accessed resulted to be huge and highly diversified. The comparison identified important similarities and differences between the language used and the way a destination is conceptualized by the industry and by potential tourists. While the semantic model of the former ones is more marketing-oriented, emphasizing concepts related to price and promotion of quality, tourists' semantic mental models include more experiential and subjective concepts.

A later study by Xiang, Gretzel and Fesenmaier (2008) arrived to similar results. Their aim was to understand if the information provided on tourism-related websites matches with the current information needs of travellers. They compared the language used by tourism websites to the one emerging from user queries. They counted the respective word frequencies and the proximity among words, and found out a relevant discrepancy between the two domains' ontologies. Understanding the language used by tourists is,

indeed, precious for promotion, marketing, and social control (Xiang, Wöber & Fesenmaier, 2008).

The findings of Pan and Fesenmaier's study (2006) confirmed that online vacation planning is a complex, dynamic and contingent process; it has several facets that have to be considered by processing the information retrieved time by time, and it is unique like each person is unique. A model of the structure of vacation planning on the Internet is the base for understanding tourists' online search behaviour and for fulfilling their information needs. However, it has yet to be clarified which criteria push a tourist from one "chapter" to another, that is to understand when a tourist considers she has enough information to make the decision and, thus, to go on approaching the next problem.

In addition, semantic models highlighted that potential tourists and marketers rely upon different criteria to choose the destination to visit or the activities and attractions to enjoy. It is still unclear what such criteria are, how diverse they are and if it makes sense to segment tourists on the base of the criteria they use. Are these criteria revealing of different 'tourism cultures'?

### 1.3.3 Interaction between users and the online space

In the model proposed by Pan and Fesenmaier (2006), tourists' planning on the Internet is viewed as the interaction between users and the online space. According to them, the online space of tourism domain is "the part of the Web related to the tourism industry and to destinations. The space contains different types of content provided by different parties, along with technology professionals, in order to market products and communicate with tourists." (Pan & Fesenmaier, 2006, p. 813). It comprises both industry created content, like official destination promotional websites or booking engines, and user generated content, like travel reviews or blogs. The concept of online space is related to the online representation of a certain domain, which is made up of all the accessible websites concerning that domain, representing the online accessible knowledge about the domain. From an information perspective, a *domain* is the collection of all the entities about a specific subject (Hjørland & Albrechtsen, 1995). Thus, the domain of tourism comprises all the entities related to travel and hospitality, which can be seen as bundles of activities, services and benefits constituting the entire tourism experience (Medlik & Middleton, 1973). Since the Internet has grown to become the largest collection of human knowledge, it is appropriate to speak about *online domains*, that is, online representations of actual knowledge domains. A question that needs to be answered in order to understand tourists' search for information, is how the tourism domain is represented on the Internet. Xiang, Wöber and Fesenmaier (2008) have focused attention on this issue, arguing that its understanding is necessary for organizing and representing travel and tourism products in a meaningful way to

support travel information search. Since online information search is mainly approached using search engines, they studied the representation of online tourism domain analysing search results from a major search engine, i.e. Google. Search engines represent online domains mainly on the base of ranking and position of search results (Spink & Jansen, 2004); only a small portion of web pages can, however, be accessed through the search engine, if compared to the total number of indexed pages (Pan et al., 2007). This means that search engines actually define the practical boundaries of the online domain (Xiang & Fesenmaier, 2005; Henzinger, 2007). Therefore, there were three main questions the study of Xiang et al. (2008) aimed at answering: a) what is the size of the tourism domain on a search engine? b) how many search results can be accessed by users on the base of a specific query? c) What websites are the most represented? The study demonstrated the so-called 'thin interface effect', which refers to the fact that the actual size of an online domain – of the tourism domain in this case – that is made visible and accessible to the users is only a small fraction of the total number of indexed – i.e. potentially relevant – web pages. Search engines tend to over-represent a small number of websites which gain the role of dominant players among the web pages, especially in the first page of search results. As it regards the online tourism domain, the most represented websites were: portals and information aggregators, such as Yahoo! Travel and citysearch.com, destination marketing organization's websites and government websites (ex. cityofnewyork.org). Given the increasing availability of Web 2.0 technologies (Cantoni & Tardini, 2010), which enable users to create their own online content, the authors suggest that it is time to develop technologies to facilitate and enhance the travel search experience among these content types, which constitute a relevant part of the online tourism domain. This becomes even more necessary if the information provided by tourism related websites is compared to travellers' information needs, which have been shown to be quite different (Xiang, Gretzel & Fesenmaier, 2009).

Travellers' information needs are expressed through searches conducted online, especially by travellers' use of search engines; a query, in fact, can be seen as the expression of the user's information needs in the context of a search task (Xiang, Gretzel & Fesenmaier, 2009). The representation of the tourism domain through search engines results corresponds to the domain knowledge provided by the supply ontology, while the queries people use to search for information correspond to the demand ontology. Comparisons between the ontologies of the two sides indicated that the supply side does not reflect certain aspects of the demand side: there is a substantial number of travellers' query terms that are not captured by the semantic representation of the online tourism domain made by tourism-related websites. The two semantic ontologies are structurally different, in that while the supply ontology aims to promote

business by using persuasive words like “best” or “deal” or “famous”, the demand ontology focuses on product attributes such as location and price and on information about specific businesses or facts (Xiang, Gretzel & Fesenmaier, 2009).

#### **1.3.4 The role of social media in tourism information search**

Social media are nowadays playing an increasingly important role as information sources for travellers and represent a growing facet of the online tourism domain. They support, in fact, the creation and spread of User Generated Content (UGC) of different types. Xiang and Gretzel (2010) asked what is what is the likely outcome when a traveller is exposed to social media websites, and investigated the representation of social media website as part of the online tourism domain. They argued that the relationship between search engines and social media is particularly interesting because “first, social media are updated frequently, which ‘invites’ search engines to index social media pages more frequently. Second, social media, due to their very nature of being socially constructed, usually include a lot of hyperlinks, which will influence their ranking within search results in a positive way” (Xiang & Gretzel, 2010, p. 181). They defined a set of keywords in combination with a group of selected destinations in the United States to form queries to search Google. Findings showed that:

- almost every Google search result page had a reference to a social media website, suggesting that the size of these kinds of websites is quite substantial, they provide updated and relevant content, and have a complex link structure with other websites;
- the distribution of unique domain names among social media websites had the shape of a steep curve with a long tail, meaning that social media represented by Google are dominated by a handful of ‘big players’, while the remaining websites occur only a few times. The most popular social media website was the review site tripadvisor.com, followed by virtualtourist.com and igougo.com, which are two worldwide travel communities;
- certain keywords were likely to generate more social media results as compared to others, meaning that consumers tend to produce more online content on certain activities, like nightlife and eating.

A previous study where Inversini, Cantoni and Buhalis (2009) considered the information market available online for travellers visiting the city of Bath, UK, obtained similar results. They divided online tourism information sources in official sources (Brick and Mortar Organizations) and unofficial sources (mere Online Organizations and Individual websites), and found that they are equally important as it regards their search engine ranking, and that most of the unofficial websites are constituted by UGC.

In addition, official sources utilized mostly factual arguments and positive value judgements to promote the destination, while unofficial sources used both of factual and emotional arguments, and to express different value judgements.

This research considers one of the prevalent unofficial sources of tourism related information, that are Online Travel Reviews, adopting a communication perspective and pursuing a descriptive analytic goal, as I will explain in the next section.

## 1.4 Research question and research goals

### 1.4.1 Perspective on communication

Although the object of investigation of this research – i.e. Online Travel Reviews – is represented mainly by textual artifacts, to rely on text analysis to give an account of it seems to be reductive. A text is, in fact, created and received in a context, according to the goals of an addresser, in view of an audience, using a code for conveying the meaning and a channel for its physical transmission. This research adopts a perspective on communication which considers language as a *social action* and texts as artefacts conceived with a purpose, that is for producing an effect on the social reality shared by the producer and the receiver. According to such perspective, if one wants to understand the meaning of a text, she needs to go beyond what is literally said and consider all the other elements of the communicative event. The *meaning* of an utterance corresponds, here, to its intended effect, and the meaning of a text corresponds to the overall intended change the text has been conceived to bring in the intersubjectivity of the interlocutors.

This perspective on communication relies, mainly, on the notion of *speech act*, which was elaborated by the philosopher J. L. Austin in the essay *How to do things with words* (1962), although it can be already found, with substantial differences, in the works of Gottlob Frege Karl Bühler and Émile Benveniste. Benveniste deserves a special mention, because he was among the first authors to refute the behavioural linguistic interpretation of human speech, which reduced it to a stimulus-response system; his masterpiece, where he explains his theory of language, is “*Problèmes de linguistique générale*”, published in 1966. The notion of *speech act* had a deep influence, in the last century, in the way communication was intended: it promoted the shift from a notion of communication as a mechanic process where a message is codified by a sender and de-codified by a receiver, to a notion where the speaker’s communicative intentions represent the core of the communicative event. The notion of speech acts promoted, as well, the idea that communication is made possible by the interactions among participants (Sbisà, 1998). In his work, Austin aimed at setting a relation between language and action, between to speak and to do. He developed a proper *theory of speech acts*, with the aim of explaining in

which sense and under which conditions “to speak is to do”. This theory was later reformulated and systematized by the philosopher of language John Searle (1969), who had as historic and conceptual background the works of philosophers like Frege, Wittgenstein and Grice. Differently from Austin, Searle took for granted the relationship between language and action and investigated what people actually do when they speak (Leonardi, 2009). He claimed that a theory of language is part of a theory of action, “simply because speaking is a rule-governed form of behaviour”, and that “being rule-governed, it has formal features which admit of independent study” (p. 15). A study of the formal rules of language, however, would not be enough to understand language; it needs to study the role of such rules in the performing of speech acts, that is, in the actions actually performed through language. In fact, “speaking a language is performing speech acts, acts such as making statements, giving commands, asking questions, making promises, and so on; (...) these acts are in general made possible by and performed in accordance with certain rules for the use of linguistic elements” (Searle, 1969, p. 16).

Searle’s version of the speech act theory constitutes a conceptual framework for describing and understanding the different types of speech acts and will constitute an essential part of the theoretical background I will adopt for the investigation of my research object.

Another essential element of the theoretical background framing my research is constituted by *Congruity Theory* (Rigotti, 2005; Rocci, 2005; Rigotti & Rocci, 2006a), that is a theory of meaning and discourse organization, which provides the necessary conceptual instruments to tackle both the semantic and the pragmatic aspects of discourse. Congruity theory adopts the same perspective on communication as the Speech Acts Theory, considering texts as actions made to reach specific aims towards specific social agents. However, it goes beyond the Speech Acts Theory, in that it helps to identify the functions of the utterances within the whole text.

I will give a more complete account of both theories in the methodological chapter (Chapter 3). The few key elements I mentioned here were just necessary to understand the extent and implications of the research question I want to answer.

#### 1.4.2 Research question

The study reported in this dissertation aims at answering the following question:

##### **Which kind of communicative event is an Online Travel Review?**

The answer will be provided as a result of a textual analysis of a corpus of Online Travel Reviews (OTR), developed on the base of a theory of human speech, which allows to take into account all the elements at play in a communicative event.

I will define the communicative event, Online Travel Review, both extensively and intensively. The *extension* of a concept is the class of objects that come to mind when one refers to that concept. The *intension* of a concept is the set of properties which characterize it univocally. Intension and extension are in inverse proportion to one another: the greater the extension of a concept the lowest its intension. The concept of feline, for instance, has a greater extension than the concept of cat, but it has a lower intension; the concept of cat, in fact, inherits all the properties of the concept of feline (mammalian, four legs, whiskers) and has some other specific properties (meows, tameable) (Porro, 2006, p. 5739). To give an extensional definition of OTR means to be able to identify the objects belonging to the class OTR, while to give an intensional definition it means to describe the class of objects according to its constitutive characteristics.

Online users are usually able to intuitively distinguish an OTR from other kinds of online content, even if they may not be able to explain why and under which aspects an OTR is different from other types of online content. Being an online user, I am able to intuitively identify OTR; I built, therefore, a corpus of OTR retrieved from one of the most popular websites for travel consumer reviews, that is *TripAdvisor*, and used it for defining the intension – i.e. the constitutive features – of my object of interest. The extension of the concept OTR corresponds to the class of objects that are comprised under such concept when a generic user thinks about it, while its intension is given by the set of properties that distinguish it from other concepts, as for instance from blogs and forum posts. The concept of OTR has a greater intension than the concept of User Generated Content, but has a lower extension; it inherits all the properties of User Generated Content, but has some additional specific properties. The goal of this research is to define such specific properties, that is to say what makes an OTR exactly an OTR.

### 1.4.3 Sub-questions

An OTR can be considered ‘successful’ if it reaches its (communicative) purpose. The first and primary aspect to be clarified for giving an account of the communicative event OTR is, therefore, its communicative purpose, that is the intended effect an OTR is conceived to bring in the social reality where it is produced and received. The first two sub-questions ask, thus:

- 1) Which is the communicative goal of an OTR?
- 2) Which communicative strategies are adopted to pursue such goal?



The meaning of a text is, then, conveyed through content and structure. The second and the third sub-questions are, therefore:

**3) What is an OTR about?**

**4) How is an OTR typically structured?**

An event happens and gains its meaning in a context. It is the same for communicative events. The concept of ‘context’ is as intuitive as misused; it is frequently employed to denote different objects with an unclear extension and also an unclear intension. The context I refer to in my investigation comprises: the *technological environment* where an OTR is published and received, that is the online environment and, in particular, web 2.0; the *cultural references* backing the reviewer’s report, which have to be recognized by the reader for making the right pragmatic inferences from the text; and the reviewer’s *individual constellation* of beliefs, principles, values that permeate the report of her experience, and that are compared by the reader to her own constellation of beliefs, principles, values in the selection of the information she needs. Cultural context and individual context together shape the set of implicit premises people consciously or unconsciously rely on for developing opinions and making decisions. The sub-question concerning contextual aspects of OTRs is:

**5) Which elements of the technological context, cultural context and individual context have to be taken into account to analyze OTR?**

Next chapter will present a literature review of the studies that have considered, so far, travel-related User Generated Content and in particular Online Travel Reviews. The aim is to learn as much as possible about my object of interest and to identify knowledge gaps or unsolved problems, to which this research might give some solutions.

## 2 Communicative functions of tourism-related User Generated Content

*In chapter 2, the literature which has tourism-related User Generated Content as its research object is reviewed and critically presented.*

*In the first section (2.1 and sub- section 2.1.1) inclusion and exclusion criteria are defined, on the base of the Model of Communication of Roman Jakobson, which also represents the rationale for classifying and discussing the reviewed studies. Jakobson distinguished six elements in a communicative event, each of them can be associated to a communicative function. Each study in the literature review will be classified according to the element of communication it stresses the most while dealing with tourism-related UGC. The most discussed issues around each element are then highlighted and discussed.*

*The first element in a communicative event to be taken into account is the addresser (section 2.2). Literature on this topic covers two main issues: motivations for writing (sub- section 2.2.1) and personal characteristics of authors (sub- section 2.2.2).*

*As far as the addressee is concerned (section 2.3), the most discussed issues regard the credibility of electronic-Word-Of-Mouth (sub- section 2.3.1) and their role and impact on travellers' decisions (sub- section 2.3.2).*

*The element context is addressed in section 2.4, paying attention to the methods employed to analyze UGC content and the nature of the content analyzed. Literature is classified according to three groups: studies aimed at characterizing personal travel experiences (sub- section 2.4.1), those which tried to grasp the image tourists build of a destination through UGC (sub- section 2.4.2), and studies specifically analyzing cases of online complaints (sub- section 2.4.3).*

*Section 2.5 deals with the object that is actually exchanged in UGC communication which may be a text, a picture, a video and any other type of media supported by web 2.0 applications. Only written texts are considered here and studies analysing features of these texts are reported (sub- section 2.5.1), as well as studies discussing their role in the construction of the online image of a destination.*

*Every communication needs a channel or contact to be realized; this element is discussed according to the literature in section 2.6; it is pointed out that one channel may support many codes (sub- section 2.6.1) and that web 2.0 applications represent a new channel which businesses have to manage (sub- section 2.6.2).*

*The last element to be investigated is the code itself (section 2.7) in terms of its vocabulary (sub- section 2.7.1) and its a grammar (sub- section 2.7.2). Literature is classified accordingly.*

*In the conclusion (section 2.8), a framework is presented which is derived from the systematic review of the literature. The framework is intended to be both a sketch of the discussion developed around tourism-related UGC, and a tool for identifying the aspects that need to be tackled in order to account for such type of content.*

“(...) exploratory activities in Antarctica present an analogy to scholarly meetings: international experts in various disciplines attempt to map an unknown region and find out where the greatest obstacles for the explorer are, the insurmountable peaks and precipices.”

(R. Jakobson, *Linguistics and Poetics*, 1958)

This chapter is devoted to review the studies that have investigated, so far, the different aspects of User Generated Contents in tourism. In order to give a systematic and critical account of the literature in the field, this review will be based on the model of communication developed by Roman Jakobson to define inclusion and exclusion criteria, as well as to point out the communicative aspect of tourism-related UGC that is stressed the most in each one of the studies considered.

### 2.1 A rationale for the literature review: Jakobson's model of communication

Roman Osipovich Jakobson was a Russian linguist and literary theorist; he was, indeed, one of the most influential linguists of the 20<sup>th</sup> century. Asked for summary remarks about poetics in its relation to linguistics in a conference on style held at Indiana University in 1958, he exposed a view on the analysis of verbal communication, according to which “language must be investigated in all the variety of its *functions*” (Jakobson, 1960, p. 66). His aim was to discuss the function of poetics among the other functions of language; he, therefore, outlined these functions in a model which has the poetic function at its core. The model was mostly developed in *Linguistics and Poetics*, a paper originally presented at a conference on style held at Indiana University in the spring of 1958, then revised and published in *Style in Language*, ed. Thomas A. Sebeok (Cambridge, Mass.: MIT Press, 1960). Jakobson's model is, in fact, based on a functional idea of language: to communicate needs language, and communication is a complex event which arises in order to accomplish a certain function, like to describe an aspect of reality, to make sure to be understood by the interlocutor or to explain the meaning of a word (Rigotti & Cigada, 2004). The model starts from an identification of the constitutive *factors* in any speech event and is an extension of the model proposed by Karl Bühler for representing human communication. Bühler identified three elements, which are related in a communicative event: the *addresser*, the *addressee* and the *object* or *fact* that is communicated. The linguistic device used to communicate the object or fact has different values and functions according to each element of the communicative process: it is a *symbol* of the object or fact that is communicated, it is a *symptom* of the addresser's mood, world view, values and ideas, and it is an *appeal* to the addressee, who is called to change her mind or her behaviour or to do something (Bühler, 1983). Jakobson added to Bühler's model three more elements; each one of the six elements, then, is associated with a proper communicative function (see Figure 4). A

communication which focuses on the addresser has an *emotive* or expressive function, in that it expresses the speaker's attitude (thoughts, beliefs, knowledge) toward what she is speaking about. A person, using emotive features to indicate her attitude – as, for instance, speaking with an excited and high tone to express anger – conveys ostensible information which adds to the meaning of the message. A communication which is oriented, instead, toward the addressee, has a *conative* function (from the Latin verb *conari* = to attempt, to try to do something), to indicate the speaker's attempt to drive the hearer to do something; the addressee represents the recipient of the addresser's effort to provoke a change in the world due to her message. The object or fact to which the communication refers is called, by Jakobson, *context* and is associated with the *referential* (or denotative or cognitive) function. The context is what surrounds the communicative event, it is the universe which gives a precise meaning to the message. Jakobson observes that “though a set toward the referent (...) is the leading task of numerous messages, the accessory participation of the other functions in such messages must be taken into account by the observant linguist” (Jakobson, 1960, p. 67). The object that is actually exchanged in the communication, such as a verbal text, a sound or a gaze, is called, by Jakobson, *message*, and the communication which focuses on the message for its own sake has a *poetic* function. In verbal communication, the poetic function is stressed when attention is put on the phonic aspect of particular words, on word choice and syntax. Examples of poetic communication are poetic and literary texts, advertising and children's language. There is, then, the *channel* or *contact*, through which communication takes place, such as the telephone, a website or a letter; the channel is associated with the *phatic* function, that is when the communication is about the channel, as when during a phone call the interlocutors ask if they can hear each other; the aim is, indeed, to enable communication, to keep the channel opened. The last element identified by Jakobson is the *code*, that is the system of signs used to produce the message, such as an idiom, the music system, codified steps and figures in ballet. The function referring to the code is the *metalinguistic* function, that is the possibility for a communication to describe its communicative code. It is alternatively called “reflexive” function, to indicate that the message is aimed at discussing or describing the rules for conveying its meaning. An example of metalinguistic communication is the description of an informatics language (e.g. html). This is, actually, a unique characteristic of natural languages: the fact that they can be used to describe every other code included their own one (Cantoni & Di Blas, 2006).

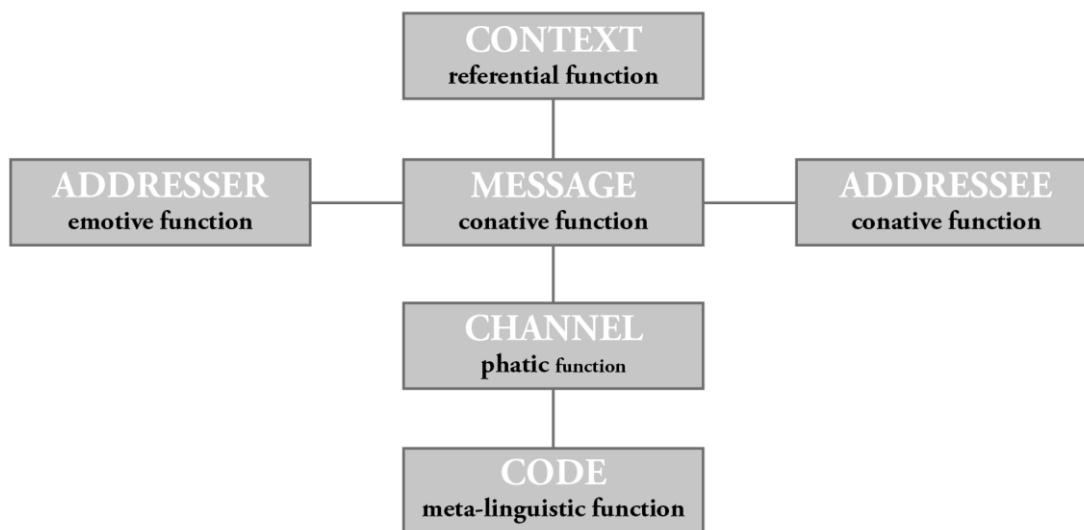


Figure 4: Jakobson's Model of communication (adapted from Jakobson, 1960, p.3).

### 2.1.1 Inclusion and exclusion criteria

The six elements of communication of Jakobson's model help to define the characteristics of the research object I am interested in and, thus, the criteria for including or excluding given studies in/from the literature review. I will consider the studies which investigated aspects of a specific type of communicative event and precisely the ones having the following characteristics:

- ✓ as *addresser*, an internet user who made a touristic experience
- ✓ as *addressee*, an internet user who is interested in information about a tourism product
- ✓ as *referent*, a touristic experience
- ✓ as *message*, a written text produced by a traveller (not by an institutional or business actor)
- ✓ as *channel*, an online platform publishing User Generated Contents
- ✓ as *code*, a historical-natural language

A note to explain what is meant by 'historical-natural language' seems to be appropriate at this point. The qualifier "historical" refers to the fact that these types of languages have been used by and developed within certain communities in a certain period of time. The qualifier "natural", instead, points out that language is one of the organic and native dimensions of human and social life, as opposed to artificial languages, which are built purposefully according to certain rules and conventions (Cantoni et al., 2008).

Some further exclusion criteria will help to narrow down the range of relevant studies to be considered in the review. Studies with the following characteristics will NOT be included studies which:

- ✓ investigated UGC using different codes than historical-natural languages, as for instance the figurative code; e.g. studies on the use of applications for photo management and sharing such as *www.flickr.com*
- ✓ had travel communities as research object (there will be included studies which analysed the content published by online travel communities)
- ✓ considered online contents published by suppliers (e.g. DMOs, institutional actors), unless they were used as a term of comparison, that is to investigate differences with contents published by independent internet users

In each one of the next six sections, an element of communication and the respective communicative function is considered, and the studies that focused mainly on that element are discussed. In the case of studies, which took into account more than one element, their contribution to the understanding of each element will be discussed in the respective section.

## **2.2 The addresser and the emotive function in UGC communication**

Despite the fact that the presence of UGC on the Internet is growing incredibly fast, the number of actual creators is far less than the number of readers, with the majority of UGC being created by a small portion of Internet users (Yoo & Gretzel, 2008a). The question concerning motivations and identity of UGC creators, thus, becomes particularly interesting. From a sociological point of view, reasons for writing and characteristics of writers may explain social behaviours related to UGC engagement (Yoo & Gretzel, 2011) and can shed light on people's interaction with digital media; from a communication perspective, then, understanding who is the writer is pivotal to understand her message.

In this section, studies whose focus of investigation was the writer of travel-related UGC, that is the addresser of the communicative event I am interested in, and the respective emotive function will be reviewed. Literature on this topic covers two main issues: *motivations for writing* (section 2.2.1), and *personal characteristics of authors* (section 2.2.2).

### **2.2.1 Why contributing online**

In their TripAdvisor's sponsored study, Gretzel, Yoo and Purifoy (2007) investigated both motivations and barriers to posting reviews and differences between OTR writers and non-writers. Results for motivations were later discussed and related to previous

literature in a paper by Yoo and Gretzel (2008a). The measurement instrument was developed on the base of a review of the literature about motivations for writing eWOM and adapted to the specific features of a travel-related review site, that is *TripAdvisor*. 7 motivational dimensions and 15 motivation items were proposed and tested. Results suggest that the main motivations to write OTR are the need to reciprocate great experiences provided by travel and tourism companies, altruism, that is the desire to help other consumers, and hedonism, that is the pleasure of sharing own travel experiences and acquired expertise; contrary to the expectations, venting negative feeling was not a strong motivation. If the desire of helping other travellers could have been expected, especially in the context of an online community, the attempt of supporting good travel service providers highlights the sense of justice of travellers, a sort of “render unto Caesar what is Caesar’s” behaviour, which relates to the nature of tourism products, that are fundamentally experiences: the company is recognized as the facilitator of an experience worth being remembered, an experience that added meaning to life, and writing a positive review seems to be a way of saying “thanks”.

### 2.2.2 Who contributes online

As far as the identity of travel review creators is concerned, the study by Yoo, Gretzel and Purifoy (2007) highlighted that writers and non-writers have different characteristics related to their travel identity and to their relationship with digital technologies. Review writers have usually travelled more frequently for pleasure than non-writers and are more likely to be involved in trip planning; they use the Internet more frequently for their leisure trip planning and more likely use live chat tools to talk with travel experts during their travel planning. Because review creators are led by the belief that other travellers’ reviews are more likely to provide up-to-date, reliable, unbiased, relevant and enjoyable information than travel service providers, they usually look at other consumers’ comments/materials and use online travel reviews throughout all trip planning stages (Yoo, Gretzel & Purifoy, 2007).

A more recent study by Yoo and Gretzel (2011) confirmed the findings on Internet users’ motivations to engage in online content creation – that are mainly altruistic and hedonistic motives – and investigated the influence of *individual personality traits* in UGC creation behaviors. Personality was assessed based on the “Big Five” personality model (Goldberg, 1990, 1992) which assumes that an individual’s personality can be described as a combination of five specific factors: neuroticism, extraversion, openness, agreeableness and conscientiousness. Results indicate that people who are extrovert (i.e. sociable, talkative and ambitious), open to new experiences (i.e. imaginative, curious, original, broad-minded and intelligent), agreeable (i.e. courteous, flexible, good-natured, cooperative and tolerant) and conscientious (i.e. organized, efficient and systematic) are



likely to be driven by hedonic and altruistic motivations; but extrovert and open people have also higher chances to be motivated by the need for venting. Neurotic people, instead, that are anxious, pessimistic or insecure, perceive high barriers in UGC creation. As for the types of UGC created, extraversion and agreeableness increase the chances of contributing to a travel-related discussion forum, and extraversion is also positively connected with the tendency to respond to others' blogs with comments; while openness, agreeableness and conscientiousness motivate to post travel reviews.

To help users to get useful information, most of the consumers' review websites provide the possibility to rate reviews according to their perceived helpfulness. Lee, Law and Murphy (2011) crossed "Review Helpful" ratings of OTR from TripAdvisor.com related to top-ranked hotels with reviewers' socio-demographic attributes and behavioral factors to understand if the authors of helpful reviews share similar characteristics. The identikit of the *helpful reviewer* outlined a person who travels to many destinations and who tends to continue posting as the number of her reviews increases. Readers, from their side, tend to perceive reviews with a low rating as more helpful than reviews with a high rating, and to consider more helpful reviews which do not provide personal information. Profiling helpful reviewers is a first step towards an OTR quality management, and identifying the characteristics that contribute to build their reputation is a key factor for evaluating their discourse.

Wenger (2008) is of the same advice as far as blogs authors are concerned: she holds that monitoring blogs may have a marketing value if those authors who are more likely to influence key markets are located. She found considerable differences between the demographic profile of blog authors writing about Austria and international visitors to Austria in general. Since the usefulness of a piece of information also depends on the extent to which the reader can put herself in the author's shoes, if all the information about a place come from authors sharing a similar profile, they might depict the place from one side only, putting into light some of its features but neglecting some others. From the other side, however, knowing how a market segment depicts a product is pivotal for marketing that product. In the case of Austria, blog authors were mostly youth, budget travellers travelling alone or in couples, travelling in summer and coming from overseas: these characteristics affected the image they gave of the destination, which was centred on gastronomy and culture instead of on nature and sport, as Austria's image usually is.

In a similar study, Carson (2008) analyzed the authorship, readership and content of the 'blogosphere' about Australia's Northern Territory to evaluate blogs as market research tools in order to assess visitors' attitudes toward the destination. It must be noticed that Australia's Northern Territory is usually one stop of an extended trip, so that the online

search for personal blogs resulted mainly in single entries in blogs relating to the entire trip or to other destinations. Despite the fact that there is no consistent standard for profiling blog authors, one interesting result is that through the content analysis of blogs it was possible to depict the segment of travellers who are most likely to visit a place: for Australia's Northern Territory, most of the visitors were international backpackers or youth budget travellers. This allows the reader to consider and weigh what is said according to who said it and to evaluate if it suits her case.

As I explain in chapter 3, in this research I adopted a pragmatic perspective on verbal communication which considers language as a social action (see Austin, 1962; Searle, 1969; Grice, 1975, 1991) and texts as artefacts conceived with a purpose, that is to produce an effect on the social reality shared by the producer and the receiver. In line with this perspective, motivations for writing impact the nature and shape of the verbal artifacts being produced. Pragmatic and semantic structures at all levels of a text, in fact, are respondent to the "habit change" the text has been conceived to bring in the reader's/listener's disposition towards action (Rigotti, 2005). Intuitively, it is different, for instance, to write a review for giving advice on how to spend a good time at a place or for venting negative feelings against a tour operator; the textual artefacts produced for conveying the two motivations will present semantic, linguistic and pragmatic differences. In order to give an account of OTR as a textual genre on their own, the intended effect they are conceived to bring in the readers' reality has to be taken into account. The studies which investigated motivations for writing, therefore, will help to pursue this semantic endeavour.

The identity of the writer, from the other side, gives the reader criteria both to estimate the usefulness of what is reported for her information objectives and to grant the reviewer trust. Different types of tourists, in fact, have different information needs, and recommendations are pondered according to the type of travel one has in mind. The level of expertise one is recognized to have is, then, a function of the trust she is entitled. From an argumentative point of view, the strength of an argument greatly depends on the perceived closeness with and the believability of the arguer. The studies I revised in this section provide elements for the evaluative part of the argumentative analysis that will be presented in chapter 4.

### **2.3 The addressee and the conative function in UGC communication**

In human communication, every communicative act is produced to address an interlocutor (Grice, 1975). Thus, the general goal of every communication is to reach an addressee: I speak because I want or I expect someone to listen, I write because I want or I expect someone to read. Different strategies are then employed by the addresser to

catch the addressee's attention (De Ascaniis & Gretzel, 2012) and to try to let her to do something.

The addressee holds an important role in argumentation practices and has received great attention by communication and argumentation scholars. Perelman and Olbrechts-Tyteca devoted a large part of their *Treatise on argumentation* to the concept of *audience*. They held that the “orator” shapes his discourse trying to achieve the greatest adherence of his ideal audience. They used the term “orator” to generically indicate the person who advances an argument, and the term “audience” to indicate the individual or collective subject he is talking to, that is the interlocutor or decision-maker. In written texts, the audience is represented by the ideal public the writer has in mind while writing; in a soliloquy, instead, the interlocutor is the self. The knowledge of the audience one is addressing is a necessary condition for the success of communication in general and of argumentation in particular. Different audiences are appealed to differently by the same message, because of their different education, previous and shared knowledge, objectives, values and beliefs. A reason that is convincing – ‘good’ – for an audience can turn out to be unacceptable, weak or misunderstood by another (De Ascaniis, 2012).

Two main streams of studies can be classified as stressing the conative function of tourism-related UGC: those which deal with the issue of *credibility* of UGC (section 2.3.1), and those which analyze its perceived *benefits and impacts* (section 2.3.2).

### 2.3.1 Why trusting to online contributors

Since their outset, UGC have questioned internet users about their credibility. If, from one side, word-of-mouth is considered the most credible and trustworthy source of information (Crotts, 1999; Mack, Blose & Pan, 2008), the case is different for *electronic*-word-of-mouth. The importance of word-of-mouth as an information source has to be found in the ties between the interlocutors: the strongest the tie, the strongest the tendency to engage in word-of-mouth behaviour and the willingness to believe and follow what the interlocutor recommends (Bone, 1992; Wirtz & Chew, 2002). This is what actually happened to me when we were deciding the restaurant for my marriage reception: word-of-mouth from acquaintances and friends played a leading role in the final decision because of the trust derived from my personal knowledge of them. The personal tie almost disappears for online contents; in fact, when a user reads a blog or a review, all that she knows about the author is what the author decided to disclose of herself.

It seems that credibility of e-word-of-mouth is a variable of the opinion that is discussed and the decision that such opinion might inform. When it is just about discussing points

of view, the position of a stranger voiced through the Internet may catch the attention and drive opinions, but when a recommendation is needed to take a decision, personal ties of trust make the difference. In a study by Johnson and Kayne (2003) credibility of political weblogs of different ideologies and that of traditional media and other online sources directly asking to blog users are compared. Blogs resulted to be viewed as a new and even better form of journalism than the mainstream media because they were considered to provide more depth and more thoughtful analysis and were perceived to be independent, personal and rich in opinions. Weblogs were judged by their users as highly credible and even more credible than traditional media.

Mack, Blose and Pan (2008) developed an online experiment to compare the perceived credibility of three sources of information: corporate blog, personal blog and word-of-mouth. They built three sets of questions according to three scenarios related to the purchase of a cruise where the user was asked to take information from one of the three sources randomly distributed. In general, traditional word-of-mouth resulted to be perceived as more credible than blogs, because of stronger ties among WOM contributors. Specifically, two groups of users have to be distinguished: a) consumers who actively post blogs, who attribute similar levels of authoritativeness (a dimension of credibility) to personal blogs, corporate blogs and WOM; b) consumers who do not post blogs, who attribute less authoritativeness to personal blogs than to corporate blogs and WOM.

Burgess, Sellitto, Cox and Buultjens (2009) investigated the trustworthiness of online travel information from different sources, by developing an online survey based on a review of existing studies on trust measurement. They collected more than 12.500 responses from the email subscribers of the Tourism New South Wales (Australia) database, and found out that different sources are given different levels of trust. The most trusted sources are State government tourism websites, and greater trust is placed in online travel content that are posted on a specific website than those posted on social networking sites or blogs, which are often doubted. UGC were, however, envisaged as useful sources of information in the future, if improvements are made in determining the reliability of the source and in enhancing the filtering capabilities for travellers to identify relevant information.

In a recent study, Dickinger (2011) investigated the trustworthiness of three popular online information channels providing tourism content. The marketing channel refers to the service provider, the editorial channel is constituted by city tourist boards, and the personal channel corresponds to UGC. She built six versions of a questionnaire where she crossed each type of information channel with either an experience-search task (that is a search for tourism products to be experienced, as a nice restaurant where to dine),

or a goal-oriented task (that is a search for facts, as the opening hours of a museum), to investigate if there is a difference in the perception of the different dimensions of trust. Results confirmed previous studies which found that different dimensions of trustworthiness become effective depending on the online channel used; specifically, for UGC (personal channel), the main drivers for trust are informativeness and benevolence in providing information which can really help the interlocutor, while the quality of information is doubted. Regarding the difference between each trust dimension and the two experimental settings, no significant difference was found, except for ability: it is considered easier to evaluate and review in goal-directed settings than in the experience-oriented one.

If Dickinger investigated the dimensions of trustworthiness, Yoo and Gretzel (2009) tried to gain an understanding of the factors driving online trust. As stated in the introduction to this dissertation, a difference has to be made between trustworthiness and trust, being the first one concerned with beliefs and the second one with intentions. Yoo and Gretzel (2009) derived the antecedents of trust from the literature, and then used online surveys to a sample of online consumers to analyse the impact and benefits of trust perception on UGC use. *Impacts* were defined as impacts on travel planning and impacts on actual travel behaviors, while the conceptualization of *benefits* concerned the possibility to become more efficient and satisfied in planning thanks to a greater knowledge and more concrete expectations. They found that believing in the good intentions and honesty and the perceived expertise of UGC creators foster trust in UGC; personal characteristics of respondents have only weak effects on trust; the type of website on which UGC are posted matters; and perceived benefits of UGC increase with trust.

The issue of UGC credibility gives elements to approach the problem of its persuasiveness. WOM and electronic WOM are generally trusted by people because they are recognized to be *expert opinions*, that is information and recommendation given on the base of a direct or indirect experience made by the addresser. The studies reviewed above point out that, however, traditional WOM receives greater trust, because of the nature of relationships among the interlocutors. Since the identity of UGC creators remains usually and mostly unknown, and it is almost impossible to verify what they wrote, it is a risk for the reader to believe them. This can explain also why people tend to trust more institutional than personal channels of online information, and why the drivers of online trust are informativeness and benevolence which have to be based on good intentions and honesty.

### 2.3.2 What to take from online contributions

From a communication perspective, the appeal to the addressee is the focus also of all the studies on tourism-related UGC which analyzed UGC role and impact in the process of travel planning.

If it is true that eWOM represents a new channel both for consumers to gain opinionated information and for marketers to improve the quality of their product, it is true as well that it is not correct to tar everyone with the same brush. The content of an eWOM can be applied to a traveller's own situation but not to another one, so that it may be viewed as a benefit by the first one but as a concern or, at least, as not useful, by the second one. The above mentioned study of Burgess, Sellitto, Cox and Buultjens (2009) (see section 3.3.1) pointed out potentially contrasting values of eWOM, gathering information about the habits of consumers when planning travels. Answers were analyzed in the software package X-Sight which enables the classification of comments under "likes" and "concerns". It concluded that for every UGC "benefit" (or "like") identified by respondents there was a matching "concern", so that if reliability resulted to be one of the main benefits of UGC because of the author's personal experience, it was also a concern because of the author's unknown identity; and if the range of travellers' opinions available was a strength, it might also turn into a weakness because of the extremity of such opinions.

Despite likes and concerns which may arouse about UGC, they represent nowadays one of the main sources for finding travel recommendations; it is, thus, important to understand *how* they are used.

Zhang, Pan, Smith and Li (2009) conducted an explanatory study to capture tourists' online activities in terms of sources and types of online travel review, recommendations used when searching for travel products and heuristics employed for making decisions based on these third-party opinions. They asked a group of students to solve a travel planning exercise where they had to plan the places to visit during a week-long trip to China. They consulted three main sources of online recommendations: other travellers, third party websites and travel companies, and they encountered four types of contents: text recommendations (e.g. catch phrases and slogans), symbolic recommendations (e.g. thumb-up images), numerical ratings and narrative reviews. Heuristics employed for evaluating website recommendations and online reviews can be classified in three types: a) single criterion stopping rule, that is when consumers decide a main criterion (e.g. numerical rating) to take a decision and stop their search when they have enough information on that criterion; b) credibility heuristics, that is when consumers do not judge the message but rely on the source's credibility (e.g. the credibility of a website which is usually consulted); c) consensus heuristics, that is the fact that, since consumers

are influenced by the reactions of others to a message, the possibility of making a certain choice is enhanced by the repetition of the same recommendation by different sources.

The study of Zhang et al. highlights at least two aspects of online recommendations that have to be taken into account when investigating their influence on decision-making. First, online recommendations are conveyed through different codes: textual messages, numerical ratings, symbols, pictures, videos and potentially through all the types of codes that are supported by digital media. When used for recommending (or complaining about) a tourism product, such as for suggesting a destination to visit, each media content should be considered an argument in its own. Picture 1 was taken by my husband in Orvieto, Tuscany, during our honey-moon and I used it when I reported on a travel review website about our visit to Orvieto, giving it the title “Roaming around old streets and magnificent works-of-art”/”An unexpected encounter”.



Figure 5: Roaming around old streets and magnificent works-of-art (the author).

The picture is an argument for recommending Orvieto as a city worth visiting, because it expresses the surprise we felt when we came upon the Dom - such an amazing work of art! - while wandering around the city's narrow old streets. Secondly, the fact that people employ different heuristics shows that decisions do not depend only on a

rational comparison among alternatives but also on other less rational elements, like others' reaction to the same recommendation.

The role and impact of online travel reviews on decision-making was accurately investigated by Gretzel, Yoo and Purifoy (2007), who conducted an extensive research on a large sample of TripAdvisor's visitors. Questions concerned several aspects of online travel reviews consumption: travel planning style, motivations and barriers for posting, factors influencing evaluation of a review, impact of OTR use on travel decision, differences between OTR frequent and occasional readers and between OTR writers and non-writers. Results showed that reading UGC is the most frequent activity of people who use the Internet to plan a trip, while motivations to write OTR are mainly intrinsic (e.g. concern for others, return the favour, social benefits). OTR readers usually plan trips in advance and use them to get ideas, to narrow down choices and to confirm decisions. When selecting a review, readers consider, above all, the detail of description, the consistency, the type of website and contextual information.

For the hospitality sector, the issue was tackled by Vermeulen and Seegers (2009). They conducted an experimental study building on constructs from the Consideration Set Theory of consumer decision-making (Roberts & Lattin, 1991) to assess the moderating effect of exposure to online hotel reviews on consumers' awareness of the hotel, their attitudes towards the hotel and its consideration. According to that theory, consumers' choice is a multi-stage process where the set of choice options is increasingly narrowed down, to come to the *choice set*, from which the decision is taken. During this process, marketing and advertising play different roles. As far as hotel choice is concerned, Vermeulen and Seegers's study (2009) showed that exposure to either positive or negative online reviews increases consumer awareness, that is the possibility that a consumer recalls the hotel under given circumstances (*awareness set*). An increased awareness enhances, in turn, hotel consideration, that is the probability that a hotel is included in the small set of options a person is willing to consider (*consideration set*). In addition, results showed that positive reviews improve attitudes toward hotels, that is which issues and attributes have to be considered salient, and that reviewer expertise has only a minor influence on review impact.

The usefulness of travel blogs as a recommendation source was investigated, instead, by Zehrer, Crotts and Magnini (2011). They framed the study in the expectancy-disconfirmation theory (Oliver, 1977, 1980) which explains how expectancies are created and how they determine choices. On the base of such theory, they tested hypothesis about the reaction of blog users to congruent and incongruent postings. They collected from TripAdvisor.com a sample of blog postings where bloggers reacted to former postings matching their experience. They found that congruent multiple



evaluations, both negative and positive, are considered helpful, that negative postings countered by positive postings (positive incongruence) are considered as useful as congruent postings, but that negative incongruence is considered less helpful. It is noteworthy that both congruence and positive incongruence resulted to be helpful. This finding may be justified by the fact that travellers access travel blogs – and UGC in general – to collect experienced recommendations in order to make more informed decisions, no matter if positive or negative; moreover, the evaluation of a product, and even more of an experiential good, is subjective: it depends on a range of aspects, as expectations, interests and personal goals, so that a recommendation may suit a consumer but not another one. When a consumer reads a recommendation, she has her own expectations, interests and goals and knows what she is looking for, which aspects of the recommendation to pay attention to. To understand and compare different evaluations of the same product, therefore, it needs to consider what is exactly said in a recommendation, which are the implicit premises it is based on, which aspects of a product are stressed and why; to compare, then, incongruent recommendations, one needs to analyze how each one is put forward, that is according to which principles and in which aspects.

The influence of online opinions on travel decision-making has been examined from the ‘inside’ – i.e. looking at what people say online – by Aarsal, Woosnam, Baldwin, Backman (2010), who analyzed the influence of residents and experienced travellers on the decisions of online community members. They considered the *Torn Three* online travel community, that is a part of Lonely Planet’s website, and analyzed threads from 8 countries in the Africa and Western Europe forums. They made use of thematic networks to map the main themes and sub-themes in the threads. “Influential” threads for members’ travel planning were identified on the base of a statement from the person who started the thread in which she declared that she would have included the recommendations in the postings in her travel plans. Influential threads were then classified according to the topic of discussion and the type of member who made the influential recommendation (4 categories were considered: residents, experienced travellers, potential travellers, unknown members). Forum posts resulted to clearly have an influence on the travel planning of online communities members and, in particular, residents resulted to be influential in decisions about accommodation, food and beverage, while experienced travellers in decisions about the destination. This is one among the few studies which tried to examine the influence of online recommendations on tourists’ choices looking at what they actually say, that is looking directly at the content of online discussions. It is claimed in the paper that thematic network analysis is based on argumentation theory, in that it aims at exploring “the understanding of an issue or the signification of an idea, rather than to reconcile conflicting definitions of a

problem”, and the method is used to identify topics that are discussed in the threads. The objective of an argumentative analysis is, however, to find out the arguments that are used to defend or attack a standpoint and it goes far beyond the identification of discussion topics, to understand what is the interlocutor’s position on the topic, how and how convincingly it is carried on. It is not clear from the explanation given in the paper which is the link between argumentation theory and thematic network analysis, if, where and how Toulmin’s model (1958) was applied to the identification of themes and sub-themes.

## 2.4 The context and the referential function in UGC communication

Studies that paid attention to the referential function of tourism-related UGC made use of various methods of content analysis and sentiment analysis, both for the general purpose of identifying the topics covered online and the associated sentiments, and for more specific purposes like to reconstruct and characterize *travel experiences* (section 2.4.1) or to grasp the *perceived image of destinations* (section 2.4.2). UGC contents have been analyzed mostly for marketing oriented goals, trying to understand customers’ delight and users’ appraisal, but also for linguistic interests, as to investigate the structure and use of *complaints online* (section 2.4.3). A review of the literature tackling the communicative element *context* might provide, then, insights about two aspects: the *methods* employed so far for analyzing UGC contents and the *nature* of the contents analyzed. Both of them will be discussed in the following three sections.

### 2.4.1 Looking for the travel experience

Weblogs are mostly used as personal diaries, usually tackling a specific topic of particular interest to the author, addressed to a familiar public, with the aim of keeping it up-to-date and/or to share knowledge. Travel blogs, then, can be seen as a manifestation of travel experience, and analyzed for research purposes “to gain an understanding of the destination experience being manifested”, as Pan, MacLaurin and Crotts (2007) claim in a study about the implications of travel blogs for destination marketing. They analyzed the content of 40 blogs related to visitors’ experiences in Charleston, South Carolina, collected from the top three travel blog sites at that time ([www.travelblog.org](http://www.travelblog.org), [www.travelpod.com](http://www.travelpod.com), [www.travelpost.com](http://www.travelpost.com)), and from blog specific search engines ([www.technorati.com](http://www.technorati.com), Google blog search, IceRocket). They firstly analyzed blog text by word and phrase occurrence using *TextAnalyst*, a software for automated semantic analysis, and then constructed a diagram of meanings and impressions about the destination through means of a semantic network analysis. The *Tourism amalgam model* developed by Cooper (2005) provided the base for categorizing such network of meanings and impressions. The model considers destinations as an inseparable tourism product – an amalgam –, including attractions, amenities, ancillary services and access;

every sentence in the blogs containing a positive or negative remark on one aspect of the travel experience amalgam was classified according to those categories. The goal of the analysis was to assess strengths and weaknesses of the destination. The analysis performed, however, though it enabled to circumscribe and categorize issues discussed online by people about the destination and to catch the general sentiment on the different aspects of the destination, was not able to dig into their stories. To “gain an understanding of the destination experience being manifested”, in fact, it needs to identify and put into light those pieces of reality (i.e. of the experience) which impressed the tourist the most and might have become criteria for taking future decisions (see the definition of the word “experience” in the *Introduction* to this dissertation). Results like “for some bloggers driving was positive, while for others it was negative”, or like “most experiences in fine dining restaurants in the Charleston area were positive”, highlight that the aspects of driving and dining were perceived by visitors in Charleston as important parts of their tourism experience, and may provide indications for destination marketers to improve offers and promotion, but are at the same time rather generic. Nonetheless, to understand the experience tourists had, it has to be investigated why for some of them driving was positive while for others it was negative, and under which respects; it has to be understood why dining in fine restaurants was considered positive by most of the people, and if Charleston fine restaurants present peculiarities that fine restaurants in other places do not present. The question why an aspect is perceived as a strength by some and a weakness by others, implicates the issue of tourist’s identity, and refers to the constellation of expectations, values, beliefs and desires she puts into play when she takes a travel decision or evaluate a travel experience.

The content analysis of blog entries relating to trips to Austria undertaken by Wenger (2008) resulted in the classification of the issues covered (distinguished in: season of visit, motives for travel, sights and attractions visited, services used, modes of transport, problems encountered and images associated with the destination) and the values (positive or negative connotation) associated with each issue. Though the study failed to go beyond a general report of the destination perception in terms of the “big” tourism categories (e.g. Austria’s most visited sights or favorite attractions), it recognized the role of blog authors’ characteristics and type of trip in the perception they have. The author also made interesting comments on blogs as information source and text type: she argued that blogs only provide few insights that might assist destinations and businesses to learn about the attitudes towards their markets. This was because commentary were – at least in the corpus of data – quite superficial, and only a few suggestions were given for product improvements; besides that, comments, although generally positive, were descriptive rather than critical. The homogeneity and scarce

variety of blogs content and their descriptive rather than critical nature did not make them a useful information source for prospective travellers.

The same critic to blogs content have been advanced by Carson (2008) who reported difficulties in locating relevant blogs for the sake of assessing visitors' attitudes because blog content is relatively shallow and provides little detail about satisfaction, expectations or recommendations; "most authors simply described where they went and what they did, while making only the broadest comments about the impact that the experiences had on them" (Carson, 2008, p. 117). The analysis of blogs content was restricted, again, to the identification of common topics of discussion and to the general value of comments.

A more focused analysis of travel blogs was undertaken by Magnini, Crotts and Zehrer (2011) who aimed at identifying the determinants of customer delight in tourism venues. Delight is a distinctive construct apart from satisfaction and is highly correlated with a customer's willingness to recommend and purchase. While customer satisfaction is defined as an experience which meets one's expectation, delight occurs when a customer receives a positive surprise beyond her expectations. The element of surprise is the major difference between satisfaction and delight. In the study, manifestations of customer delight were looked for in a corpus of blogs related to hotel experiences; the construct was operationalized searching for four phrases: "pleasantly surprised", "delightful surprise", "excellent surprise", "positive surprise". After the text-mining, a content analysis was applied to the two sentences surrounding the surprise phrase in order to determine causes of the surprise. The limit of the study is that it only allowed identification of explicit references to customers' delight; however, expressions of surprise can be transmitted using different linguistic and pragmatic strategies which might be worthy of investigation.

In an attempt to identify key aspects of a travel experience, which makes the experience worthy to be communicated and the destination worthy to be visited, De Ascaniis and Greco Morasso (2011) undertook an analysis of a corpus of UGC, specifically considering tourists' arguments. They proposed a theoretical and methodological approach to analyze UGC content based on argumentation theory for extrapolating, classifying and evaluating such arguments. They explained that "having access to these reasons and being able to study them carries a lot of implications at the practical level. As a prime factor, it means understanding which features of a certain destination are appreciated by tourists themselves, and why; then, on this basis, it means to improve the destination promotion" (De Ascaniis & Greco Morasso, 2011, p. 126). The corpus they used for the analysis comprised both posts in travel forums and OTR; they are, indeed, two types of text which present substantial differences both at the linguistic and

pragmatic level, and an argumentative analysis should take into account their inherent characteristics.

#### **2.4.2 Grasping destination image**

A systematic effort to classify online discourses about a destination has been made by Marchiori and colleagues who presented, in different papers (Marchiori et al., 2010, 2011; Inversini et al. 2010), the elaboration and testing of a contents classification framework called DORM, Destination Online Reputation Model, specifically aimed at classifying online tourism-related conversations. DORM originated from an adaptation of literature in reputation organization studies and represents a scientific tool devoted to the management of the destination online presence. In order to study the reputation of a destination in online media, a tourism destination has been decomposed in measurable thematic dimensions (multidimensional traits), and, at the aggregate level, opinions posted online toward these dimensions have been studied. Thus, the framework results of five main destination thematic dimensions (that are: products and services, society, performance, environment and governance), which represent the topics that might be discussed online about a destination, and the related destination drivers (e.g. value for money), that are the aspects of each dimension that might influence destination-related decisions. Dimensions and drivers were taken from the literature and tested first, with the supply side, that is experts and service providers, and then with the demand side, that is asking directly to prospective tourists. The authors stress the fact that UGC are a source of information used for making decisions, first of all because high credibility is granted to word-of-mouth; classifying what is spoken about online and the polarization (i.e. positive or negative) of what is said, allows to identify the topics that are more relevant when a decision about the destination to visit has to be taken and which aspects are valued the most. Reputation in the online media, however, is not only the result of what is said about an object and the respective evaluation assessment but is intrinsically bound to human preference. The opinion about an object is, in fact, expressed by a stakeholder and shared by a group of people (other stakeholders); thus, it is shaped by their expectations about the object and their values (Marchiori & Cantoni, 2012). To catch the image a person formed of a destination, therefore, requires that the identity of the person reporting about it has to be taken into account and her arguments have to be pondered accordingly.

In the case of tourism destinations, opinion stakeholders may be institutional actors, as Destination Management Organizations (DMO) and travel agencies, or private actors, that is prospective tourists; the image the two sides have of the destination may differ under a number of respects. Fedele, De Ascaniis and Cantoni (2011) observed, through the analysis of online contents, if there was actually a difference in the way the

destination Malta was promoted by the DMO and the way it was perceived by visitors. For the supply side, they considered the official destination website and the promotional brochure, while for the demand side they collected posts published in the travel forum dedicated to Malta on TripAdvisor. They looked for selected types of contents that are the arguments put forward by the two sides for encouraging a visit to Malta. They held that UGC “can be generally said to have a *deliberative function*”, because they provide elements for taking a decision among alternatives, and “people consulting travel fora or reviews directly ask or simply look for information that can help them organizing their trip” (Fedele, De Ascaniis & Cantoni, 2011, p. 153). Indeed, the analysis showed that the reasons why tourists appreciated Malta were only partially in line with the arguments used by the DMO to promote it. The limit of the analysis was due to the fact that argumentation is scarcely developed in travel forums: forum threads are not discussions where different parties argue for their opinions, but rather short and quick exchanges of information. To have a better understanding of people’s image of a destination, other sources of arguments, as OTR or travel blogs, should be analyzed.

In the online environment, however, the image a visitor forms of a destination may be influenced by the first impression she had of it, based on metadata from search results, such as title, rating or keywords. A high amount of information, in fact, can be retrieved for a single entry in a search engine, but human capacity to process incoming information and time for processing it are limited. The metadata serve the function of overview and preview (Balatsoukas, Morris & O’Brien, 2009) and may contribute to the creation of a “first image” of the product or service one is looking for (Pan & Fesenmaier, 2006; Xiang & Fesenmaier, 2006). The first impression is so crucial for online information search that a number of studies have investigated the decisive factors contributing to its creation (Kim & Fesenmaier, 2007, 2008). De Ascaniis and Gretzel (2012) looked at one type of metadata, that is OTR titles, analyzing their function in the economy of the text and their contextual referents. Users might look at OTR titles to make a quick first choice to select those reviews which seem to be most relevant without ever looking at the complete review text. It came out from the study that OTR titles are quite representative of the review orientation and accomplish the general function of text titles in helping readers anticipate what follows in the text. Titles often refer to the destination (e.g. “Rome”) or to the kind of experience being reviewed (e.g. “My trip to Paris”), as suggested by the frequent use of temporal indications and meta-words. Understanding the functional parts of certain text type and their contextual referents is of practical relevance as it can support online content quality management.

### 2.4.3 Pondering on complaints and dissatisfaction

Websites for UGC creation are often the place for expressing disappointment and conveying dissatisfaction. While the issues of consumers' satisfaction and, respectively, consumers' dissatisfaction have received a high attention by marketing research (see, among many others, Weiner et al., 1971; Swan & Combs, 1976; Oliver, 1980), and a number of studies in the tourism sector dealt with tourists' satisfaction (Rodriguez & San Martin, 2008; Ryan & Cessford, 2003; Huang et al., 1996), only a few studies have focused on online complaints related to tourism experiences. As Au, Buhalis and Law (2009) argue, understanding complaint behavior on the web and the relationships between types of e-complaints and product or consumer related variables, give tourism organizations the possibility to manage responses and improve the service. They analyzed a corpus of individual complaints posted on TripAdvisor, taking the case of Hong Kong hotels. They first classified complaints according to the aspect being complained about, and then crossed the categories with the origin and age of the complainant. It came out that travellers from the USA, Australia and UK reported the highest number of complaints, and the aspect they were dissatisfied the most were different from the aspect complained about by travellers with different origins (for instance from customers from China). Age, in turn, resulted to be correlated with some aspects of the hotel experience (i.e. space, décor and price). The relationship between the hotel class and the responding action undertaken by the management was also investigated but no significant difference emerged. As this study pointed out, when analyzing online contents, attention has to be paid to cultural and age differences among content creators; travellers within a certain age range and with certain origins, in fact, may be more willing to express their views and to take actions in the online environment, as to report a negative experience. From an argumentative point of view, then, cultural elements influenced by the country of origin and age range constitute endoxical premises for arguments.

Does a negative experience influence satisfaction? Our general understanding of what should drive satisfaction ratings leads us to answer that yes, a negative experience influence negatively on satisfaction. The results of a study by Jiang, Gretzel and Law (2010), however, challenge this idea. They used attribution theory (Martinko & Thomson, 1998) for explaining why that is not always true in the case of OTR. They found a disconnection between the description of the experience and the actual overall satisfaction rating given: although reviews made explicit comments about negative experiences, they were generally connected with positive ratings. Moreover, only the lack of attribution of a negative experience to global factors (that is the overall incapacity of the service provider) was found to significantly increase satisfaction, while no other significant influences were found. How the authors remark, these findings

question the usefulness of the ratings, and the issue warrants further exploration. Also the pragmatic analysis by Vasquez (2011) made of online complaints on TripAdvisor, pointed out that reviewers tend to juxtapose an overall negative evaluation with some positive appraisal. The direction of argument analysis may provide interesting insights for understanding this apparent contradiction. In fact, to understand, why despite a bad experience, the level of satisfaction (and, accordingly, the rating) was good, one needs to go through the reviewer's story and identify the aspects of the experience she valued the most, and the aspects she is disposed to renounce to if some others are ensured. The argumentation put forward to report a negative experience and to mitigate it should be analyzed in order to understand the actual position of the author, to evaluate and to weight her arguments according to the evidence she reports.

## 2.5 The message and the poetic function in UGC communication

Within tourism studies, a very famous work has focused on the poetic function of tourism communication; it is "*The Language of tourism: a socio-linguistic perspective*", written by Graham Dann and published in 1996. The author makes a semiotic and linguistic analysis of promotional materials and media representations of tourism experience, arguing that there exists an *ad hoc* language used by the tourism industry to seduce people into becoming tourists. Such a language works to depict tourism experience as the chance to exit ordinary life and satisfy freedom wish, this way manipulating people's attitudes and behaviour. Tourists, in turn, contribute further to this language through the communication of their experiences.

Language and discourse studies in the context of tourism, indeed, have mostly aimed at unveiling the values and desires to which marketers appeal in their persuasive strategies. This line of research has been developed by the work of Adam Jaworski and his associates, and has been summarized by Thurlow & Jaworski (2010). The authors considered tourism discourse as a window on globalization processes and, taking a critical discourse analysis perspective, discussed discourse representations that reinforce social inequalities: tourist-host relationships and the representation of hosts (e.g. in postcards) are examined in this perspective, as is the construction of elitism in promotional material (e.g. in-flight magazines). Issues of cultural representation and stereotyping are also central in the studies collected by Baider, Burger & Goutsos (2004). Ylännä-McEwen's (2000) work on tourism promotion discourse addressing the over 50s, instead, examines how "selling points" are presented in discourse.

Apart the line of critical research mentioned above, tourism discourse is dealt with in applied text-linguistics studies, focusing on the functioning of the different genres of tourism communication (Antelmi, Held & Santulli, 2007), with particular attention to the multimodal way genres are orchestrated in order to convey a specific meaning.



Nonetheless, communication practices among tourists have been mostly ignored in discourse studies, and only a few of them specifically looked at online communication and UGC. Two groups of studies which observed linguistic and structural characteristics of UGC may be distinguished, according to their research interest: those with a linguistic or semantic aim and those investigating the construction and promotion of destination identity online.

### 2.5.1 Investigating textual features of eWOM

Vásquez (2011) undertook a discourse analysis based on a corpus of 100 negative hotel reviews in *TripAdvisor* to examine how complaints are organized and voiced in the context of computer-mediated communication. The author showed that online complaints related to tourism issues exhibit the typical features of the speech act of complaining and are combined with other speech-act types such as advice, recommendation, warning and threat. Peculiar of online complaints in this context is that they can be both direct and indirect (i.e. third-party) simultaneously. Reviewers, in fact, are generally aware that they may have a dual audience: both fellow travellers and service management; “consequently, while binary distinction may be appropriate for classifying complaints in face-to-face interactions, the distinction may be less clear-cut in computer-mediated-communication complaints” (Vásquez, 2011, p. 1715). This analysis singles out several typical discourse moves that are rhetorically and argumentatively relevant, such as the concessive mention of positive features and the reference to expectations, but neither discusses the argumentative significance of these moves, nor addresses reviews as an argumentative genre.

Gretzel and De Ascaniis’ (2012) investigation of OTR titles instead did not focus on the organization of one particular type of speech act along the text but considered structural and semantic characteristics of one specific part of the text, that is the title. They analyzed the average length of OTR titles, their level of informativeness, the indication they provide on the review orientation, the word diversity and their communicative function. The authors built on Grice’s observation that a general principle of human communication is that every communicative act is produced to address an interlocutor (Grice, 1975).

“It means that the first main goal of every communication is to reach its addressee: I write because I want or I expect someone to read, I speak because I want or I expect someone to listen. Thus, different strategies are employed to reach the goal of catching the interlocutor’s attention. In the same vein, it can be said that the overall reason for writing a review is for it to be read, on the assumption that what is reported may be of interest to the reader. It is therefore meaningful to ask which

communicative strategies are used by the authors of OTRs to make their texts attractive for an unknown audience” (De Ascaniis & Gretzel, 2012, p. 496).

### 2.5.2 Constructing destination identity online

The construction and promotion of identity of tourist locales is the topic addressed by the work of Hallett & Kaplan-Weinger (2010), who analyzed official tourism websites, through means of discourse analysis, multimodal discourse analysis and visual semiotic analysis to let emerge how such an identity can be moulded manoeuvring language. They took a pragmatic perspective on communication, which sees language as a social action and social problems as inextricably linked to texts, arguing, in this respect, that “the World Wide Web, with its invitation to explore both within and outside the site through various links, encourages interaction between text and tourist. It serves, therefore, as a setting for the initiation and incitement of social action” (Hallett & Kaplan-Weinger, 2010, p. 12). While they did not focus on tourists’ deliberation and only considered the supply side of contents published online, their work is worth mentioning here for the analytical goal they pursued and the method they used. As Dann explains, in fact: “since much of the rhetoric is both logically and temporally prior to any travel or sightseeing, one can legitimately argue that tourism is grounded in discourse” (Dann, 1996, p. 2). Looking at discourse to understand tourism dynamics, thus, might provide precious insights.

Not only, indeed, is tourists’ language different from marketers’ language, but also the values and desires to which they appeal may not correspond completely. That emerged from the comparison between the destination image promoted by official institutional actors and the image fostered by actual tourists through their online discourses, proposed by the study of Fedele, De Ascaniis and Cantoni (2011). They highlighted a discrepancy between the arguments used by the DMO and those used by tourists.

The role of language analysis for understanding both persuasion strategies by business actors and travellers’ image of a tourism product, was acknowledged by Xiang, Kim, Hu and Fesenmaier (2007), who stated that “a fundamental difficulty in making online recommendation lies in understanding what consumers really want” (Xiang et al., 2007, p. 1006). They studied the linguistic representation of restaurants in online reviews in order to develop effective online recommender systems, and found that consumers use substantially different and poorer vocabularies than restaurant websites to describe dining experiences. Besides, websites’ vocabulary present an “active tone of persuasion”, making a strong use of verbs such as “offer”, “continue”, “learn”, “try”.

## 2.6 The channel and the phatic function in UGC communication

The internet represents the channel enabling UGC communication. The Internet shouldn't, however, to be thought as an amalgam of undifferentiated messages, but rather as a repository of different types of information sources and interaction opportunities, to suit different institutional, business or private needs. The same channel supports communication employing different codes, and new codes arose since the appearance of the Internet on stage and even more, since the advent of the Web 2.0, opening new communication opportunities and challenges.

Studies on tourism-related UGC centring on the channel may be distinguished in two groups: those proposing a *classification of Internet mediated communications*, that is considering communication codes arising from certain uses of the channel (i.e. Web 2.0) (section 2.6.1); those discussing *challenges issued by the channel* both to sites managers and users (section 2.6.2).

### 2.6.1 One channel, many codes

The study of Inversini, Cantoni and Buhalis (2009) is reviewed in this section concerning the channel because they asked themselves which kind of information online travellers may retrieve when searching on the Internet, that is to say: which types of information sources does the channel make available? The classification they built distinguished between official and unofficial sources. They referred to Anderson's (2006) typology, and considered as official websites the so called Brick and Mortar Organizations, that comprises all the players that are doing business also in the offline world and were doing business before the Internet was developed; the mere Online Organizations and Individual websites, instead, were considered as unofficial sources when hosting UGCs; they include all individuals' websites and those organizations doing business (almost) exclusively online; the authors point out that "these providers wouldn't be even conceivable without the infrastructure that the Internet provided" (Inversini, Cantoni & Buhalis, 2009, p. 227). The concept of the "long tail" introduced by Anderson (2004, 2006), makes the observation even more cogent: he showed that official websites represent only the 20% (and probably less then that now) of the public websites on the Internet, while the remaining 80% is constituted by unofficial sources as blogs, social networks, personal websites.

A typology of eWOM media is proposed by Litvin, Goldsmith and Pan (2007). They consider two dimensions: a) the communication scope and b) the level of interactivity.

- a) Some media only link one user with another one, as emails, some others connect a single user with many others, as personal homepages and websites for consumer review, and still others allow a many-to-many communication, as blogs and virtual communities.
- b) The communication may be synchronous, when users are connected and interact at

the same time, as it happens in chat-rooms, or it may be asynchronous, when the message is sent at a time and received at a different time, according to the receiver access possibilities and her preferences, as emails and consumer reviews.

As Bronner and de Hoog (2011) argued, in order to understand a message, other elements of the communication have to be considered, and the channel is one of them. They showed that there is a reciprocal influence among motivations for contributing to eWOM, the media where the contribution is published and its content, as they put it: “*why* you want to contribute influences *where* you are going to make your contribution and *what* you are going to contribute” (Bronner & de Hoog, 2011, p. 24). They analyzed the relation among these elements interviewing a sample of vacationers who posted eWOM about their last summer holiday (in 2008); questions concerned socio-demographic aspects, motivations for writing, type and characteristics of the posting site. It came out that vacationers having a largely others-directed motivation seemed to prefer consumer-generated sites, while vacationers pushed mainly by self-directed motivations, seemed to prefer marketer-generated sites. The first type of sites were characterized as sites developed by users themselves, while the second type as websites built by institutional or business actors but having a ‘corner’ for posting opinions.

### 2.6.2 Opportunities and challenges of a new communication channel

The appeal of User-Generated-Media – a term used to indicate channels supporting creation and publishing of UGC – has been discussed from a uses and gratification perspective by Shao (2009), supporting the observation that people make use of UGM in different ways for different purposes. UGM are, first of all, a source of information, an information that is, most of the time, a “digestible snack food” consumed with increased frequency and maximum speed. They allow, secondly, direct and intense interaction with other users, this way enhancing social connections and creating virtual communities. In the end, creating their own contents, users can satisfy needs of self-expression and self-actualization. Shao identified, then, two usability attributes of the channel which enable people to derive great gratification from their UGM use: easiness of use and direct control of the media. Every activity users want to perform through UGM (e.g. consuming, producing, participating), they can do it easily. A small input effort is required to obtain abundant output; UGM “provide users with very efficient Internet experience: they often ask very little of users but in return gratify them a lot” (Shao, 2009, p. 17). An example is Wikipedia: even if in terms of accuracy the information provided might be debatable, users often rely on it as an information source mainly because they are driven by convenience. Users’ control, on the other side, refers to three aspects: interpersonal control, meaning that they can choose the people to interact with without worrying for space and time constraints; content-based control, in

that content is asynchronic and dynamic; interface-based control, in the sense that highly customized features may be provided, this way allowing to create an online identity and express personal interests, values, thoughts.

In the field of tourism, the topic of the opportunities and challenges opened by Web 2.0 applications as a new communication channel has been discussed by many. It seemed to me appropriate to classify the studies concerned with opportunities and challenges (or benefits and impact) of UGM for *consumers* in the section devoted to the conative function of communication (section 3.3). The study I reviewed in that section, in fact, observed how UGM appeal to the addressee informing and influencing her travel decisions. I report, instead, in this section, the few studies I retrieved which discussed opportunities and challenges of Web 2.0 applications for the *supply side*, since UGM represent for them, first of all, a communication channel to be managed.

In a short but sharp commentary about the trends and implications for branding of Consumer Generated Content, Gretzel defined it a “collective travel intelligence”, which cannot be ignored by tourism businesses and destinations to successfully brand their products. She supported her argument reporting a number of statistics, which demonstrated the incredible growth of the phenomenon. She argued that an effective management of UGC by the business side depends on search engine optimization and that, since tourist increasingly look for other customers’ experiences, businesses have to include UGC opportunities on their websites (Gretzel, 2006).

Taking the marketing perspective, Litvin, Goldsmith and Pan (2007) presented eWOM as potentially cost-effective means for hospitality and tourism marketers and suggested two main strategies for managing them. They held that, first, procedures had to be established to harvest discussion and feedback created online, in order to monitor what people say about a tourism product, improve it accordingly and, in this way, enhance consumers’ satisfaction. Second, good eWOM about the property and destination might be actively spread by marketers for revenue generation purposes, by providing more precise information and reinforcing the product image. To carry out the two strategies, they envisioned the use of different media: email, websites, blogs, virtual communities, as it has actually happened since the time when their paper was published (2007). They concluded the discussion pointing out some ethical concerns, which hospitality and tourism business should consider when they market activities based on eWOM: ease of use and cost-free of eWOM posting may lead to abuse, and there may be the risk of stealth marketing.

Schmallager and Carson (2008) proposed a systematic review of the main issues currently discussed among tourism academics and practitioners concerning the use of

travel blogs as part of business strategies. The review was built according to the five core elements of Carson's "online architecture", which classifies the key functions that the Internet can contribute to for tourism organizations and enterprises: promotion, communication, product distribution, management and research. Examples for each function were found, suggesting that enterprises are indeed increasingly experimenting with the new channel.

O'Connor (2008), instead, made an investigation of UGM perception by the hotel sector. He analyzed a sample of reviews about London hotels retrieved from TripAdvisor and considered: star rating, TripAdvisor Traveller rating, rank within the local market, average rate and number of reviews posted for each hotel. Results showed that the system displays detailed, rich and relevant data for informing travel planning, and little evidence was found of characteristics that typify false reviews; the belief that the system is compromised by false reviews posted to enhance a hotel reputation or tarnish that of competitors seemed, therefore, to be unfounded. To conclude, O'Connor claims that "hotel companies need to become more proactive at both monitoring and managing how they are being represented on social network sites. As the latter continue to grow in importance, their influence on travellers can only increase." (O'Connor, 2008, p. 57).

The way how platforms for tourism are designed influences the interactions taking place among users. The design of technologies sets new modes of communicative interaction among people, this way creating a gap with the interaction routines of a community (Aakhus, 2003, 2006, 2007). Aakhus speaks of an *argumentation design* implicit in the technology and calls this situation *socio-technical gap*. To bridge the gap between the argumentation (i.e. interaction) routine of the community of tourists and the functionalities enabled by the argumentation (i.e. interaction) design of the technologies available to them, both the routines of the community of tourists and the argumentation design of platforms have to be separately considered and reconciled.

## **2.7 The code and the metalinguistic function in UGC communication**

In this section are discussed studies which considered the characteristics that the code assumes in the context of online tourism discourses. Every code is articulated in two fundamental classes of elements: a *vocabulary*, that is the group of signs conveying meanings, and a *grammar*, that are the rules to meaningfully combine those signs. In the musical code, for instance, the vocabulary is represented by the musical notation, constituted by notes, note values, key signature, time signature and so on, while the grammar refers to the rules for combining those symbols in order to obtain melodies. In the case of historical-natural languages, the vocabulary is called "lexicon", and is constituted, roughly speaking, by words. However, since the term "word" is polysemic,

it is preferred to speak of “lexemes”, that is referred to the elements of the lexicon, whose function is to nominate (things, people, events, ...). Rigotti and Cigada (2004) explain that the lexicon of a language represents, on the whole, the experience possibilities recognized within a community of speakers. Grammar, on the other side, is the set of rules for combining lexemes.

Studies in tourism-related UGC focusing on the metalinguistic function of the text are distinguished in two groups: studies which analyzed the ‘vocabulary’ of the linguistic code used to convey the message, and studies which observed the ‘grammar’ of the code.

### 2.7.1 Analyzing the vocabulary of UGC code

Tourism-related UGC represent one of the main sources of recommendation people rely on for informing their travel decisions. Different codes are combined to express recommendations: the linguistic code is the predominant one, but it often comes with the visual code, as when pictures or videos are posted. In Zhang et al. (2009) types of OTR and websites recommendations travellers refer to for planning their trips have been specifically examined. Four types of recommendations were distinguished for travel products: website text recommendations, based on “catch phrases” like “best dining place” or “to N list”; symbolic recommendations, which use visual symbols for making attractions appealing, like the thumb-up red hot pepper; numerical or star ratings from other travellers; narrative reviews, where travel experiences are reported and commented.

In their study on the language representation of restaurants on online travel reviews, Xiang, Kim, Hu and Fesenmaier (2007), besides highlighting the rhetoric manoeuvres employed by suppliers on official websites to give the best representation of their business (section 2.5.2), analysed the vocabulary of users reporting dining experiences. Both offline and online language data were collected and compared. Offline, consumers were asked to elicit description of some selected restaurants answering to a questionnaire. Online, textual contents from the websites owned by the selected restaurants were extracted, representing the language used by restaurant owners. Restaurant websites resulted to use diverse vocabularies than consumers. Consumers used more adjectives and nouns to describe their experience, and those concerned attributes such as the value for money and service quality. Consumers’ vocabulary, then, was constituted by words belonging mostly to an informal common register, while restaurants tended to use a more elaborated and technical language.

The use of narration as a language code in travel blogs was the topic of Bosangit, McCabe and Hibbert’s (2009) paper. They held that deciding which stories to tell,



tourists' mould the identity they want to reveal online and make sense of their experiences. They made a narrative analysis of a sample of 30 travel blogs to examine three narrative elements: social aspect, narrative structure and meaning. A couple of examples may show how, 'picking in the vocabulary of narration', identity is built through story-telling and sense is given to the travel experience. As for identity building, the authors report the example of a blogger who started her tale stating that she is a glutton but she apologises because her travel journal "will not be completely filled with food critiques and descriptions" (quoted from Bosangit, McCabe & Hibbert, 2009, p. 65). As for experience sense-making, one example is that of a blogger, originally from New Zealand, who reported her experience in Laos, and emphasizes the beauty she discovered in a simple countryside life, which was absolutely different from her homeland but which she described as a "great place".

### 2.7.2 Understanding the grammar of UGC code

A growing interest has been given in recent years to the identification of genres on the Web. The characteristics of weblogs as a form of Internet communication were the topic of empirical research by Blood (2002), Krishnamurthy (2002) and Halavais (2002), and were systematically described by Herring et al. (2004). Personal home pages count a number of studies considering different aspects: identification of structural characteristics (Dillon & Gushrowski, 2000), distinctive traits of business websites (Ha & James, 1998), gender differences (Arnold & Miller, 1999), just to cite some of them (for a review of the literature, see: Döring, N. [2002]. Personal home pages on the Web: A review of research. *Journal of Computer-Mediated Communication*, 7.) Online travel-related literature has received, instead, until now, scarce attention as candidate for genre status. I only found a few studies dedicated to the topic.

In the paper mentioned above (section 2.7.1), Bosangit et al. (2009) analyzed also the way bloggers recount their stories, that is the 'grammar' of narratives used for identity building and experience sense-making. The structure of blogs was accounted for using Labov and Waletzky's (1967) structural model of narrative, which distinguishes six parts: abstract, orientation, complicating action, evaluation, resolution and coda. Each part has a function. It has to be noted, then, that the channel through which the message is conveyed influences the rules for the correct use of the code. In the case of blogs, "the technological feature of blogging which allows readers to post comments to blog entries is an additional manifestation of the interactional context in narratives", and asks for a special attention to the audience which is mostly unknown but can be figured out to some extent. Clues of the appeal to a familiar rather than a generic and unknown audience are introductory or concluding greetings like "hi to all" and "take care, love xxxx".



Travel blogs as a form of narrative of the modern age was examined by Pudliner (2007), who discussed the topic from a cultural ethnographic point of view. She did not make any systematic analysis of blogs but rather wondered about three topics: tourism as a language, of which travel blogs are the digital representatives; tourism as a place of experiences in place and time which, if not imposing a structure to the story-telling, determines at least some aspects of the plot; the authenticity of tourism, which refers to the fact that the story told is personal and unique, thus its plot cannot be rigidly fixed. Concerning the second aspect – tourism in place and time –, the author acknowledges that the ‘grammar’ of travel blogs implies that, for instance: tourists, as story tellers, utilize narration to explain their time in tourist spaces, the story reflects the linear nature of travel itself and tends to be the author’s observation of the outside world, tourists construct experience that would afford the landscape to ‘speak’ for itself.

From a marketing point of view, the narrative structure analysis of travel blogs may help to identify key marketing elements for a more effective promotion of destinations. Tussyadiah and Fesenmaier (2008), with this aim in mind, analyzed the narrative structure of blogs about visits to Philadelphia. The analysis included: characterization (i.e. the introduction of the blog writer as a personal character), temporal dimension, relational organization (of goals-actions-outcomes), space categorization, overall product evaluation. Characterization and space categorization, in particular, are viewed as determinants of travel genres. The blog writer plays the role of a personal character, and her travel company, mentioned in her story, represents multiple characters; in this way, characterization introduces drama in the story, allowing blog readers “to access the picture of lived identities created through actions, attitudes, and values” (Tussyadiah & Fesenmaier, 2008, p. 303). Space categorization, in its turn, fosters the construction of hypothetical travel scenarios, which work as “rehearsals” of likely future travels.

## 2.8 Concluding remarks

To catch the communicative significance of a text, all the elements of the communicative event the text represents have to be taken into account. The meaning of a text is, in fact, the result of the synergy among such elements. In Figure 5, the discussion concerning tourism-related UGC is summarized, associating each element of Jakobson’s model to the main issues covered in the literature. It constitutes a visual summary; to both classify research efforts dealing with tourism-related UGC, and to point out the elements, which have to be considered when aiming at giving an account of its communicative significance.

The analysis of a message should start, then, from the recognition of the goal it was conceived to pursue and the uses one can make of it. A topographic map, for instance, intends to be a bi-dimensional symbolic representation of topographic aspects of a place

(e.g. mountains, rivers, desert zones); different uses, then, can be made of a map: find directions in an unknown place, investigate characteristics of that place, locate historical facts. In the case of tourism-related UGC and OTRs in particular, it can be reasonably said that their general purpose is to give information and recommendation about tourism products, and that they are used by fellow tourists mostly for supporting their travel decisions. However, to fully understand the communicative significance of UGC and to be able to analyse their content, it is not enough to acknowledge their ‘general’ purpose and their ‘common’ use, but it is necessary to classify and characterize it as belonging to a genre.

Next chapter is devoted to present a methodology which allows an account for the coherence and organization of texts. Such methodology will be applied, then, in chapter 4, to analyse a corpus of OTR, with the aim of characterizing them as a textual genre on their own.

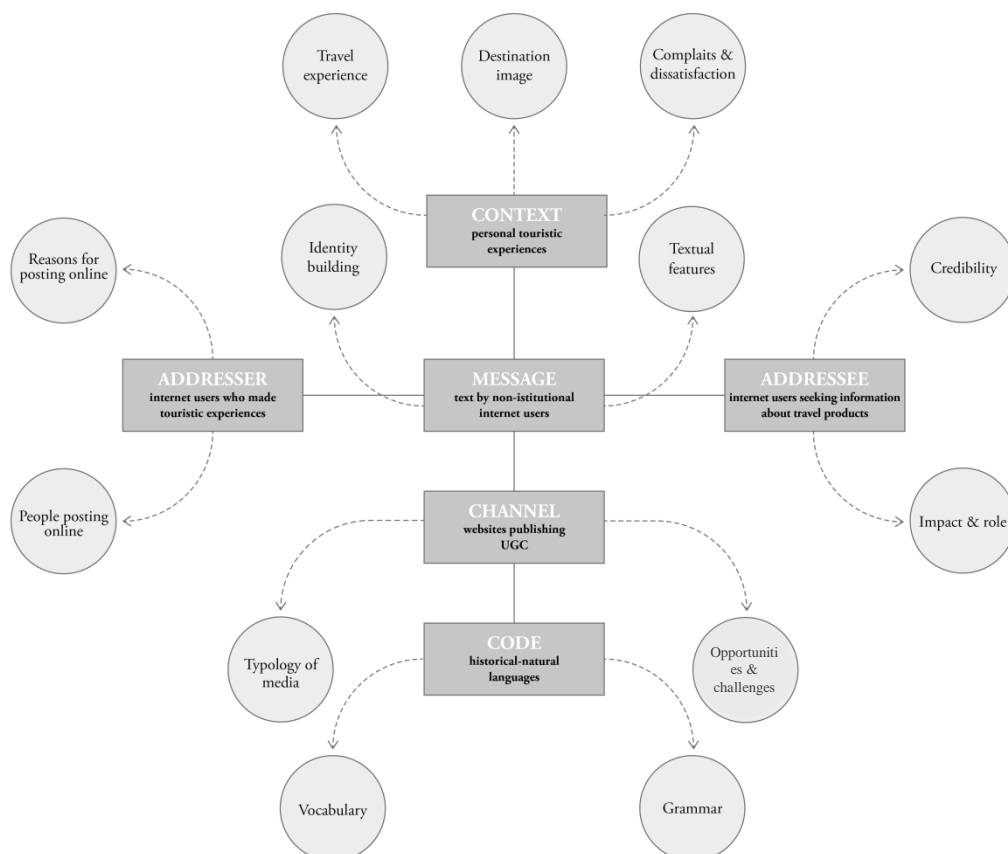


Figure 6: Summary scheme of the literature review on tourism-related User Generated Content.

### 3 A semantic-pragmatic perspective on Online Travel Reviews

*In chapter 3 Online Travel Reviews are defined as a complex action pursuing a specific and recognizable communicative purpose.*

*The first section (3.1) outlines the basic conceptual instrument used for investigating the characteristics of OTR as a communicative event and for proposing a definition of the respective textual genre. The conceptual instrument is provided by Congruity Theory, that is a theory of text coherence and organization adopting an action-centred perspective on verbal communication (4.1.1). Congruity is explained as a property of discourse which characterizes the meaningful combination among words (4.1.2). According to this theory, texts are complex actions constituted by multiple units each performing a specific action, and the coherence of texts can be accounted for representing them as a hierarchy of predicate-argument relations. Thus, the approach advocated by Congruity Theory results to be principally pragmatic, though it recognizes an interdependence of semantics and pragmatics (4.1.3).*

*Given their increasing popularity on the web, OTR are good candidates to be awarded a genre status, that is for being recognized and characterized as a proper textual genre. In section 3.2 the issue of textual genre definition is tackled. First, a concise overview of the main approaches to genre studies is given (3.2.1), then studies on OTR parent genres of travel review (3.2.2), and online review (3.2.3) are discussed.*

*In the third section (3.3), the pragmatic predicate governing the textual genre OTR is reconstructed, combining elements from the etymology and semantic of review (3.3.1), the strategic goal of TripAdvisor (3.3.2), which is expression of the social (communicative) purpose of OTR as complex actions, and the guidelines provided by TripAdvisor to reviewers (3.3.3), which put constraints on what is published and what is rejected. The structure of the pragmatic predicate, as well as the presuppositions it imposes on its argument places, and the entailments it adds to the common ground, are pointed out in sub-section 3.3.4.*

*Section 3.4 is devoted to describe the corpus of texts used to analyze the utterances composing OTR, which are the presuppositions imposed on OTR by the dominant pragmatic predicate (results of the analysis will be discussed in the next chapter). Motivations for the choice of the source of data (3.4.1), the type of review considered – that are destination reviews (3.4.2) - and their referent – that is Rome (3.4.3), are given.*

*In the last section (3.5) UAM Corpus Tool is presented, that is the software for text annotation and analysis employed to handle the corpus.*

### 3.1 Congruity theory: a theory of text coherence and organization

As shown in the previous chapters, OTR are a genre of Computer Mediated Communication attaining widespread popularity, especially for consumer research, but whose characteristics haven't yet been systematically described. Empirical research on OTR is far limited, while research on other types of online reviews gained higher attention. OTR, though, are a good *prima facie* candidate to be awarded a genre status, in that they are named and recognized by members of the culture in which they are created, and they exhibit common structures and substance. They are also, however, a developing genre because they are ontologically bound to the medium of communication, in the sense that they arise from actual online practices, which change and evolve together with the change and evolution of digital technologies.

This research aims at taking an empirical snapshot of OTR in their present stage. In order to systematically describe the genre OTR, it needs a conceptual instrument in order to identify OTR constitutive elements, which make them recognizable by the community of online users. Such an instrument is provided by Congruity theory, which gives analytical tools for accounting for the coherence and organization of texts. The first section of this chapter is thus devoted to present the main assumptions of this theory.

#### 3.1.1 Verbal communication as action

Congruity theory (Rigotti, 2005; Rocci, 2005; Rigotti & Rocci, 2006a; Rocci, Mazzali & Pollaroli, forthcoming) adopts a perspective on human communication that is centered on verbal communication as *action* (see chapter II, p. 2.4.1). Within this perspective, a text is considered a complex action, whose *meaning* coincides with its intended effect, that is the change it is expected to bring about in the context; it is to say that, after a text has been uttered, things are no longer the same for the interlocutors. This perspective “belongs to a long series of approaches to text coherence that are based on relational predicates, sometimes called *discourse relations*, which take text units as arguments to which they impose specific constraints” (Rigotti, 2005, p. 82). Congruity theory (henceforth: CT) accounts, indeed, for the coherence of texts by describing how textual elements are hierarchically related to each other; the units of this relation are utterances, constituted by predicates and arguments. CT encompasses *Speech Act Theory* (Austin, 1962; Searle, 1969) and goes beyond it. According to Speech Act Theory, in fact, the coherence of a text is defined at the level of communicative (illocutionary) acts; it explains how and under which conditions an utterance is an act, providing a conceptual framework for understanding and describing the different kinds of speech acts (Sbisà, 2007). CT considers, in addition, the role of each utterance within the whole text, claiming that all text units concur in performing the high-level action of the text. The

meaning of a text cannot be reduced to referential continuity, in that it is not sufficient for textual units to refer to entities mentioned in other utterances of the same text, but they hold together because they concur to the action performed by the whole text.

There can be found “significant similarities with [...] Rhetorical Structure Theory developed by Mann and Thompson since the late ‘80s. In Rhetorical Structure Theory rhetorical relations are defined both in terms of the constraints they pose on their textual argument and in terms of the effect the speaker intends to achieve in the addressee by establishing a particular relation.” (Rigotti, 2005, p. 82). However, Rhetorical Structure Theory does not clarify its relationship with Speech Act theory, with which it clearly shares the perspective on language and main ideas.

From a psychological and behavioural point of view, the effect the speaker intends to achieve (or, put in other terms, the change brought about by a speech act) can be characterized with the notion of *habit change* which has been mainly elaborated by C.S. Peirce (1969). Peirce explains that a habit change is “a modification of a person tendencies toward action, resulting from previous experiences or from previous exertions of his will or acts, or from a complexus of both kinds of cause” (p. 476). A personal example might help to clarify in which sense a speech act brings about a habit change. Before my one-year long experience in Australia, I thought that swimming in an open-air swimming pool in winter was crazy; however, since the only swimming pool on the Australian university campus I visited was open-air both in summer and winter, and because I did still wanted to swim after a working day, I forced myself to give it a try. The experience was successful, and it modified once and for all my tendency toward swimming in winter in open-air swimming pools. According to Peirce, the performance of a speech act brings about a habit change in a person’s tendencies toward action exactly as my swimming experience did.

The tradition of Speech Act Theory, from another side, emphasizes the *social dimension* of verbal communication. The pragmatic effects of an utterance are explained in terms of *commitments* (Searle, 1969) that are exchanged between the interlocutors; the production of such effects is made possible by the fact that the hearer has an active role in the communicative interaction, both because she interprets the utterance produced by the speaker and because she takes up that utterance as a performance of a certain kind of speech act, adding to the common ground its “conventional effects” (Sbisà, 2001). Each speech act has, indeed, to be considered an *updating of the common ground* of the interaction (Clark, 1996), which entails an updating of the interlocutors’ commitments. According to Searle (2001, p. 147), “just about every speech act involves a commitment of some kind or other. The famous examples are speech acts like promising, where the speaker is committed to carrying out a future course of action, but asserting commits the speaker

to the truth of the proposition asserted, and orders commit the speaker to the belief that the person to whom he or she gives the order is able to do it, to the desire that he or she should do it, and to permitting the hearer to do it. In short, what people have thought of as the distinctive element of promising, actually pervades just about all speech acts.” To take an example from daily life, if I ask my husband to pick Francesco (our son) up at the nursery and he accepts, he commits himself to get organized in order to be at the nursery on time, to physically pick Francesco up and to go back home together with him. If, having accepted my request, he does not perform the actions implied, that would be a problem, and I would probably receive a phone call from the nursery teachers! However, even if my husband did not perform the action he committed to, or if he didn’t accept my request, my utterance of request, once uttered, would have brought about a change in the context anyway, at the level of the shared common ground between me and my husband: asking him to go to the nursery, I committed myself to the belief he could go there, and he got to know that, instead, I had difficulties to go there myself or that I had other plans. Language, recognized as a social action, has the power to draw people closer to each other.

The social dimension of verbal communication becomes even more evident if the *active role* of the hearer is recognized. This aspect has been emphasized particularly by the Russian philosopher and literary critic M. M. Bakhtin, who developed an idea of language according to which every discourse is a segment in a dialogue, in that it is aimed at the explicit or implicit answer of the addressee. In a famous excerpt of his essay *The Problem of Speech Genres*, Bakhtin (1986, p. 68) states that “when the listener perceives and understands the meaning (the language meaning) of speech, he simultaneously takes an active, responsive attitude toward it. He either agrees or disagrees with it (completely or partially), arguments it, applies it, prepares for its execution, and so on. And the listener adopts this responsive attitude for the entire duration of the process of listening and understanding, from the very beginning.”

Rigotti (2005) argues that both accounts of communication – that are the psychologically based approach described by Peirce in terms of habit change, and the socially based approach of the Speech Act tradition focused on commitments - are complementary rather than mutually exclusive. He points out that “the assumption of a commitment, when it is sincere, always presupposes some sort of habit change. The relative balance between these two dimensions, moreover, varies according to the type of speech act performed. In the case of a *promise*, for instance, we can say that the change in the commitment store represents the main effect to which the speaker aims, while this is certainly not the case with many *assertive* speech acts: the speaker’s commitment to the truth of the proposition is always present but rarely comes to the

fore (except in special contexts such as testimony in a court). More often it is the intended change in the beliefs of the addressee that is fore-grounded in the assertive act.” (Rigotti, 2005, pp. 78-79).

### 3.1.2 What does congruity mean?

*Congruity* refers to the logic-semantic cohesion of a discourse, it is a *property* which characterizes the meaningful combination of words. The fact that a discourse is meaningful, though, does not mean that it is true. There might be, in fact, false discourses that are perfectly meaningful and congruent. Even a contradictory discourse can be considered congruent because a sense can be recovered, that is, indeed, the contradictory sense, the fact that the contradiction is manifest and can be recognized.

“Congruity” is an old term, which can be traced back to Plato and to classical Greek and Latin grammarians. Rigotti (1993, 1994) traces the foundation of the notion of congruity in a passage of Plato’s *Sophist* (261.d.4 – 262.e.2) where the philosopher gives a definition of “discourse” as the right combination of nouns and verbs. Plato considered discourse as a living body which cannot be dismembered; thus, its meaning was given by the intertwining of its constitutive parts, that were nouns and verbs. This phenomenon was called *symploké* (from the Greek “sympléko” which means intertwining), and corresponds to what is called here congruity. The notion of congruity already represented a constitutive trait of the definition of discourse in the *Institutiones Grammaticae* of Priscian, that was the standard textbook during the Middle Ages for the study of Latin; there, discourse is defined as “a congruent combination of word-forms manifesting an accomplished thought” (op. cit. in Rigotti, 1993, 1994).

Congruity guarantees the ‘semantic correctness’ of the discourse, and has to be distinguished from the *grammaticality*, which refers to the ‘syntactic correctness’. In fact, a discourse (or a sentence) might be syntactically correct but semantically senseless, as in the following example: “Rome is awkward”. This sentence is syntactically correct, but semantically it is a nonsense, unless it is given some sort of metaphorical interpretation; congruent combinations of the predicate “awkward” require the argument to be a human being or an animal, or the behaviour/decision/action of a human being or an animal.

*Predicates* are modes of being, that is: actions, activities, relations (to be mother of/wife of, to compare), properties (red, beautiful, crowded), events (to rain, to die). The term predicate is the translation of the Latin “praedicatum”, which is, in turn, the translation of the Greek “kategoria”, deriving from “kata”, meaning “about” and “agoreuo”, meaning “to speak”: a predicate, thus, refers to/speaks about something, more precisely, it says the mode of being of an argument. The term *argument* is here used to refer to an

entity, “including individuals, situations, and events that are or can be involved (affected) by this mode of being. State of affairs are indeed entities or arguments affected by modes of being.” (Rigotti, Rocci & Greco, 2012, p. 12). Not every predicate can be combined with every argument for a discourse to be congruent, but each predicate selects its argument types, in the sense that each predicate imposes conditions – called *presuppositions* – which arguments must fulfil to congruently combine with it, that is: the predicate predefines the class of possible arguments. These conditions can be outlined by pondering on the relation between the predicates and its arguments, which is characterized by three aspects: the *number* of the argument places a predicate requires, the argument *quality*, that is the plexus of specific features a given argument must have, the *order* in which the arguments must appear, that affects the communicative perspective from which the situation is viewed. The order of arguments is important “because different perspectives on a particular fragment of world are pointed out by means of it” (Rigotti, Rocci & Greco, 2012, p. 14).

The combination of predicates and arguments is ruled by the **principle of congruity**, formulated as follows:

*“There is semantic congruity between a predicate term and the argument term it is applied to when the characteristics imposed by the predicate on each argument place are hyperonyms of the characteristics of the respective arguments.”* (Rigotti 2005, p. 79; see also Rigotti, 1994 and Rigotti et al., 2012)

Besides, when a predicate is asserted it brings about some *entailments* that correspond to what occurs if it is true. Entailments represent, indeed, the proper meaning of the predicate.

Let’s take the example of the predicate *to write a review*, that is treated here as lexicalized unit, analyzing the following sentence:

Example: Silvia writes a review of the movie she saw last night.

Number - ‘To write a review is a dyadic predicate, in that it has two argument places: someone who writes the review (according to CT conventions, it is named  $x_1$ ) and something that is reviewed ( $x_2$ ).

Silvia	writes a review	of the movie she saw last night.
x	P	x

*Quality* - The predicate “to write a review” imposes on its arguments some presuppositions, which are the conditions the arguments must satisfy for the sentence to be meaningful:  $x_1$  must exist, must be a human being, must have had a consumer experience with  $x_2$  and must be literate;  $x_2$  must exist, must be a (tangible or intangible)



consumer product or service, must have been experienced by  $x_1$ . The presuppositions imposed on  $x_1$  and  $x_2$  by the predicate are, in fact, hyperonyms of the characteristics of “Silvia” and “the movie she saw last night”. If one tries to combine P with arguments of different quality, a nonsense is generated, as in: Silvia writes a review of her grandmother, or in: The table writes a review of a movie.

*Order* – the communicative perspective from which the situation in the example (i.e. Silvia making a review) is viewed, is manifested on the morphological level: the fact that the verb is used in the active form imposes a certain order on the arguments. If used in the passive form, as in

$\boxed{\text{A movie}}$       is reviewed       $\boxed{\text{by Silvia.}}$   
 $x$                                   P                                   $x$

the predicate “to be reviewed” (that is the passive form of “to write a review”) still selects two arguments, and imposes on them the same presuppositions as in the active form, but conveys a different meaning.

The entailments that the predicate “to write a review” brings about concern the actual production of  $x_2$  by  $x_1$ . Figure 6. represents the predicate-argument structure of the utterance in the example.

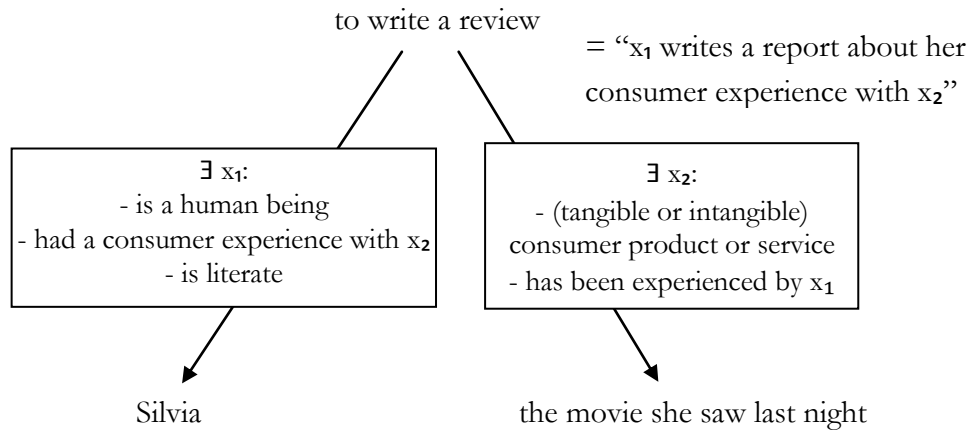


Figure 7: Predicate-argument structure of the utterance “Silvia writes a review of the movie she saw last night”

### 3.1.3 Semantic and pragmatic aspects of meaning

According to the action-centred perspective on verbal communication adopted by Congruity Theory, texts are *complex actions* constituted by multiple units performing each one a specific action that all together concur to perform the high-level action of the text. Texts are deeply pervaded by subtle but strong *logical ties* among the units, which guarantee their coherence. CT posits that the coherence of a text can be accounted for if it is represented as a hierarchy of predicate-argument relations. The hypothesis of congruity I have so far showed for the lexical level must be extended well beyond lexical predicates by admitting into the semantic structure of texts **high-level pragmatic abstract predicates**: *connective predicates* or *pragmatic predicates*. CT, in fact, builds on the idea that “the meanings that are really exchanged in a communicative interaction are not really a matter concerning *semantics*, but rather *pragmatics*, because they depend on the context, situation, activity type, they are not fixed but negotiated interactively in the exchange, and they are not decoded but inferred from contextual cues” (Rigotti, Rocci & Greco, 2012, p. 20). Thus, the approach advocated by CT results to be principally *pragmatic*, but recognizes an interdependence of semantics and pragmatics. *Semantics* refers to the relationship between language and reality, pointing to the fact that utterances and discourses represent possible state of affairs. *Pragmatics* is intended both in the broad sense of considering the role of contextual factors in language use and understanding, and in the etymological sense referring to the fact that utterances and discourses realize particular kinds of social (joint) actions. Semantics is dependent from pragmatics because interlocutors also rely on assumptions or expectations about what is being done, in order to infer the intended meaning of a message. Pragmatics is, in turn, dependent on semantics because verbal communication actually realizes social actions.

Thus, in order to fully describe the semantics of a text, we have to include pragmatics, “by admitting into the semantic structure of text high-level pragmatic abstract predicates which on occasion have no linguistic manifestation at all” (Rigotti, 2005, p. 81). Pragmatic predicates have the same logical structure of lexical predicates: they impose presuppositions to their argument places and entail pragmatic effects that change habits and social reality of the addresser and the addressee. Connective predicates are an answer to the question of how it is that a text composed by different utterances conveys a univocal sense. The function of the connective predicate is, indeed, to link directly or indirectly, the action accomplished by each utterance to the action accomplished by the whole text;

*“to put it bluntly, the connective predicate characterizes the utterance by specifying what the speaker does to the addressee with her utterance”* (Rigotti, 2005, p. 82).

Rocci (2012) explains that the idea of the pragmatic predicate is a variation of the *performative hypothesis* of the linguist John Robert Ross (1975), who is an exponent of the generative semantics school of thought. According to the performative hypothesis, the inner structure of an utterance is governed by a performative predicate and there is, therefore, continuity between the semantic and the pragmatic dimension. The predicate governing an utterance is performative in the sense explained by Austin (1962) when arguing about the function of language: according to him, language has not a truth value but is used to do things. In the same vein, the pragmatic (or connective) predicate is performative because it refers to an action made through means of language.

I exemplify the matter by reconstructing the connective predicate of an utterance taken from my corpus of data. It has, however, to be noticed that the reconstruction I propose does not take into account all the pragmatic elements, which cooperate to create the meaning of the utterance and, conversely, help the addressee to make the right inferences.

Example: “I was a little apprehensive about going on this trip.”  
(source: [http://www.tripadvisor.com/ShowUserReviews-g187791-r115783057-Rome\\_Lazio.html](http://www.tripadvisor.com/ShowUserReviews-g187791-r115783057-Rome_Lazio.html))

If the connective predicate in the example is reconstructed in terms of “what the speaker does to the addressee with the utterance”, the following formula can be obtained: “With the utterance  $U_0$  the Speaker expresses her past mood toward the undertaking of a course of action.’ Every pragmatic predicate selects, at least, three argument places: the speaker, the hearer and the utterance; the minimal schema is, thus, the following:  $P(\text{Spk}, \text{Hr}, U_0)$ .

A pragmatic predicate may govern not only one single utterance, but also a sequence of utterances, which may even correspond to the whole text. In this case, the pragmatic predicate is *dominant* upon the entire discourse, because it expresses its pragmatic function; for this reason, pragmatic predicates can be defined as **discursive connectives**, in that they bind together a discourse. The text/discourse, in this term, constitutes an argument of a super-ordinate connective. Utterances making up the text/discourse, represent local moves of a wider rhetorical strategy, and are subordinate to the whole of the text (Rocci, 2012).

Going back to my example, in order to account for the meaning the speaker wanted to convey with her utterance, the entire text the utterance is part of must be taken into account. The utterance, in fact maybe, was the hooking point for telling a story: it can be the case that the speaker reveals along the narration that, despite her initial

apprehension, the trip was great and everything worked out. Maybe the utterance was, instead, the conclusion of the story, just preceding the final assessment of the travel experience, used to counter or to strengthen an initial claim: after having told her trip, the speaker reveals that she was apprehensive about it, and now that it is over, she realizes that the apprehension was unwarranted or, conversely, that her feeling was right. The utterances preceding ( $U_{-1}$ ) or following cataphorically ( $U_{+1}$ ) in the co-text of the utterance, which decisively contribute to create its meaning; they must, therefore, be considered constitutive parts of pragmatic predicates, and have to be reconstructed in the semantic analysis.

As any other predicate, the connective predicate imposes on its arguments some presuppositions and adds entailments to the common ground of the communicative interaction. The function of an utterance within a text depends on its relation with the other utterances of the text; therefore, presuppositions imposed by the predicate and entailments have to be identified taking into account: the context where the utterance is uttered, the text it is part of, the respective role of the speaker and the hearer within the context. It clearly emerges, here, the role of pragmatics in the semantic analysis of high-level pragmatic predicates. In the example above, if the utterance served as hooking point for telling a story, the dominant pragmatic predicate might be defined as a narrative; if, instead, the utterance was the conclusion of a story, the predicate might be defined as a final verdict.

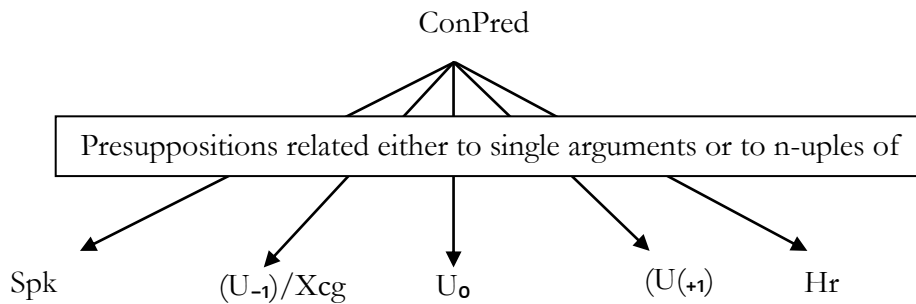


Figure 8: Structure of the pragmatic predicate governing an utterance  
(Rigotti, 2005, p. 85)

Figure 7 represents the general structure of a pragmatic predicate governing an utterance. In the rectangular box on the arrows, the presuppositions that the connective predicate imposes on its arguments have to be pointed out.  $U_{-1}$  and  $U_{+1}$  are occupied by anaphoric or cataphoric *co-textual utterances*, but can be as well occupied by implicit *contextual propositions* (X) that are part of the common ground.

The structure of a pragmatic predicate governing a discourse or text, is basically the same, but one argument place is occupied by the discourse or text itself ( $T_0$ ), and anaphoric or cataphoric co-textual utterances must be replaced by aspects of the common ground which help both the speaker to convey her intended meaning and the reader/hearer to correctly understand it.

There usually is in a text a specific utterance or a sequence of utterances, which is directly connected to the pragmatic predicate and can directly occupy the argument place occupied by the text itself: it is called **dominant utterance** or dominant sequence. In the case of OTR, if, from one side, the dominant pragmatic predicate *advice in OTR* has the entire review as argument ( $T_0$ ), from the other side such pragmatic predicate takes a specific utterance or a sequence of utterances of the review text as argument. The analysis presented in chapter 4 will allow to identify dominant utterances in OTR. All the other utterances in the discourse or text, are only indirectly connected with the dominant pragmatic predicate. They are, of course, also governed by pragmatic predicates, which tell their function at the local level, that is the part they play to reach the overall communicative purpose of the text/discourse. Since the function of these pragmatic predicates at the local level is subordinate to the function of the dominant pragmatic predicate, their governing connective is called **subordinate connective** (Rocci 2012).

In section 3.3.4 of this chapter, I will propose a super-ordinate connective predicate for the textual genre Online Travel Review, and will analyze the presuppositions it imposes upon its arguments as well as the entailments it adds to the common ground, on the base of: the indications that a platform which publishes OTR gives to reviewers, the etymological characterization of the term review, insights from the literature about other types of review. After that, in chapter 4, I will go down in the hierarchy of predicate-argument relations analyzing local utterances of a corpus of OTR, in order to test empirically the proposed super-ordinate connective predicate. For each OTR there is, in fact, a unique connective predicate, that is the result of the interplay among the utterances it is made up of; the unique connective predicates are, in fact, manifestations of the generic predicate. The analysis of OTR in terms of local connectives governing the different utterances, then, will allow to emerge typical communicative schema for this textual genre.

### 3.2 Genre studies

Approaching OTR from a macro-level perspective as communicative acts within a discursive system, and trying to identify their constitutive characteristics, means defining them as a *textual genre*. A prospective tourist searching the web in need for

recommendations, is usually able to recognize a text she comes upon as an OTR and expects that text to be of help for satisfying her needs exactly because it is an OTR. This ‘spontaneous’ knowledge is knowledge of textual (and speech) genres, which people use in everyday life to classify the communicative events they are involved in, and to give congruent feed-backs. We use genres, in fact, “to package our speech and make of it a recognizable response to the exigencies of the situation” (Berkenkotter & Huckin, 1995, p. 7).

Genre analysis has a long-established tradition in literary studies, and genre approaches are having, since the last decade, a considerable impact on the way discourse is understood. Most of them build upon the concept of genre developed by Bakhtin (1986, p. 60), who posited that: “language is realized in the form of concrete utterances (oral or written) by participants in the various areas of human activity. (...) Each separate utterance is individual, of course, but each sphere in which language is used develops its own *relatively stable types* of these utterances. These we may call *speech genres*.”

It goes beyond the scope of this dissertation to review the literature discussing issues related to speech genres. A concise overview of important approaches seems, however, to be appropriate in order to understand how an analysis of a specific communicative event, through means of Congruity Theory, leads to a characterization and, ultimately, to a definition of a genre for a “relatively stable types” of utterances making up a certain type of text.

### 3.2.1 Different approaches to genre studies

Three broad schools of genre theories can be distinguished (Hyland, 2002; Wang, 2007): a) *New Rhetoric*, which draws on the seminal work by Miller (1984), and is represented in the studies by Bazerman (1988), Freedman and Medway (1994), Berkenkotter and Huckin (1995); b) *Systemic Functional Linguistics*, that is based on the theoretical work by Halliday (1978, 1989, 1994), Martin, (1984, 1992, 1997) and Eggins (1994); c) studies on *English for Specific Purposes* conducted mainly by Swales (1990), and Bhatia (1993). Their approaches are essentially overlapping, grounding on a general agreement on the nature of genre, but differences in the kind of research and pedagogies encouraged by the different schools might be usefully emphasized. Hyland (2002, p. 114) highlights that “genre analysis is based on two central assumptions: that the feature of a similar group of texts depend on the social context of their creation and use, and that those features can be described in a way that relates a text to others like it and to the choices and constraints acting on text producers”. Differences, instead, mainly concern the emphasis that is given to either text or context, to either the role of texts in social communities or the ways that texts reflect and shape these communities (Hyland, 2002).

a) New Rhetoric, rather than analyzing text, concerns itself with investigating context, adopting ethnographic methodologies. The aim is to uncover attitudes, values and beliefs of the communities of text users implied and somehow shaped by genres. It tends to tie linguistic and substantive similarities of types of discourse with regularities in human spheres of activities, rather than characterizing them by similarities in content and form (Freedman & Medway, 1994). Miller (1984, p. 159) proposes to “understand genres as typified rhetorical actions based in recurrent situations”, which establish regularities in form and content. Following this idea, it must be concluded that “members of a genre are discourses that are incomplete, in the sense that they are circumscribed by a relatively complete shift in rhetorical situation” (1984, p. 159). Thus, for Miller, the classification of genre should follow an open principle rather than a closed one based on structure, aim or content of the text. Bazerman (1994) holds the same view, arguing that genres “identify a repertoire of actions that may be taken in a set of circumstances” (p. 82). In fact, “over a period of time individuals perceive homologies in circumstances that encourage them to see these as occasions for similar kinds of utterances. These *typified utterances*, often developing standardized formal features, appear as ready solutions to similar problems” (Bazerman, 1994, p. 82). He stresses the social dimension of genres, both in the sense that they arise from typified social actions, and because they are recognized within a system of social practices (“a genre exists only in the recognitions and attributions of the users” [Bazerman, 1994, p. 83]). Bazerman makes his point analyzing the case of the patent. A particular text can be recognized as a patent on the base of standard public beliefs about patents. However, the patent genre and, together with it the social system of patent grant, developed along the history following traceable events and key-decisions, and nowadays the laws suggests the content, organization and even some of the phrasing of such genre.

The fact that most people are adept at recognizing a piece of text as belonging to a genre, suggests that there might be a link between recurrent social situations and the respective communicative practices. Speech genres work, indeed, as standard rhetorical templates to help communicators to achieve the goal of certain communicative situations.

b) The approach to speech genre of Systemic Functional Linguistics, also known as the ‘Sydney School’, builds on the idea that language consists of a set of systems, which provide the speaker/writer with choices for expressing meaning, that is people make meanings by making linguistic choices (Wang, 2007). Genre is here described as “a staged, goal-orientated, and purposeful social activity that people engage in as members of their culture” (Martin, 1984, p. 25). The emphasis is on the *social purposes* of genres, and on the link between language and context. Analytical efforts aimed at explicating

distinctive stages (or moves), and patterns of lexical, grammatical, and cohesive choices of the schematic (rhetorical) structures that have evolved to serve the communicative purpose of each genre; because the goals of each genre are different, in fact, the genres will also be different in structure (Taboada, 2004). The major contribution of Systemic Functional Linguistics to genre studies is the analysis of the ‘micro-genres’ (such as descriptions, evaluations, argumentations, procedures) that make up ‘macro-genres’, that is more complex texts, both written and institutionalized, such as news stories or academic discourse, and spoken and colloquial, such as gossiping or telling stories.

c) The third perspective is generally referred to as English for Specific Purposes approach. It is centred on the *communicative purpose* and the formal properties of texts, and is motivated by a commitment to pedagogical applications, especially on the creation of materials for both first language (L1) and second language (L2) students as well as teachers. The most influential definition of genre in ESP work on genre analysis is the one elaborated by Swales in his wide cited work *Genre analysis: English in academic and research settings* (1990). There, he proposes that a genre is “a class of communicative events, the members of which share some set of communicative purposes. These purposes are recognized by the expert members of the parent discourse community and thereby constitute the rationale for the genre. This rationale shapes the schematic structure of the discourse and influences and constrains choice of content and style” (Swales, 1990, p. 58). Thus, in a text, the structure and the choices at content and style level depend on the communicative purpose; genres are groups of texts sharing syntactical, lexical and rhetorical characteristics, whose communicative purpose is recognizable by the community of reference. In agreement with the stand taken by Swales, Bathia emphasizes the need for genre analysis to go beyond description and to attempt explanation, for answering the question “Why do members of a specialist community write the way they do?” (Bathia, 1993, p. 1). Hyland (2002) observes that this perspective steers between the previous ones, in that it employs the Bakhtinian notions of intertextuality and dialogism as the New Rhetoric, and draws on the Systemic Functional Linguistics understandings of text structure.

### 3.2.2 Genres of travel reviews

Travel literature has given rise to well-defined and recognized genres. Tour-guides and travel diaries (or travel journals) are just two examples. Travel diaries, in particular, are a type of the wider genre diary, that is so much representative of a popular communicative practice (in Bazerman’s terms “of a sphere of human activity”) that in Pieve Santo Stefano, a town in Central Italy, a public archive of diaries (*Archivio dei Diari*) has been instituted, and the town has been given the name of “Town of the diary”.



Urry, in the book *The Tourist Gaze* (1990), chronicles the growth of the tourist guide and explains its function from a semiotic perspective. He introduces the concept of *gaze*, explaining that the tourist is attracted by a “promise of delight” and is lead toward objects which are, for some reasons, considered extraordinary. The tourist’s gaze is caught by this extraordinary object (called *sight*), but often a sign is necessary, which makes evident the extraordinary aspect. The tour guide has the function of signing the sight which deserves the tourist’s gaze; it works like a *marker* for the sight, that might be, for instance, an attraction, a monument, a garden. Mazzali-Lurati (2009) accounts for the genre tourist guide from a semantic-pragmatic perspective, building on the rhetorical analysis of Kerbratt-Orecchioni (2004), and applying key notions of Congruity Theory. The communicative purpose of a tour guide is to promote, encourage and evaluate a destination; this purpose is accomplished at the textual level with different types of texts: descriptions, procedures, evaluations and comments, persuasive texts. Each type of text is realized through different combinations of connectives/pragmatic predicates: descriptions and procedures are governed by coordinative pragmatic predicates, that are, exactly, descriptive and procedural speech acts; evaluations and comments are governed by axiological acts and subordinate argumentative acts; persuasion is reached through the use of directives and argumentation. There are, then, other types of texts in the tour guides, such as specification or contextualization acts, which are subordinate to the main text types, in the sense that they add something to it, allowing the reader to better understand the message.

Tourist guides, though, are a well-established textual genre, whose communicative purpose is clear for both the addresser and the addressee. The case is different for OTR. First, it has to be noticed that the actors playing a role in OTR are more than two: besides the reviewer and the reader, also the platform publishing OTR is a decisive actor. Both the reviewer and the platform, indeed, have an important influence on the way OTR are created, because they pursue multiple and partially different communicative goals. Reviewers might be pushed to write OTR not only by altruistic reasons, as to be helpful to other tourists or to reciprocate great experiences provided by travel and tourism companies, but also by hedonistic motives, as to share own travel experiences and acquired expertise (Gretzel, Yoo & Purifoy, 2007; Yoo & Gretzel, 2008a) (see section 2.2.1). The platform, in turn, does not only aim at the social benefit of “enabling travellers to plan and have the perfect trip” (TripAdvisor’s motto), but pursues also commercial goals. Concerning this, it is emblematic the substantial change that at the beginning of 2012 TripAdvisor made to the section where OTR were published (i.e. *Destination X Travel Guide*): it is no more possible to post a review for a destination, but only specific tourism services or attractions can be selected and reviewed. This means that tourists have no longer the possibility to report their

experience at a destination, depicting, this way, their own picture of that destination and contributing to shape its online reputation. They can only select an aspect of their experience, like an accommodation where they stayed or an attraction they visited. If this change in the platform design followed a commercial strategy or a certain view of OTR, cannot be said with the information at hand; the consequence is, in any case, that reviewers have now less freedom in expressing their view of a destination, and readers have fewer elements to grasp the richness of a travel experience. TripAdvisor's change in the format of OTR suggests, as well, that OTR are a 'developing' genre, whose characteristics change together with the communication practice it represents.

### 3.2.3 Genres of online reviews

The task of characterizing the genre OTR is further complicated by the particular environment in which OTR are created, that is the online environment. As Trosborg (1997) points out, in fact, there are a number of text types that are characterized and influenced by their *medium of communication*, for example e-mails, forum posts, faxes. For these text types, the medium has to be considered a decisive criterion.

With the advent of the Internet, for many textual genres a web version was created, and other genres emerged. Web genres have received considerable attention from analysts, who investigated the relation between off-line genres and their online equivalents, to understand if and how the formers carried over the latter. Studies on personal home pages showed that they are an 'emergent' rather than a 'reproduced' web genre (Crowston & Williams, 2000), if not even the first uniquely web-based genre (Dillon & Gushrowski, 2000), while home pages of business websites and home pages created by academic professionals carry over old practices from related off-line genres (Ha & James, 1998; Arnold & Miller, 1999). An analysis of weblogs conducted by Herring et al. (2004), instead, suggests that they are neither unique nor reproduced, but rather constitute a hybrid genre that draws from multiple sources.

Taboada (2011), following the approach to genre of the Systemic Functional Linguistics, analyzed online movie reviews in terms of their structural and lexico-grammatical characteristics. According to this view, in fact, structure is considered as a determining characteristic of texts, and is referred in terms of 'staging'. "*Stages* are the constitutive elements of a genre, which follow each other in a predetermined fashion, specific to each genre" (Taboada, 2011, p. 249); they are classified according to the main purpose they accomplish in the text, that is from a functional point of view. The lexico-grammatical choices that speakers make, then, are influenced by the genre, and each stage in a genre tends to have its own lexico-grammatical characteristics. The results of her analysis show that a typical movie review can be characterized in terms of a few stages: they all present an obligatory stage that is the 'Evaluation', and different

combinations of optional stages that can be ascribed to the broad stage 'Description' (i.e. summary of the movie's subject matter, description of plot and characters, background information about the reviewer). The linguistic aspects analyzed were the frequency of evaluative words and the frequency of temporal versus causal connectives.

While presenting her analysis, Taboada (2011) notes that, if the movie review genre adopted many of the conventions of the literary review genre once movies became popular, the online version of the genre is slightly different. The major difference is that online movie reviews are written by non-professionals, addressing an audience presumably made up of peers. Writing is, therefore, usually spontaneous and an important role is played by emotional and personal experience. The same holds for OTR, that are written by internet users for other users. However, it may be expected that online movie reviews present a structure that is more or less similar to the offline version, for at least two reasons. First, movie reviews are a quite popular, well established form of literary reviews, easily accessible and wide spread because published on mass-media print supports like newspaper or magazines; because they share a similar place "within structured human activities" (Bazerman, 1994), practices of the off-line genre might have reasonably carried over into the related on-line genre, making it partially reproduced. Taboada (2011) recognizes, indeed, that in the construction of the online movie review genre, reviews of different types and mediums of art are likely brought to bear.

The second reason concerns the object taken by movie reviews, that is exactly the movie. It is a highly formalized experience, well defined in time and space: everyone who has seen at least one movie in her life might agree that plot, characters, subject matter, style are defining elements, which are creatively interpreted and combined by the director to make a unique movie. A movie, then, is a "fictitious" experience, in the sense that it is confined to around a couple of hours, during which the spectator may be more or less involved in the events, but plays a passive role, paying attention to what is represented but being unable to change anything. The case of a tourism experience is thoroughly different. The factors at play are a thousand, and the tourist has an active role from the very first step. The characteristics of the tourism product (which have been discussed in chapter 1, section 1.2.1) - which are intangibility, heterogeneity, inseparability, perishability, high cost - open the tourism experience to human diversity, and travel reviews are a mirror of such diversity. The case is different for tourism services like hotels or restaurants: the factors that influence the experience with the service are easily traceable. If one thinks of a restaurant, for instance, the dining experience is determined by food quality, variety and presentation, by the attitude and

competence of people working there, the cleanliness, the environment, and a few others.

The description and evaluation of a tourism experience, thus, can hardly be expected to move along predictable lines. However, OTR have recognizable characteristics that readers use to identify them exactly as a textual genre (that is, exactly as OTR). The aim of the analysis presented in this and in the next chapter is to investigate such characteristics, considering the structure of the text and the functions, which different parts have in accomplishing the communicative purpose of the text. This kind of analysis has some similarities with the studies on genre conducted within the tradition of Systemic Functional Linguistics, but differs in the way that the ‘function’ of different parts of the text is accounted for, and tends to be less rigid in assigning certain structural characteristics to a certain genre. In the next chapter I will reconstruct the pragmatic connectives at the utterance level for the OTR making up my corpus, with the goal of identifying – using Bakhtin’s terms – the stable types of utterances, which develop in the area of human activity represented by OTR. The question is if OTR can be ascribed to the wider genre of review, if they are closer to other online genres, or if they are an emergent unique genre.

### 3.3 The pragmatic predicate governing Online Travel Reviews

To reconstruct the pragmatic predicate governing OTR means, first of all, to point out its *communicative purpose*, that is the effect in social reality the reviewer wants to obtain with her text. The communicative purpose of OTR is identified taking into account three elements: a) the action(s) referred to by the predicate ‘to make a review’, according to the etymology and to the common understanding both of the verb ‘to review’ and of the de-verbal noun ‘review’ (3.3.1); b) the strategic goal of TripAdvisor declared by the platform itself (3.3.2); c) the guidelines provided by TripAdvisor to reviewers (3.3.3). TripAdvisor represents the major stakeholder in the publication of OTR, thus its understanding of what kind of communicative practice an OTR is, puts constraints on what is published and what is rejected.

In 3.3.4 I will define the pragmatic predicate OTR, with its arguments, the respective presuppositions and entailments. The predicate has to be considered ‘generic’ because it is the cumulative expression of a genre, whose individual manifestations are slightly different.

#### 3.3.1 Etymology and semantic of review

The word *review* comes from the French “reveue”, the feminine of “revu”, which is the past participle of the verb “revoir”. The French verb “revoir”, originated, in its turn, from the Latin verb “revidēre”, constituted by the prefix “re-“, which means “again”,

and the verb *vidēre*, which means "to see". The *Oxford English Dictionary* reports two main groups of meanings for the substantive *review*. The first group of meanings literally relies on the etymology and indicates the repetition (hence the prefix "re-") of the act of viewing/seeing something or someone; this repeated view suggests that the object or person deserves a *special attention* or is of *particular interest* for the person who reviews it.

The second group of meanings, instead, refers to the act of inspection of an object, or a situation or a past experience, and implies a modification or correction of that object, or an evaluation of that situation or past experience. The *Websters' New International Dictionary* explains that it is "an examination with a view to amendment or improvement". In this last sense, different *uses* of the substantive review should be distinguished in specific fields of knowledge. In the field of *law*, it indicates the examination of judicial sentences or acts by other courts or authorities; in specific constructs, then, review points to a branch of the judicial system, like the "bill of review" or the "court/commission of review". In the *military language*, a review indicates a formal inspection of the force (e.g. troops under arms or naval force) by high authorities. The aim of a review is, thus, to correct or to improve the object of examination.

As a *literary genre*, a review is defined by The *Oxford English Dictionary* as "a general account or criticism of a literary work, a musical or dramatic performance, etc. either published separately or, more usually, as an article in a periodical or newspaper"; by the *Websters' New International Dictionary* it is defined as "an explanatory and critical account of an artistic production or performance usually in a periodical". This third meaning underlines the *critical attitude* one has to take for making a review; being critical has not to be understood, here, as enjoying the fact of questioning everything, being polemic on every issue and discrediting the interlocutor, but as a commitment to find adequate reasons for supporting an opinion, for making decisions, for giving evaluations. Rigotti and Greco Morasso (2009, p. 18) explain that "the two pillars of critical commitment in all its manifestations are adherence to evidence and correct reasoning. They constitute the two fundamental aspects of reason's commitment to adhere to reality in its various aspects: one can be more or less critical in scientific research, in everyday life, in making individual or collective decisions, or in the evaluation of ethics or aesthetics". Interestingly, a synonym of *reviewer* is "critic", which shares its root with "criticism" and "criterion". The term critic comes from the Greek verb *krino*, which literally means "sieving"; from *krino* derives also the term *kritēs*, that can be translated in English as decision-maker, that is "the person that sieves a discourse, extracting the truth it contains, and evaluating it in order to make a decision (Rigotti & Greco Morasso, 2009, p. 20).

The aspect of *assessment* in a review is stressed by the Italian translation for the literary related meaning, that is “recensione”. The substantive comes from the Latin “recensio”, that means enumeration, and is constituted by the prefix “re-” and the verb “censō”, meaning to give an advice, to suggest and also to value, or to tax. In Latin, from the verb “censō” derived the (deverbal) noun “census”, which indicated the registering of Roman citizens according to their properties with the aim of rating them and fixing the fees (Lewis & Short, 1999) citizens were “assessed” in order to measure what contribution they were able to give to the “res publica”.

### 3.3.2 TripAdvisor’s strategic goal

TripAdvisor was founded in 2000 by Stephen Kaufer, who is still its President and CEO. Its declared aim is to enable “travellers to plan and have the perfect trip, [by offering] trusted advice from real travellers and a wide variety of travel choices and planning features with seamless links to booking tools” ([http://www.tripadvisor.com/pages/about\\_us.html](http://www.tripadvisor.com/pages/about_us.html)). Under the S. Kaufer’s leadership, TripAdvisor has grown into the largest Web 2.0 company in the Northeast and the largest travel site in the world: its branded sites together attract more than 56 million unique monthly visitors, and publish over 75 million reviews and opinions ([http://www.tripadvisor.com/PressCenter-c4-Fact\\_Sheet.html](http://www.tripadvisor.com/PressCenter-c4-Fact_Sheet.html)). TripAdvisor was owned by Expedia until December 2011, when it spun off to become the publicly traded company TripAdvisor, Inc.

Interestingly, a recent release from *comScore*, a global source of digital market intelligence, which measures the performance of digital businesses, reports that: “In March 2012, Americans were seeking to book last-minute spring break travel or looking ahead to summertime getaways, which helped several travel subcategories rank among the top-gainers. For those looking to book a few months out, Travel Information sites were particularly helpful, drawing 69.7 million visitors during the month (up 10 percent). TripAdvisor Media Group led the pack with 18.1 million visitors (up 5 percent), followed by Travora Media with 15.5 million visitors (up 5 percent) and Yahoo! Travel with 11.1 million visitors (up 9 percent).” ([http://www.comscore.com/Press\\_Events/Press\\_Releases](http://www.comscore.com/Press_Events/Press_Releases)).

### 3.3.3 TripAdvisor’s guidelines for traveller reviews

TripAdvisor lists the criteria that reviews must respect in order to be published in the section “Our guidelines for traveller reviews” ([http://www.tripadvisor.co.uk/help/our\\_guidelines\\_for\\_traveller\\_reviews](http://www.tripadvisor.co.uk/help/our_guidelines_for_traveller_reviews)).

The first criterion is the *family-friendliness*, and concerns the language and the content that must be avoided, that are any kind of vulgarity, insult, threat or curse, and reference to

any kind of violent, offensive or illegal activity; in addition, consistently with its mission of “Helping people around the world plan and have the perfect trip” ([http://www.tripadvisor.ie/PressCenter-c4-Fact\\_Sheet.html](http://www.tripadvisor.ie/PressCenter-c4-Fact_Sheet.html)) that means, as well, a safe trip, the website supports forum discussions about tragic events, which may directly affect travel to a particular destination.

The second criterion - *written by actual travellers* - places emphasis on one of the main ontological aspects of the platform, that is the possibility users have to create content themselves, providing this way information that should be reliable because it is based on experience. However, to “offer trusted advice from *real travellers*” ([http://www.tripadvisor.com/pages/about\\_us.html](http://www.tripadvisor.com/pages/about_us.html)), contents created by users must be first hand experiences and give a substantial contribution to the issue discussed. Although according to this criterion reviews written by, for instance, properties’ owners or vendors, are forbidden, it may happen that deceptive reviews “get through” the checks and are published; there is not, in fact, any method to unveil the writer hidden behind the screen. However, some stylistic markers of the review may help to unmask cheats (Yoo & Gretzel, 2009).

The third criterion - *relevant to other travellers* - considers the *relevancy* of reviews, defined according to the platform aim, that is helping trip planning and research: to be accounted as relevant a review must be of some help to prospective travellers in order to plan their trip or to perform research about a trip. In order to provide up-to-date information, then, reviewers are asked to report experiences that occurred no more than one year before the submission. Reviews are only allowed to have travel related topics, and must avoid political, ethical or religious opinions: this prevents the platform from becoming an arena of ideological struggles, and stresses its function of decision-making support.

The criterion of *uniqueness* and *originality* aim at avoiding redundant content motivated by commercial or other sorts of promotional goals. Only one review per person about the same tourism service is allowed; in the case of a new visit/use of the same service, the platform sets a minimum time before the submission of a new review; the fact that a review must be unique guarantees a certain ‘stability’ of the opinion and forces the reviewer to think a bit more before writing, because she cannot add in a following review saying “Sorry, I forgot to tell that ...!”. In addition, despite the fact that a user may retrieve from the internet a number of reviews for the same product or service, asking for original contribution the platform helps reducing information noise, and selecting relevant information.

The exploitation of reviews for commercial purposes is explicitly forbidden by one last criterion, which warns about inserting even a self-promotional URL in the text: this is to protect the *social* nature of the platform. TripAdvisor, indeed, as many other platforms for travel and tourism, works as a showcase for businesses, in that owners can ask their property to be listed in the reviewable establishments, but opinions given in the reviews and ranking are, allegedly, ensured to be those of actual consumers.

### 3.3.4 “What does the reviewer do to the reader with the review?”: a theoretical definition of the pragmatic predicate governing OTR

I will call the pragmatic predicate, which governs the textual genre Online Travel Review *advice*, because the main purpose of an OTR is to help readers to plan their trip. Each individual OTR is a different manifestation of this same pragmatic predicate (or of very similar ones). It seems fair to treat an advice at least as a three-place pragmatic predicate, where the argument slots correspond to the *Reviewer* (Rwr), the *Reader* (Rd) and the object of advice (To), which is part of the propositional content of the utterances making up the text. However, two more components should be taken into account. The first one is the *interaction field* where an OTR is produced, which gives a frame for its interpretation and provides the common ground for its understanding. The interaction field “is that piece of *social reality* where the communicative interaction takes place. An interaction field is defined by specific (hierarchically organized) *shared goals*, which all the inter-agents share beyond their individual goals, and which define the inter-agents’ mutual commitments” (Rigotti & Rocci, 2006, p. 172). Shared goals are recognized because of inter-agents’ belonging to a certain community, which creates myths, rites and models (Cantoni, 2004). At a higher level, the interaction field of an OTR is represented by tourism, conceived as people who travel and businesses providing services to allow their travel. In a review, the interaction field of tourism emerges when, for instance, (direct or indirect) advices are given about accommodation, catering or attractions to visit. At a lower level, the interaction field of an OTR is constituted by the implicit dialogue taking place on the travel review platform – here on TripAdvisor – between tourists reporting their experiences online and prospective tourists looking for information and advice for taking trip decisions. The interaction field and its dynamics have been punctually described in chapter II of this dissertation.

TripsAdvisor is, actually, both the medium supporting the interaction and the *institutional context* where it takes place. As an institutional context, TripAdvisor puts constraints on the interaction and defines the commitments interlocutors have to make to ‘play the game’. The interaction taking place on the platform is, in fact, a *dialogue game* (Mann, 1988), where the players have shared goals to which they are institutionally committed, and personal goals. Shared goals might be completely negotiated among players or they



might be inherited from the context, as in the case of platforms for travel reviews, which make them even explicit in the guidelines for authors. Here, the primary commitment imposed by the platform is ‘to be helpful’, which might correspond to the personal goal – and studies show (see section 2.2.1) that most of the times this is the case –, or might be just an accepted and contemplated outcome, if the reviewer pursues a different personal goal, like venting or bragging. Even though, institutional commitments and personal goals are not mutually exclusive: one can, in fact, pursue personal goals while keeping institutional commitments. It is a different matter in the case of spam, which are created to promote a product or service, despite any personal experience or opinion. Spam, however, is very difficult to identify. A systematic attempt to find out indicators for identifying spam has been made by Liu and colleagues, investigating characteristics of different kinds of online product reviews (Mukherjee, Liu, & Natalie, 2012; Wang, Xie, Liu, & Yu, 2011; Jindal, & Liu, 2008).

The second component which needs to be taken into account to analyze the pragmatic predicate governing OTR, is the set of *co-textual elements* in the webpage, which have different sorts of relations with the dominant speech act of giving an advice. The second component is the set of *co-textual elements* in the webpage, which have different sorts of relations with the dominant speech act of giving an advice. Co-textual elements are expression of the *interaction schemes* activated by the medium of communication, that is the online platform. These elements might be visual, such as accompanying pictures, ratings, maps; hyper-textual, that is links to other websites or pages; textual, such as captions and users’ quick tips added to the main review text; even multi-media, like amateur videos or commercials. Interaction schemes are “culturally shared ‘recipes’ for interaction congruent with more or less broad classes of joint goals and involving scheme-roles presupposing generic requirements” (Rigotti & Rocci, 2006, p. 173).

Technical characteristics of the medium, indeed, shape the interaction schemes that are made available to inter-agents. Three examples of co-textual elements pointing to available interaction schemes are highlighted in Figure 8. The opportunity to subscribe to a free newsletter (IS 1) is an example of interaction scheme enabled by the hyper-textual nature of websites. The possibility to see on a map the places mentioned in the review (IS 2), or to interact with the reviewer (IS 3), are other examples of interaction schemes, enabled by the multi-media convergence (i.e. texts, pictures, and so on) allowed by digital tools.

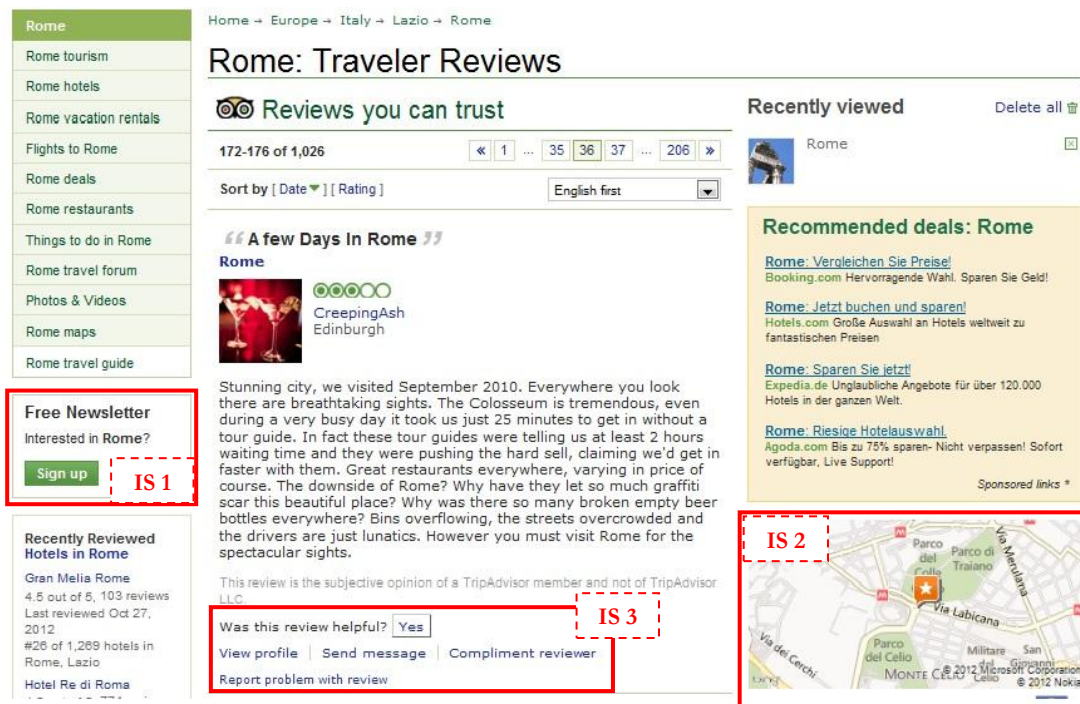


Figure 6: Examples of co-textual elements in an OTR page.

Contextual elements of the interaction field and co-textual elements of the webpage, have to be given a proper place in the structure of the pragmatic predicate. The interaction field might be treated as an implicit contextual set of propositions that is part of the common ground (Xcg), while elements in the webpage surrounding the review might be considered a set of co-textual utterances ( $T_{+1}$ ). Figure 9 is the scheme of the pragmatic predicate *advice* governing OTR.

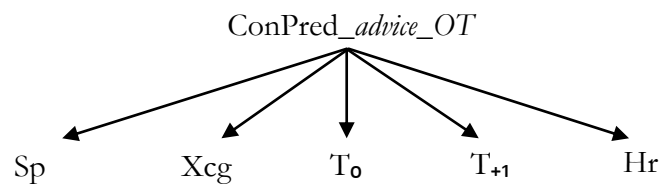


Figure 7: Scheme of the pragmatic predicate governing OTR.

Following the aspects emerged from the etymology and semantic analysis of review, and from the TA's guidelines for traveller reviews, the pragmatic predicate *advice* in OTR is one which should emphasize:

- the “repeated view” of an object which deserves special attention or is of particular interest for the person who reviews it;
- the goal of correcting or improving the result of an event or an action of the past;
- the aspect of assessment of what is reviewed and the critical attitude necessary to assess it;
- the fact that the object of review has been experienced directly by the reviewer;
- the commitment of the reviewer to what she writes (in terms of truthfulness, originality and uniqueness);
- the relevance of what is written for the reader (she should get elements for trip planning).

As any other predicate, the pragmatic predicate advice in OTR can be analyzed in terms of the presuppositions it imposes on its arguments and the entailments it adds to the common ground of the communicative interaction.

*Presuppositions imposed on the Reviewer (Rwr):*

- is a person
- (usually) does not know Reader (Rd)
- made an experience at a destination D
- wants to help Rd to make decisions about a possible future trip
- believes that sharing her experience on D is relevant and helpful for Rd

*Presuppositions imposed on the Reader (Rd):*

- is a person
- (usually) does not know Rwr
- has an interest in D
- believes that Rwr is a reliable testimony
- believes that what Rwr reports could inform her trip decisions

*Presuppositions imposed on elements of the common ground (Xcg):*

- refer to the field of tourism
- are related to the experience made by Rwr at destination D
- may be relevant to travel decisions Rd should take

*Presuppositions imposed on elements of the co-text (T<sub>•1</sub>):*

- provide Rd with or enable Rd to find additional information or tips for making travel decisions
- give specifications about or locate the travel experience reported in  $T_o$
- enable further interactions between Rwr, Rd and the platform

*Presuppositions imposed on the main review text ( $T_o$ ):*

- reports Rwr's travel experience at destination D
- provides Rwr's descriptions of D
- provides Rwr's opinions on D

*Entailments added to the common ground: by uttering  $T_o$ , Rwr*

- may inform Rd's decisions concerning Rd's prospective travel experience in D
- provides Rd reasons for her decision
- commits Rd to take the offered advice into consideration
- commits herself to the truth of what she tells

Figure 10 represents the structural scheme of the pragmatic predicate advice in OTR, including the presuppositions imposed upon its argument places. An implication of this type of analysis is that, since presuppositions are relational, the congruity of each argument place cannot be evaluated by itself, but it has to be considered against the other argument places.

The congruity of  $T_o$  as an advice about a destination has to be evaluated, for instance, with respect to the interaction field represented by tourism: if a travel review is posted on a blog about food and cooking, it is immediately perceived as out of place, unless – but it would be an extreme case anyway – it is focused on culinary experiences made during the trip. In addition, the particular directive predicate evoked by an OTR, that is the advice, presupposes that Rwr has good reasons to give the advice. If in  $T_o$  the reviewer states that what she is telling about the destination is the result of her imagination or of a book she read, an incongruity would arise. Similarly, it is not possible to evaluate the congruity of the argument place occupied by Reader if Reviewer and context are ignored: a reader using TA reviews with the aim of finding friends online and having not, thus, any interests in the destination reported about in the review, would completely fail her goal.

Next section describes the corpus of OTR used for the analysis of connectives predicates at the utterance level, while the categories for the analysis and the results will be discussed in chapter 4.

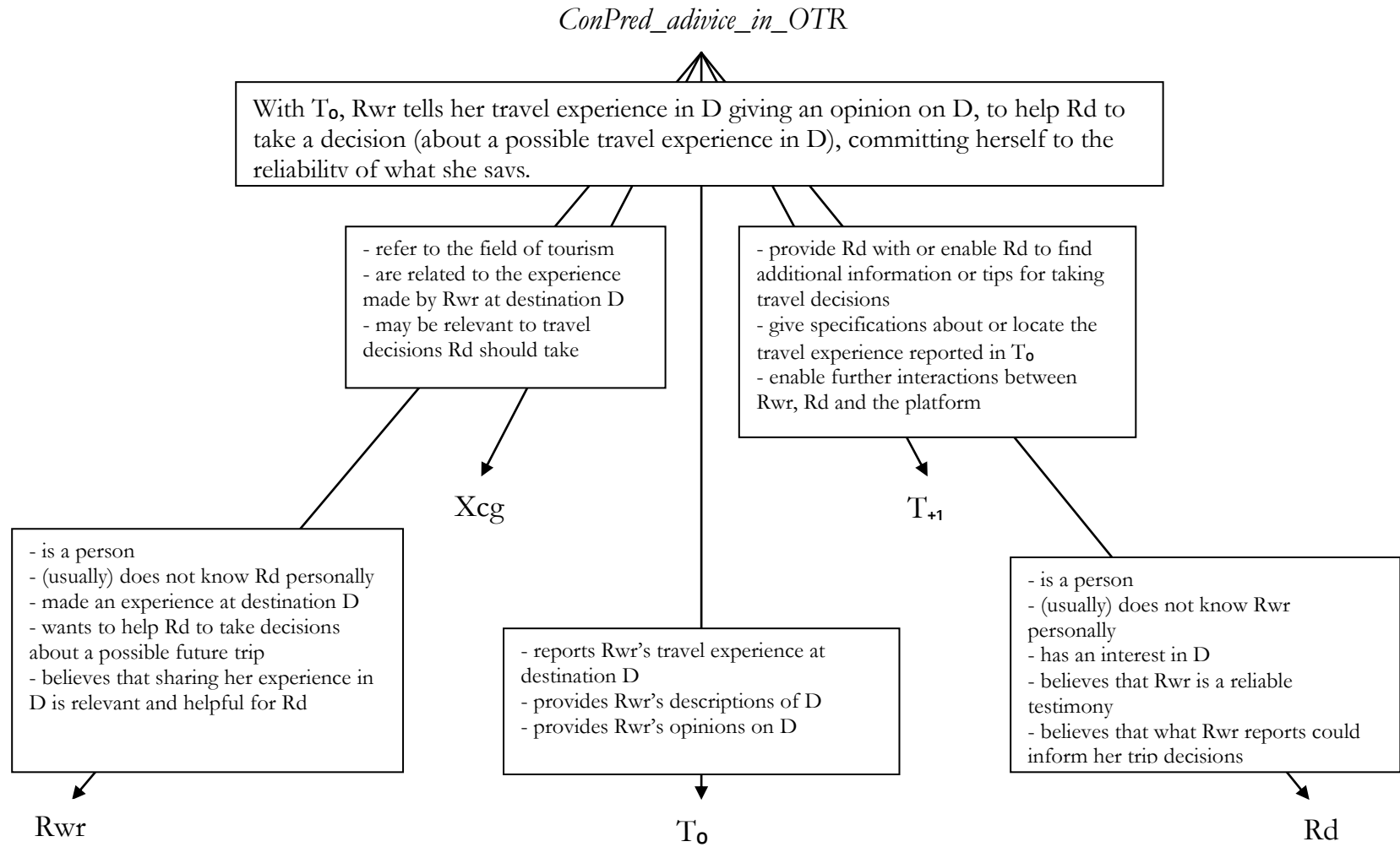


Figure 8: Presuppositions imposed by the pragmatic predicate *advice in OTR* on its arguments.

### 3.4 The corpus of data

The corpus analyzed in this research consists of all the reviews posted on TripAdvisor in 2011 concerning the destination Rome, in English, German and Italian. Only reviews about the destination itself were considered, excluding the reviews that talked about specific services or attractions. Destination reviews are listed by *TripAdvisor* as the last group of reviews in the *Travel Guide* section ([http://www.tripadvisor.com/AllReviews-g187791-Rome\\_Lazio.html](http://www.tripadvisor.com/AllReviews-g187791-Rome_Lazio.html)). At the beginning of 2012, TripAdvisor (TA) made a significant change to the design of the Travel Guide section and to the design of OTR itself. When selecting the Travel Guide section now, users do not reach directly the reviews repository anymore, but they arrive at an overview page, where they are provided so called *guides* or *trip ideas* about the destination written by “experts”. It is even difficult to say if such guides can be considered UGC or not, because a generic user cannot post a “guide”, and the criteria adopted to choose the guides to be published among the many that – supposedly – were submitted by TA experts, are not stated. In addition, in the new version of TA, users cannot submit destination reviews anymore, but they are forced to choose among four tourism products: hotel, vacation rental, attraction, restaurants. Destination reviews, however, are still accessible, and can be retrieved through search engines; TA, in fact, does not delete any of the reviews posted along the years. This change suggests a prominent commercial shift in TA; differently from product specific reviews, in fact, destination reviews cannot be linked to a specific business with which to establish any sort of relation.

A consumer review is a multimodal artefact, which comprises elements belonging to different semiotic codes. Linguistic code prevails, in that the main body of a review is a written text; the visual code is also exploited, when the text is accompanied by pictures and by symbols used for different types of ratings, as the product rating, the review helpfulness and the reviewer’s contribution activity. Though pictures and symbols are textual parts of a review and cooperate to accomplish its communicative goal, in this research I concentrated on the body of the review itself. I considered in the analysis also the title and the product (i.e. destination) overall rating. I ignored other elements as author information and pictures, as well as the relations among the different elements and the role they play in the review.

After a first overall reading of the corpus, those reviews that seemed to have been posted in the wrong place were excluded, e.g. those focusing on hotels or transportation means. In total, 145 reviews were collected, among which 6 reviews were longer than 500 words; with a length comprised between 700 to 1250 words, they could be considered extreme cases not representative of the genre, and therefore were excluded from the corpus. Table 1 provides the total number of reviews per language and size of

the corpus in words. Word count may not be completely accurate because it was performed automatically, and two aspects have to be taken into consideration: they assume a space between words; the words for date, travel rating and author's signature were subtracted counting 3 words for the date (e.g. May 13, 2011), 3 words for the rating (e.g. travel rating: 3), 5 words for the signature (e.g. posted by xxx, Milan, Italy). The shorter review in the corpus counts 18 words, while the longer one counts 487 words.

Language	N° of reviews	Total N° of words	Average words per review
English	57	9826	172
German	49	4218	86
Italian	32	3023	95
<b>Total</b>	<b>138</b>	<b>17067</b>	<b>124</b>

Table 1: Description of the corpus.

#### 3.4.1 The source of data: why TripAdvisor

Among the many platforms for travel reviews, TA was chosen because it is the most popular, it provides the largest amount of content (see 4.3.2), and has the highest ranking in search engines. An experiment was made to check how TA ranks among the sites publishing UGC, in the search results of Goggle for travel information and, specifically, for travel reviews about the destination Rome. *www.google.com* was searched for the keywords: “visiting Rome”, “Rome reviews” and “Rome travel reviews”. The first 10 results per keyword (as on October, 22<sup>nd</sup> 2012) are reported in Table 2, specifying the type of website they refer to. It has to be noted that in 2012 two movies appeared on screen containing the word Rome in their title: *When in Rome* directed by mark Steven Johnson, and *To Rome with love* directed by Woody Allen. Search results referred to online reviews of one or the other movie were ignored in the ranking.

##### *Visiting Rome*

<b>Rank</b>	<i>Web address</i>	<i>Homepage</i>	<i>Type of site</i>
<b>1<sup>st</sup></b>	www.rome-guide.it	www.rome-guide.it	Independent – travel information about Rome
<b>2<sup>nd</sup></b>	http://www.sgr.info/tourism/roma/	www.sgr.info/tourism/roma	Independent – travel information about Rome
<b>3<sup>rd</sup></b>	voices.yahoo.com/10-hot-tips-visiting-rome-364514.html	http://voices.yahoo.com	Online community – contents on every topic
<b>4<sup>th</sup></b>	http://www.turismoroma.it/	www.turismoroma.it	Official website of Rome tourism agency
<b>5<sup>th</sup></b>	www.tripadvisor.com › Europe › Italy › Lazio	<b>www.tripadvisor.com</b>	Travel community
<b>6<sup>th</sup></b>	wikitravel.org/en/Rome	www.wikitravel.org	Wiki – up-datable travel guides
<b>7<sup>th</sup></b>	http://www.rome.info/tips/avoid/	http://www.rome.info	Independent – travel

8 <sup>th</sup>	<a href="http://www.aboutroma.com/itineraries-in-Rome.html">http://www.aboutroma.com/itineraries-in-Rome.html</a>	<a href="http://www.aboutroma.com">www.aboutroma.com</a>	information about Rome Independent – travel information about Rome
9 <sup>th</sup>	<a href="http://www.lonelyplanet.com/italy/rome">www.lonelyplanet.com/italy/rome</a>	<a href="http://www.lonelyplanet.com">www.lonelyplanet.com</a>	Travel community
10 <sup>th</sup>	<a href="http://www.rometoolkit.com/whattodo/colosseum.htm">http://www.rometoolkit.com/whattodo/colosseum.htm</a>	<a href="http://www.rometoolkit.com">www.rometoolkit.com</a>	Independent – travel information about Rome

Table 2: First 10 Google results per keyword “visiting Rome”.

4 out of the first 10 results for the keyword “visiting Rome” refer to websites publishing UGC, and three of them come from online communities for consumer reviews; TripAdvisor is fifth in the ranking. 5 results refer to independent websites providing information about Rome; they all declare to pursue the goal of helping visitors giving tips and indications, and to provide “expert” information; the expert sources are, however, not mentioned. One result corresponds to the official website of Rome tourism agency.

<i>Rome reviews</i>			
<i>Rank</i>	<i>Web address</i>	<i>Homepage</i>	<i>Type of site</i>
1 <sup>st</sup>	<a href="http://www.tripadvisor.com/Tourism-g187791-Rome_Lazio-Vacations.html">http://www.tripadvisor.com/Tourism-g187791-Rome_Lazio-Vacations.html</a>	<a href="http://www.tripadvisor.com">www.tripadvisor.com</a>	Travel community
2 <sup>nd</sup>	<a href="http://www.romereview.com">www.romereview.com</a>	<a href="http://www.romereview.com">www.romereview.com</a>	Online community – reviews on different types of product or service referred to Rome
3 <sup>rd</sup>	<a href="http://www.virtualtourist.com/travel/Europe/Italy/Lazio/Rome-144659/TravelGuide-Rome.html">http://www.virtualtourist.com/travel/Europe/Italy/Lazio/Rome-144659/TravelGuide-Rome.html</a>	<a href="http://www.virtualtourist.com">www.virtualtourist.com</a>	Travel community
4 <sup>th</sup>	<a href="http://uk.travel.yahoo.com/rome/">http://uk.travel.yahoo.com/rome/</a>	<a href="http://uk.travel.yahoo.com">http://uk.travel.yahoo.com</a>	Travel community
5 <sup>th</sup>	<a href="http://travel.yahoo.com/p-travelguide-191501769-rome_vacations-i">http://travel.yahoo.com/p-travelguide-191501769-rome_vacations-i</a>	<a href="http://uk.travel.yahoo.com">http://uk.travel.yahoo.com</a>	Travel community
6 <sup>th</sup>	<a href="http://www.tripadvisor.com/Hotels-g187791-Rome_Lazio-Hotels.html">http://www.tripadvisor.com/Hotels-g187791-Rome_Lazio-Hotels.html</a>	<a href="http://www.tripadvisor.com">www.tripadvisor.com</a>	Travel community
7 <sup>th</sup>	<a href="http://www.fodors.com/world/europe/italy/rome/hotels.html">http://www.fodors.com/world/europe/italy/rome/hotels.html</a>	<a href="http://www.fodors.com">www.fodors.com</a>	Travel community
8 <sup>th</sup>	<a href="http://www.holidaywatchdog.com/Rome-Holiday-Reviews-273.html">http://www.holidaywatchdog.com/Rome-Holiday-Reviews-273.html</a>	<a href="http://www.holidaywatchdog.com">www.holidaywatchdog.com</a>	Travel community
9 <sup>th</sup>	<a href="http://www.tripadvisor.com/Hotel_Review-g187791-d1145313-Reviews-H10_Roma_Citta-Rome_Lazio.html">http://www.tripadvisor.com/Hotel_Review-g187791-d1145313-Reviews-H10_Roma_Citta-Rome_Lazio.html</a>	<a href="http://www.tripadvisor.com">www.tripadvisor.com</a>	Travel community
10 <sup>th</sup>	<a href="http://www.tripadvisor.com.sg/Hotels-g187791-Rome_Lazio-Hotels.html">http://www.tripadvisor.com.sg/Hotels-g187791-Rome_Lazio-Hotels.html</a>	<a href="http://www.tripadvisor.com">www.tripadvisor.com</a>	Travel community

Table 3: First 10 Google results per keyword “Rome reviews”.

For the keyword “Rome reviews” (Table 4) TripAdvisor occupies the first, sixth, ninth and tenth place in the ranking, which is all made up of travel communities, except for one online community publishing reviews on whatever product or service, attraction,



event or activity related, in various ways, to Rome. Second in the ranking is *Virtualtourist*, a travel brand acquired by TA in 2008, third and fourth is *Yahoo Travel*, one of the largest online travel communities. High in the ranking (8<sup>th</sup> place) is also *Holidaywatchdog*, a popular travel review and advice website in the UK, which has been also bought by TA in 2008.

If Google is searched for the keyword “Rome travel reviews” (Table 4), TA comes out being again the first result, followed by its parent website Virtualtourist. Interestingly, high in the ranking is the website of a news agency, *The Telegraph*, which has a section devoted to travel.

In addition, a search for the keywords “recommendations Rome”, and “recommending Rome” on [www.google.com](http://www.google.com), shows that: TripAdvisor appears on the third place for the first keyword, after a website for expert recommendations and advice ([www.simonseeks.com](http://www.simonseeks.com)) and the travel section of *The Telegraph*; it covers the 3<sup>rd</sup>, 4<sup>th</sup>, 5<sup>th</sup> and 6<sup>th</sup> place for the second keyword, after a religious website (Apprising Ministries of the Baptist Church), and a website for rental apartments ([www.romeloft.com](http://www.romeloft.com)).

<i>Rome travel reviews</i>			
<i>Rank</i>	<i>Web address</i>	<i>Homepage</i>	<i>Type of site</i>
1 <sup>st</sup>	<a href="http://www.tripadvisor.com/Tourism-g187791-Rome_Lazio-Vacations.html">http://www.tripadvisor.com/Tourism-g187791-Rome_Lazio-Vacations.html</a>	<a href="http://www.tripadvisor.com">www.tripadvisor.com</a>	Travel community
2 <sup>nd</sup>	<a href="http://www.virtualtourist.com/travel/Europe/Italy/Lazio/Rome-144659/TravelGuide-Rome.html">http://www.virtualtourist.com/travel/Europe/Italy/Lazio/Rome-144659/TravelGuide-Rome.html</a>	<a href="http://www.virtualtourist.com">www.virtualtourist.com</a>	Travel community
3 <sup>rd</sup>	<a href="http://www.telegraph.co.uk/travel/destinations/europe/italy/rome/">http://www.telegraph.co.uk/travel/destinations/europe/italy/rome/</a>	<a href="http://www.telegraph.co.uk/travel">www.telegraph.co.uk/travel</a>	Official website – travel section of new agency website
4 <sup>th</sup>	<a href="http://www.travbuddy.com/Rome-travel-guide-278393">http://www.travbuddy.com/Rome-travel-guide-278393</a>	<a href="http://www.travbuddy.com">www.travbuddy.com</a>	Travel community
5 <sup>th</sup>	<a href="http://travel.yahoo.com/p-travelguide-191501769-rome_vacations-i">http://travel.yahoo.com/p-travelguide-191501769-rome_vacations-i</a>	<a href="http://www.travel.yahoo.com">www.travel.yahoo.com</a>	Travel community
6 <sup>th</sup>	<a href="http://www.lonelyplanet.com/italy/rome/travel-tips-and-articles/76843">http://www.lonelyplanet.com/italy/rome/travel-tips-and-articles/76843</a>	<a href="http://www.lonelyplanet.com">www.lonelyplanet.com</a>	Travel community
7 <sup>th</sup>	<a href="http://www.girlontour.com/2009/05/travel-review-rome.html">http://www.girlontour.com/2009/05/travel-review-rome.html</a>	<a href="http://www.girlontour.com">www.girlontour.com</a>	Personal blog
8 <sup>th</sup>	<a href="http://www.concierge.com/travelguide/rome">http://www.concierge.com/travelguide/rome</a>	<a href="http://www.concierge.com">www.concierge.com</a>	Travel community
9 <sup>th</sup>	<a href="http://goitaly.about.com/od/rometours/fr/rome_tour.htm">http://goitaly.about.com/od/rometours/fr/rome_tour.htm</a>	<a href="http://www.about.com">www.about.com</a>	Independent - expert information on different topics
10 <sup>th</sup>	<a href="http://www.viator.com/Rome/d511/TravellerReviews">http://www.viator.com/Rome/d511/TravellerReviews</a>	<a href="http://www.viator.com">www.viator.com</a>	Travel community

Table 4: First 10 Google results per keyword “Rome travel reviews”.

### 3.4.2 The type of data: why destination reviews

There are different reasons why I decided to focus on destination reviews; some of them are related to the meaning of travel and tourism, others have a more pragmatic nature.

A first observation is that the decision about the destination to visit is a *core decision*, which influences lower level decisions (Vogt & Fesenmaier, 1998; section 2.2.2 of this dissertation). Therefore, analyzing the reasons given by tourists when commenting about their travel experiences at a certain destination may reveal the elements they took into account and that had an influence on their decision.

A second aspect is connected to the very significance of tourism. Holiday time represents, indeed, a domain of freedom, where preferences and desires may find expression. In fact, once constraining factors like budget, time, safety or health risks have been evaluated and fixed, the decision of the destination to visit is played in the field of more personal and intimate dimensions, like interests, expectations and ideas connected to the concept of free time. The meaning people give to tourism may differ, being for some a time for escaping, for others a time for improving knowledge; though, common to everyone is the experience of a joyful waiting, like that described by the Italian poet Giacomo Leopardi in his poem *Il sabato del villaggio*:

*Or la squilla dà segno  
Della festa che viene;  
ed a quel suon diresti  
che il cor si riconforta.*

(...)

*Questo dì sette è il più gradito giorno,  
pien di speme e di gioia:*

(...)

(Bandini, 2007)

*Now the bells are witness  
to the coming holiday:  
you would say the heart  
might take comfort from the sound.*

*This is the best of the seven days,  
full of hope and joy:*

(...)

(Translation by A. S. Kline, British poet and translator. From:

[www.poetryintranslation.com](http://www.poetryintranslation.com))

If holiday time is defined in contrast to working time, tourism acquires an extraordinary value, in the etymological sense of breaking the ordinary time, going out of the daily routine. Even the Bible comments on the extraordinary character of tourism experiences, noticing that it is a trait of the wise man to recognize in the extraordinary time an opportunity to change the quality of ordinary time:

*A much travelled man knows many things, and a man of great experience will talk sound sense. Someone who has never had his trials knows little; but the travelled man is master of every situation. I have seen many things on my travels, I have understood more than I can put into words.*

(Sirach 34, 9-11)

The destination visited represents the way in which a person decided to go out of her ordinary time for making extraordinary experiences; and the destination is, at the same time, the opportunity she has for making those extraordinary experiences.

The choice of the destination to visit is driven, then, also by one's expectations and by the type of tourism experience she would like to have. Destinations, in fact, share a more or less defined reputation among people. Ibiza, for instance, is usually seen as a 'beach and fun' destination, Australia as a place of wild nature and adventure, Italy is associated to art, history, good food and good wine. Destination reputation, then, is bound to a certain tourism culture. The decision to go to Ibiza for laying on the beach and enjoying the nightlife, suggests a meaning of holiday time that is clearly different than the meaning suggested by a trip around Australia for discovering nature and wildlife. Tourists' expectations about a destination in relation to its reputation, and the value they give to holiday time as an expression of their tourism culture, are expected to play an important role in the way they report their travel experience online.

Two final observations regard ontological aspects of the concept of destination and, in particular, of urban destinations. The concept of destination is, in fact, a more complex concept than that of other tourism products/services, like hotels, attractions or guided tours; as a consequence, many more elements have to be taken into account when pondering about it. While considering a hotel where to stay, for instance, the decision pivots on a few precise elements, such as room conditions, staff attitude, quality-price ratio, surroundings, accessories. The elements playing a role in the decision about an attraction to visit, in the same vein, can be easily identified: among them are the entrance fee, attractiveness of site in respect to personal interests, availability of guides, weather conditions. The question is, here, which elements related to the ontology of a destination play a role when pondering about it. Since one main goal of OTR is the social commitment towards fellow tourists to provide useful hints for a more reasoned decision, it is reasonable to expect that in OTR authors comments on those aspects they think are relevant for the decision-making. Identifying the aspects that refer to the destination itself means, therefore, to draw a sort of ontology of that destination.

Urban destinations, then, are the most complex tourism destinations. A huge continuing amount of literature, which has grown particularly over the last fifteen years, has tried to cover a number of topics to delineate urban tourism (Peirce, 2001), such as heritage conservation, specific urban activities (e.g. big city shopping, gambling, arts), the connection between urban structure and infrastructure for tourism and public events; different approaches have been used to analyze it, the main four having been classified by Ashworth & Tunbridge (1990): the facility, the ecological, the user and the policy approach. In his dedicated book *Tourism in major cities*, Law (1996) points out the key

attributes of urban destinations; among these attributes, it is here relevant to mention the fact that both primary and secondary attractions are often much better developed than in other types of destinations, and that their number, variety and scale is large, this way working as an enticement for tourists. The tourism market of urban destinations, then, is widely differentiated, as they offer in communications, transport, services and facilities which meet the needs of tourists with different purposes, from leisure to business, from visiting friends and relatives to health purposes. Law (1996) outlines a series of markets, which are typical – if not unique – of urban destinations, including: “a more educated population, which is attracted to the cultural heritage of cities and towns; seniors, who undertake more sightseeing and are more likely to appreciate cultural and historic heritage; young people, who are attracted by the excitement of the urban environment along with entertainment, night life and sporting events; business travelers; and the meetings, incentives, conventions and exhibition market”. Edwards, Griffin & Hyllar (2008) add that local residents are also significant users of attractions and of infrastructure, which have generally been developed for non-tourism purposes. Different types of tourists comment differently on their travel experience, focusing on aspects which are representative of their expectations and needs, and all together constitute the ontology of the destination, that is its defining features.

### 3.4.3 The referent of data: why Rome

My Italian roots are a good reason but are not enough to support the preference I have for Rome among the many valuable Italian destinations, and even less among the almost uncountable places in the world which deserve a visit. Rome is great, Rome is magic, Rome is lively, Rome is just ... eternal! Every stone in Rome could tell a story, and every corner hides a surprise. I had the luck of living there for one year, and to appreciate the richness and diversity of this city. Its reputation is centred on the historical and artistic aspects, but it has a lot to offer to every different ‘tourism culture’. A personal review of Rome seems to be out of place here or, at least, redundant, considered all the other voices I will present (and analyze) further on. My opinion, however, must be a shared one, since Rome won the third place in TripAdvisor’s 2012 classification of the top 25 destinations in the world, after London and New York City, and the first place among the top 25 destinations in Italy.

In the *MasterCard Global Destination Cities Index 2012*, Rome is the 12<sup>th</sup> placed among the global top 20 destinations cities as calculated by international visitors, while it ranked 8<sup>th</sup> in the report of 2011. In previous years, big Asian destination cities as Bangkok, Singapore, Hong Kong and Kuala Lumpur have made huge strides, and now are at the top of the ranking. While in the ranking of 2012 Rome is the only Italian destination city, it was followed by Milan at the 16<sup>th</sup> place in the ranking of 2011. At the first and

second place of the top 20 destination cities in the world both in 2011 and 2012, are London and Paris. Rome, then, ranks 6<sup>th</sup> among the 10 most visited destination cities in Europe in 2012, again followed by Milan at the 8<sup>th</sup> place. The widely-known American business magazine *Forbes* ([www.forbes.com](http://www.forbes.com)), comments on Rome's fall in the ranking from 2011 to 2012, observing that "although Rome hasn't lost any of its charm, it has slipped in popularity as a tourist destination, falling below Seoul, Kuala Lumpur, Frankfurt and Dubai. Perhaps economic forces are at play" (Jacobs, 2012).

In addition to the scientific significance of this research, I do not deny to have an inner goal: I am very curious to know visitors' opinions on my beloved destination.

### 3.5 A tool for text annotation and analysis: UAM Corpus Tool

The corpus was annotated and analysed using *UAM Corpus Tool* version 2.8.12, a software for human and semi-automatic annotation of texts and images, developed by Mick O'Donnell. The software can be freely downloaded from the website: <http://www.wagsoft.com/CorpusTool/>. The description of the software which follows is based on the Version 2.8 User Manual, released on May 2012, on O'Donnell (2008) and on De Ascaniis and Gretzel (2012).

UAM allows the user to explore linguistic patterns and linguistic features in a text which cannot be explored with simple concordances, and which cannot be automatically tagged because they pertain to the semantic or pragmatic level. The central concept of UAM is the *project*, consisting of a corpus of text files which can be annotated at a number of linguistic layers: at the document layer, if one wants to assign features to the document as a whole (e.g. date, author, text type), at semantic-pragmatic or syntactic layers, for features pertaining to segments within the text, or at the lexical layer, if the feature characterizes single words. For each layer, the user can provide a hierarchically-organized tagging scheme. The corpus of the present research was annotated at different levels:

- at the document level, for annotating the rate assigned to the destination by the reviewer;
- at the semantic-pragmatic level, for classifying the connectives dominating utterances in the texts;
- at the lexical layer, for capturing rhetorical aspects of the reviews.

The UAM Corpus Tool also provides statistical functionalities for the analysis of corpora. Two kinds of analyses can be performed: *general text statistics*, which offers basic statistics of the different text files in the corpus, such as the total number of segments, the number of words per segment, the average segment length, lexical density; and

*feature coding*, which allows to specify a feature in a layer and describe its usage in the corpus at that layer in terms of count, mean and standard deviation (e.g. the feature *connective\_description* for the layer *connectives at the utterance level*). Both kinds of analyses can be done for: describing a dataset, comparing two datasets, describing several datasets and describing each file.

In addition, the *Corpus Search* functionality of UAM Corpus Tool allows the user to search for instances in the annotated corpus matching desired criteria (e.g. search for the feature *metaphor* within the segments tagged with the feature *connective\_description*), for segments containing strings (search for the string “*eternal*” in all the segments of the layer *rhetorical\_devices*), and for lexical patterns (e.g. search for *second person pronouns*). It is also possible to make searches across layers.

One last functionality of the tool is called *Explore*. It allows compiling the absolute frequency of words, the frequency of keywords, the frequency of key-phrases and that of features in the corpus. The absolute frequency of words lists usually place on top words such as “the”, “of” or “and”, while the keywords and key-phrases frequency orders words or phrases (called *n-grams*) in terms of their ‘specialness’ for the corpus, that is in terms of how important each word is for a specific corpus when compared with other corpora.

## 4 Online Travel Reviews as an emergent textual genre

*Chapter 4 provides a definition of OTR as a textual genre on the base of an empirical analysis of the pragmatic predicates governing the utterances of the main review text.*

*In the first section (4.1 and 4.1.1), OTR are characterized as an argumentative speech act, which is structured on three levels: the main standpoint is the visit recommendation, which is supported by an overall evaluation of the destination; this, in turn, works as standpoint for a series of different types of arguments put forward in the text. Specific research questions driving the analysis of the corpus in terms of predicate-arguments structure are listed in section 4.1.2, while the procedure for the analysis is explained in section 4.1.3.*

*Each type of connective predicate encountered in the corpus is, then, presented and characterized in detail in section 4.2, giving examples and pointing out the differences between each other. Dominant connectives are distinguished from subordinate connectives. Sub-categories for the classification of the propositional content of the utterances are presented, as well.*

*In section 4.3 (in particular in section 4.3.4) an empirical definition of the pragmatic predicate advice in OTR is, eventually, provided, combining results of: the absolute occurrence of each type of connective predicate in the corpus (4.3.1), a distinction between compulsory and optional connectives (4.3.2), and recurrent patterns of connectives sequences within the texts (4.3.3).*

*In the end, differences in connective predicates sequences across languages is investigated (section 4.3.5), and the hypothesis, based on empirical observation, of a dependency between OTR length and connective predicates configuration is tested (section 4.3.6), arbitrarily dividing OTR between those shorter than 100 words and those longer than 100 words.*

Part of the issues discussed in section 4.2.1 have been presented in the following papers  
(co)authored by Silvia De Ascaniis:

- De Ascaniis, S., & Gretzel, U. (2012). What's in a review title? In M. Fuchs, F. Ricci and L. Cantoni (Eds.), *Information and Communication Technologies in Tourism 2012* (pp. 494-505), Springer, Wien – New York 2012.

## 4.1 Characterizing connective predicate *advice in OTR*

In chapters 1 and 2, relying on previous studies, I discussed the fact that OTR are an increasingly used source for trip planning. In chapter 3, then, I defined OTR according to the communicative purpose they accomplish, that is, exactly, helping the reader to make travel decisions.

In this chapter, before analyzing the characteristics of OTR as a textual genre, I want to linger over their structure, to show that it is, indeed, an eminently **argumentative structure**.

### 4.1.1 An argumentative connective predicate

The following definition recapitulates the general characteristics of argumentation:

“Argumentation is a verbal and social activity of reason aimed at increasing (or decreasing) the acceptability of a controversial standpoint for the listener or reader, by putting forward a constellation of propositions intended to justify (or refute) the standpoint before a rational judge.” (Van Eemeren et al., 1996, p. 5)

In the case of OTR, the **standpoint** is constituted by a travel advice about a destination, which can be expressed with a directive of this kind: “I advice/recommend you to visit  $x$ ”. The **argument** directly supporting the standpoint – i.e. the travel advice – is the reviewer’s opinion about the destination or her ‘final verdict’ about her travel experience at the destination. Thus, the main argumentative move of OTR can be generically expressed in these terms: “I advice/recommend you to visit  $x$ , because  $x$  is  $y$  OR because my experience in  $x$  was  $y$ ”. This argument works, in turn, as standpoint for other arguments (“constellation of propositions”) that are the **data** used by the reviewer to support her opinion. Data can be, for instance, descriptions of attraction or reports of travel events. For the sake of clarity, I will call the main standpoint *stdp 1*, and the standpoint working as argument for it *stdp 2*. *Stdp 2* is always explicit in OTR, even if it has not always been a verbal expression in the text. In fact, reviewers are asked by the platform to give a rate to the object they are reviewing, before publishing it; rating represents a summary statement of the reviewer’s opinion. It usually adopts different semiotic codes than the linguistic one, like stars, ordinal numbers (this is the case for TripAdvisor), buckets. Ratings often precede the main review text, and catch the reader’s eyes thanks to their color and design, contributing this way to create a first impression of the object of interest, well before the review text itself.

The general schema of the argumentative structure of OTR can be represented as in figure 11.



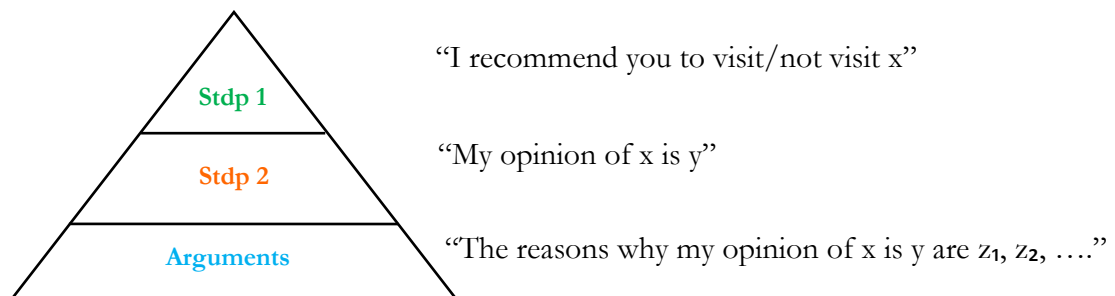


Figure 11: Argumentative structure of OTR.

I hereby provide an example, to illustrate my point.

#### Example 1

ANNOTATION CODE
Standpoint (2)
argument
counter-argument

#### mein Favorit in Italien

Traveler rating: 

May 18, 2011

Rom ist einfach genial, wegen der Freundlichkeit der Leute, und deren Essen. Nicht zu vergessen die ganzen einmaligen Sehenswürdigkeiten!! Eines braucht ihr sicher: Geduld bei der Bushaltestelle,...es gibt keine Uhrzeiten. Der Bus kommt wenn er will.

Posted by *Bergi87*, Bozen

[My favorite in Italy- Rome is simply genial, because of people’s friendliness and their food. And don’t miss the unique sightseeing! One thing you need for sure is patience at bus stops.. there is no timetable. The bus comes when it wants.]

The standpoint – which corresponds to *stdp 2* – is repeated three times, twice verbally, with a different formulation, and once visually, through the rating. *Stdp 1*, instead, is not explicitly stated in the review, but it can be inferred on the base of *stdp 2*, and be likely formulated as: “I strongly recommend a visit to Rome”. *Stdp 2* is supported by three arguments, which are introduced (and signaled) by a linguistic indicator, that is the preposition “wegen”: the first one praises the attitude of Roman people, the second one

praises the food, and the third one – expressed in a different sentence – pointing to the variety of attractions. The review closes with a statement which works as counter-argument: despite the overall positive evaluation of the destination, one aspect has to be taken into account, which may become problematic: public transport seem to be unorganized. Arguments and counter-arguments are, indeed, descriptions of some aspects of the destination, that are local people, food, attractions and transport system. The argumentative moves in the example are not signaled by any linguistic (i.e. manifest) indicator.

In terms of Congruity, the connective predicate governing OTR can be typified as an **argumentative connective predicate**.

Van Eemeren and Grootendorst (1982) analyzed the speech act of arguing and convincing in externalized discussions; they argued that argumentation must be regarded as an illocutionary act complex at a textual level. They explained that even the simplest argumentation contain at least two sentences, and that if each sentence is uttered alone, a new specific illocutionary act is performed, which is different from the speech act of arguing. Moreover, in order for two sentences to constitute an argumentation, they must have a specific relation, that is one of them must be an expressed opinion and the other must be a justification or refutation of that opinion. In terms of Congruity, an argumentative connective predicate is one which has at least three argument places (in addition to those occupied by the speaker and the hearer): one explicit premise, one unstated premise and a conclusion (Rigotti, 2005).


In example 1, though, it is clear that not all the arguments supporting stdp 2 use the same communicative strategy, and that different utterances putting forward the arguments accomplish different functions, beyond being premises for deriving conclusion. In the example, there are five distinguished utterances, governed by three types of connective predicates. The title is analyzed as a different connective, as explained in section 4.2.1. Traveller rating is not analyzed, because it does not add anything to text analysis of OTR. Utterances are distinguished per function and per propositional content.

## Example 2

ANNOTATION CODE
connective overall evaluation
connective description

### mein Favorit in Italien

---

Traveler rating: 

May 18, 2011

Rom ist einfach genial, wegen der Freundlichkeit der Leute, und deren Essen, Nicht zu vergessen die ganzen einmaligen Sehenswürdigkeiten!! Eines braucht ihr sicher: Geduld bei der Bushaltestelle,...es gibt keine Uhrzeiten. Der Bus kommt wenn er will.

Posted by *Bergi87*, Bozen

[My favorite in Italy- Rome is simply genial, because of people's friendliness and their food. And don't miss the unique sightseeing! One thing you need for sure is patience at bus stops.. there is no timetable. The bus comes when it wants]

The first utterance in the example is "Rom ist einfach genial" [Rome is simply genial], and uttering it the reviewer gives a sort of 'final verdict' about the destination she visited; I will call the pragmatic predicate governing this utterance *connective overall evaluation*. With the other utterances, the reviewer describes aspects of the destination which probably impressed her the most; thus, I will call the pragmatic predicate governing these utterances *connective description*. The second and third utterances constitute, together, a single sentence ("wegen der Freundlichkeit der Leute, und deren Essen" [because of people's friendliness and their food]) but they are analyzed separately because they have different propositional contents. The last utterance is, instead, made up of three sentences, but they all are about public transport; they are therefore analyzed as a single utterance.

For the purpose of this research, I decided to analyze separately the utterances working as standpoints and those working as arguments in the argumentative connective predicate *advice in OTR*. Utterances working as standpoints are, indeed, **dominant utterances** directly bound to the pragmatic (or connective) predicate governing the whole text, and express either stdp 1 or stdp 2. In fact, the generic connective predicate *advice in OTR* has the entire review as argument, but its local manifestations (i.e. actual OTR) take a specific utterance or a sequence of utterances of the review text as argument, that is as explicit textual representative of that argument place. The connective predicate governing such utterances is either one with which the reviewer

presents her claim about the destination or about her experience at the destination, or one with which she directly recommends/not recommends a visit. I will illustrate dominant connectives in sections 4.2.2 and 4.2.3. From the other side, utterances working as arguments, are only indirectly bound to OTR pragmatic predicate; they are, therefore, governed by subordinate connectives accomplishing different functions. There are, then, other subordinate connective predicates, which do not have any argumentative function. I will describe the former and the latter in sections from 4.2.4 to 4.2.10.

Before describing the different connective types encountered in the empirical analysis of the corpus, specific research questions for this level of analysis (4.1.1) and the analytical procedure employed are presented (4.1.2).

#### **4.1.2 Specific research questions of OTR connectives analysis**

Specific research questions drive the analysis of connective predicates in OTR; they are:

- 1) Which are the most frequent connective predicates used in OTR to accomplish the main text act?
- 2) Which of them are necessary and which are optional for an OTR to be recognized as a textual genre?
- 3) What is the propositional content of the different connective predicates?
- 4) Is the reader directly addressed in OTR? Which connective predicates take him directly into account?
- 5) Can recurrent patterns of connective predicates sequences be identified? Do they differ across languages and/or depending on other variables?

#### **4.1.3 An iterative procedure for the classification of OTR utterances**

To classify connectives at the utterance level, an *iterative analytical procedure* has been adopted. Figure 12 is a schematic representation of the process of OTR analysis.

- 1) The first step was to reconstruct the connectives of one review and classify them according to the dominant act performed by the writer with the utterance: for instance, a connective like “with the utterance Rwr gives Rdr details about her trip (i.e. travel company or type of trip)”, was labeled “connective contextualization”, because the dominant speech act is exactly one which specifies the context of the trip.

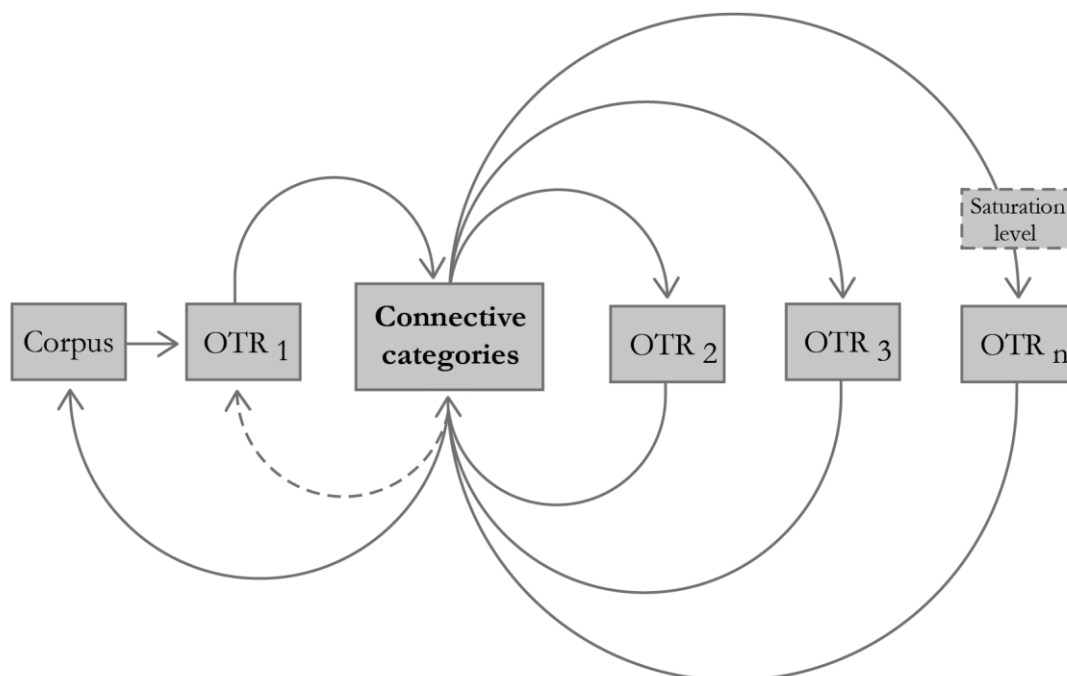


Figure 12: Iterative analytical procedure for classification of OTR utterances.

2) A second review was then considered for analysis, classifying connectives according to the previously defined categories. If new types of connectives were found, new categories were created and added to the classification scheme.

3) The second step was repeated until the *saturation level*, that is until no new category was found in the texts, but the existent categories were enough to categorize the types of connectives encountered. No unclassified residuals were left.

The classification scheme was elaborated and refined step after step using UAM Corpus Tool functionalities. The UAM allows to modify the coding scheme during the analysis, and to adjust previous classification to new categories. Given the empirical iterative process of OTR analysis and classification, the classes of connectives characterizing OTR at the utterance level constitute a *taxonomy* rather than a *typology*. Figure 13 illustrates the taxonomy of OTR connectives (using UAM Corpus Tool representation), as emerged from the analysis of the corpus. In the following sections, a characterization of each connective type is given, and examples from the corpus are supplied.

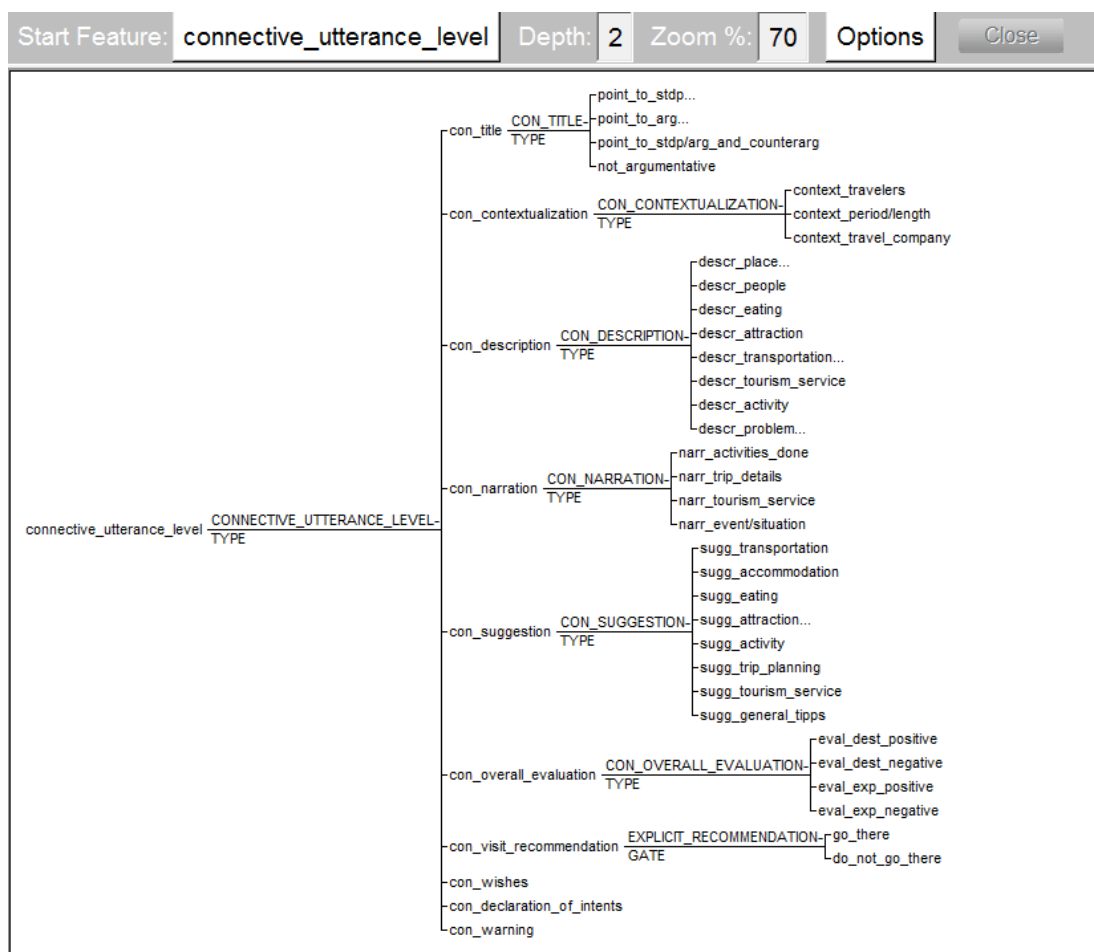


Figure 13: Classification scheme for connective predicates governing OTR utterances, from UAM Corpus Tool.

## 4.2 Dominant and subordinate connectives in OTR

**9 types** of connective predicates governing the utterances of the corpus have been found. Two of them correspond to dominant utterances, since they directly express the dominant connective predicate (DCP) of OTR. They are:

- DCP overall evaluation (section 4.2.2)
- DCP visit recommendation (section 4.2.3)

Seven types of connective predicate are subordinate (SCP), and add to the dominant one in different ways. They are:

- SCP contextualization (section 4.2.4)
- SCP description (section 4.2.5)

- SCP narration (section 4.2.6)
- SCP suggestion (section 4.2.7)
- SCP declaration of intents (section 4.2.8)
- SCP warning (section 4.2.9)
- SCP wishes (section 4.2.10)

While the first of them (connective contextualization) does not have an argumentative function in the text, all the others provide arguments, each one using a different communicative strategy. Titles have been treated separately, creating an ad hoc ‘connective predicate title’, which accomplishes different functions from one review to the other; sub-categories of connective titles have been distinguished for accounting for the diversity of functions (section 4.2.1).

#### 4.2.1 OTR titles and their function: connective title

The connective predicate governing OTR titles is, in most of the cases, one with which

*the reviewer helps the reader anticipate what is reported in the text trying to attract the reader's curiosity.*

The dominant speech act of this connective, though, may vary a lot from title to title, because titles can be assigned different functions by different reviewers. De Ascaniis and Gretzel (2012) conducted a first exploration of OTR titles, describing some of their linguistic and functional characteristics. They noticed that OTR titles have communalities both with news headlines and advertisement taglines. As well as news headlines, OTR titles many times anticipate something that is reported in the text, allowing the reader to achieve a valuable contextual effect without an excessive processing effort. As well as taglines, OTR titles usually use persuasive linguistic devices to attract the reader's curiosity in order to convince her that what is written is of interest. Differently from taglines, however, they do not need to be remembered because they are not associated with a brand, so their persuasion goal may not be as explicit.

OTR titles were, here, classified according to their *relation with the review main text*. Four types of relations emerged from the corpus:

- titles *pointing to the standpoint* put forward in the review, either corresponding to the recommendation for visiting (stdp 1) or to the overall evaluation of the destination (stdp 2). Four sub-categories were distinguished according to the sentiment of the standpoint pointed to:

- point to positive recommendation → examples: “A must destination”, “Jederzeit nochmal hin” [Back there again whenever it’s possible], “A late comer to the eternal city” (the fact that the author complains about herself for not having visited Rome before is an indirect recommendation to visit the city as soon as possible), “Rom ist eine Reise wert” [Rome is worth a trip]
  - point to negative recommendation → only the following instance was found in the corpus: “Rome and Naples for the last time”
  - point to destination positive evaluation → examples: “Best city of all”, “Caput mundi”, “Das schöne Rom” [the beautiful Rome], “Die Stadt überhaupt” [THE city], “Bellissima!” [Wonderful]
  - point to destination negative evaluation → only two instances were found in the corpus: “Roma caput mundi?.....qualche anno fa forse...” [Roma caput mundi?... perhaps some years ago...], “Lost me!”
- titles *pointing to an argument* used in the review to support the standpoint. The sentiment of the argument was codified creating two sub-categories:
- point to positive argument → examples: “Rome - City of Gelato and Pizzal!!!”, “Rome, Italy- An Open Air Museum”, “la mia citta preferita per shopping” [my favourite shopping city], “Ausflug in die Antike” [Journey in the Antique]
  - point to negative argument → examples: “Beware the touts!”, “Asthmatics beware!”, “Protect your belongings in Rome”
- titles *pointing both to a standpoint or an argument and to a counter-argument*. From a syntactical point of view, they are often expressed with concessive sentences, where the value of one of the two extremes is strengthened or weakened by the other extreme. They represent important ‘condensed’ information for the reader, in that they work as a kind of warning or limit to the applicability of the main standpoint maintained in the review. The following instances were found, showing different configurations (highlighted in brackets): “Beautiful city ruined by traffic” (pos stdp + neg arg), “Great sites shame about the rest” (pos arg + neg stdp), “Caotica ma fantastica” [Chaotic but great] (neg arg + pos stdp), “Schöne Stadt, zuviele Tourists” [Beautiful city, too many tourists] (pos stdp + neg arg), “tra smog e monumenti” [Between smog and monuments] (pos arg + neg arg), “Rome, City of beauty, treasures, Wealth, Poverty & increasing social problems” (pos stdp + pos arg + neg arg)



- titles having *no relation with argumentative aspects* of the review, but either (a) presenting the object of review (as the city name or the travel experience), or (b) providing technical details about the experience being reviewed (as visit length or visit occasion). These type of titles, indeed, do not add any relevant information for the reader and are even redundant; there is, in fact, no need to say that the review is about a certain destination, since reviews are already clustered by the platform according to the destination they are about → examples: (a) “Rome, Italy”, “Rome in review”, “Hot Tip when visiting Rome”; (b) “Rome in 5 hours”, “Rome in August”, “Day Trip”

It has to be noted that since arguments selected by pragmatic predicates are identified with utterances and not directly with the propositional content of utterances, Congruity Theory allows the reviewer to account for the pragmatic predicates associated with utterances such as “Wow” or “Good luck”. These utterances do not have a proper semantic propositional content, but only a purely pragmatic frame (e.g. Spk expresses wonder in front of Hr; Spk makes a wish to Hr). Moreover, an utterance such as “Wow”, entails a positive evaluation of the object which caused the wonder; therefore, it was classified as a title pointing to a positive destination evaluation (stdp 2).

The following three tables (Table 5, Table 6, and Table 7) report the amount and percentage of the connective titles per category. Values for the first table are calculated against the total number of titles, while values for the second and third table are calculated, respectively, against the number of titles pointing to the standpoint of the review, and the number of titles pointing to an argument given in the review.

	Point to standpoint	Point to argument	Point to stdp/arg & counter-arg	Not argumentative	Total
Amount	87	28	6	17	138
%	63%	20.3%	4.4%	12.3%	100%

Table 5: Type of Connective title

	Point to positive recm	Point to negative recm	Point to positive destination eval	Point to negative dest eval	Total
Amount	16	1	68	2	87
%	18.3%	1.2%	78.2%	2.3%	100%

Table 6: Connective title pointing to the standpoint

	Point to positive argument	Point to negative argument	Total
Amount	23	5	28
%	82%	18%	100%

Table 7: Connective title pointing to the argument

The fact that the most of the titles point to the standpoint put forward in the review, highlight that OTR titles have a dominant *reformulative function*, that is they anticipate both the content and the sentiment of the main claim of the review. Most of the titles pointing to the standpoint, then, concern the overall evaluation of the destination rather than the recommendation for visiting/not visiting; this result should be discussed against the pragmatic definition of OTR. OTR are, in fact, accounts of travel experiences, and their communicative function, that is primarily giving travel advices, is pursued exactly making a report of the experience, and giving an evaluation of the destination. Not very often (20.3%), though, titles are used to anticipate the reasons for such evaluation.

#### 4.2.2 “I recommend you to go there!”: connective visit recommendation

If, from one side, the dominant pragmatic predicate *advice in OTR* has the entire review as argument ( $T_o$ ), from the other side such pragmatic predicate takes a specific utterance or a sequence of utterances of the review text as argument. The *dominant utterance* or *dominant sequence* of an OTR, is an utterance or sequence with which the reviewer gives her opinion about her travel experience at the destination or about the destination itself, or an utterance with which she makes a visit recommendation. In OTR, the dominant utterance or sequence is always explicitly stated (see section 4.1.1). Traveller rating expressed with a number from one to five is, indeed, a visual representation of the dominant text act, and works as a ‘condensed’ dominant utterance. The opinion and the recommendation should be put, actually, on two different levels of the semantic-pragmatic structure of OTR. Reviewers’ opinions, in fact, work as indirect recommendations for visiting/not visiting the destination. They are, more precisely, motives for supporting the recommendation claim, and should be put one level below the recommendation itself.

In this research, though, I decided to consider both types of utterances as dominant utterances, distinguishing them by their main (explicit) function in the text. In this section the pragmatic predicate governing utterances with which the reviewer explicitly makes a visit recommendation is described, while in the next section the pragmatic predicate governing utterances with which the reviewer gives her opinion is presented.

Connective visit recommendation is one with which:

*the reviewer recommends the reader to engage or not engage in a course of action, for the reader's benefit.*

Following the Searlean classification of speech acts, the illocutionary act performed with this type of utterances is a *directive*, in that the “illocutionary point of these consists in the fact that they are attempts (...) by the speaker to get the hearer to do something” (Searle, 1976, p. 11). “The direction of fit is world-to-words and the sincerity condition is want (or wish or desire). The propositional content is always that the hearer H does some future action A” (Searle, 1976, p. 11).

Two sub-categories were created in order to account for the propositional content and the sentiment of recommendations:

- *Visit recommendation go there*, examples are:
  - “Rome is a must do!”
  - “Rom ist auf jeden Fall eine Reise wert“ [Rome is in any case worth a journey]
- *Visit recommendation do not go there*, examples are:
  - “Either stay away or complain loudly”
  - “I'm only writing this review for those that may be considering their first big trip abroad and are considering Italy. I feel that for the less experienced travellers this would leave a very bad taste and feeling with them about travel and I don't want this to happen as I feel that travel is the best experience one can have in learning about the planet we live on and the people that we share it with.”

5.1% of the utterances in the corpus are governed by a connective visit recommendation; 93.6% of them being positive recommendations, and only 6.4% being negative recommendations.

#### 4.2.3 “The best place in the world!”: connective overall evaluation

Connective overall evaluation is one with which:

*the reviewer gives a summary statement of her opinion about the destination or about her experience at the destination, to support her (explicit or implicit) visit recommendation.*

Most of the illocutionary acts governed by a connective overall evaluation correspond to the Searlean category of *representatives*. Using Searle's terms, their illocutionary point or purpose is to commit the speaker (in varying degrees) to something's being the case; the direction of fit is words-to-world, and the sincerity condition is *belief (that p)*. Searle suggests an assessment test to verify if an illocutionary act can be ascribed to this category, that is if it can be literally characterized as true or false; the truth or falseness regards the belief that what is asserted is or is not the case (Searle, 1976).

Four sub-categories were created in order to account for the propositional content of overall evaluations and for their sentiment. One example for each sub-category is provided:

- *destination evaluation positive*, example: “Rom war definitiv eines der Highlights auf meine Reise durch Italien” [Rome definitively was one of the highlights of my trip through Italy.]
- *destination evaluation negative*, example: “I was so relieved to get out of Rome and move to Florence which is much better”
- *experience evaluation positive*, example: “quel che ho visto è stato un’ esperienza indimenticabile” [What I’ve seen has been an unforgettable experience]
- *experience evaluation negative*, example: “I have never been so glad to return home”

I did not find any utterance expressing an average evaluation in my corpus of reviews: reviewers always expressed a clearly oriented evaluation in their text. Four reviewers gave Rome a rating of 3 out of 5 points, but this rating was not mirrored in the review utterances expressing the overall evaluation. Thus, I did not create a sub-category for classifying destination/experience average evaluations.

Utterances governed by the connective overall evaluation amount to the **14%** of the corpus utterances. Chart 1 reports the distribution of sub-categories in the corpus. Positive evaluations are far more than negative ones, and the most of them concerns the destination. It is presumable that the appraisal of the travel experience is passed on the destination; that is to say, that if one had a nice travel experience, she is inclined to have a positive image of the destination.

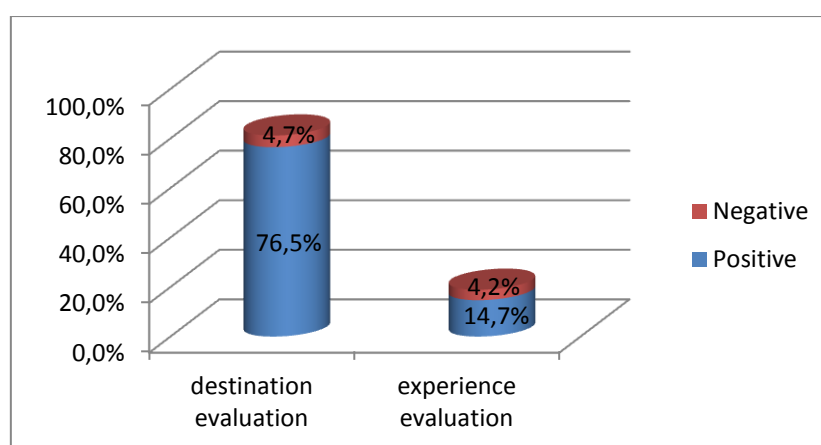


Chart 1: Distribution of connective predicates *destination evaluation* and *experience evaluation* in the corpus.

#### 4.2.4 Contextualizing the trip: connective contextualization

These have been found in the corpus utterances where elements pertaining to the context of the trip are given. They do not have any argumentative function, but are a sort of ‘additions’, with which the reviewer helps the reader to better locate the experience reported, by giving her elements for grasping what is in the background. The pragmatic effect of these utterances is a better understanding of the dominant text act (that is the local manifestation of the pragmatic predicate advice in OTR).

The connective predicate governing such utterances is one with which:

*the reviewer gives to the reader details about herself or her trip, to expand their common ground.*

Four sub-categories were created for classifying contextualization connectives, in order to account for their propositional content:

- utterances where the reviewer reveals personal characteristics, as demographic features, personality traits or previous experiences → examples are:
  - “At 60 I have just experienced my first visit to Rome”
  - “I'm generally not a "fly by the seat of your pants" kind of girl!”
  - “Als ich Rom vor 36 Jahren zum allererstenmal gesehen habe” [As I saw Rome for the very first time, 36 years ago]
  - “io abito a circa 45 km da Roma” [I live about 45 km away from Rome]
- utterances which specify period when the trip took place or the length of stay → example are:
  - “We were there because we were taking a cruise at the Civitavecchia port”
  - “We celebrated 25 Years of Marriage by staying a month in Europe in May 2010”
  - “Wir waren im Frühling dort” [We were there in spring]
  - “Viaggio di 3 giorni a Roma- venerdì sabato e domenica” [3-days trip to Rome – Friday, Saturday and Sunday]
- utterances which specify the travel company → examples are:
  - “my husband, myself and 2 children aged 9 and 11”
  - “my wife and I had the opportunity to visit Rome”
  - “Roma è una città che con la mia fidanzata visito appena posso” [Rome is a city I visit with my fiancée whenever I can]

- “famiglia di 4 persone, due figli di 11 e 14 anni, in generale non lamentosi” [4-people family, 2 children aged 11 and 14, mostly not mournful]

Contextualization connectives are **6.7%** of the total of connectives in the corpus, most of them providing details about the traveller herself (52%) and the period or length of her trip (36%). Only in a few OTR the travel company is specified (12%).

#### 4.2.5 Painting travel experiences through means of words: connective description

Descriptions of the travel experience or of the destination visited, constitute a communicative strategy frequently exploited in OTR for pursuing their pragmatic effect. Describing is a sort of painting which uses words instead of brush and colors; it is an attempt, in fact, to draw the image of something (e.g. object, event, activity, emotion) that is known, outlining its most representative aspects. Travel experiences are complex objects, defined by many different aspects (see chapter 3, section 3.2.3), which can be hardly fully accounted for, and even less in a short text as a review. The aspects of a travel experience that are highlighted in a review represent, therefore, a *selection* of all the aspects that actually contributed to shape the experience. A selection is, then, the result of a comparison, an evaluation and a choice within a plethora of alternatives. The alternatives that are selected likely represent those that are considered the worthiest or the most valued for pursuing the selector’s goal. In the case of OTR, since the main communicative purpose is to provide prospective tourists with travel advices to make informed decisions, the reviewer selects those aspects of her travel experience she considers more helpful for the reader; that is to say, the selection corresponds to the aspects of the trip the reviewer holds worthy to be told.

Connective predicate description, thus, can be defined as one with which:

*the reviewer describes aspects of her travel experience or of the destination she visited, to draw the reader’s attention on those aspects, which she thinks are the most relevant.*

Descriptions in OTR often reveal the reviewer’s appraisal, in that they not only describe states of affairs related to the travel experience, but usually also give a judgment about them. Following are examples of two utterances governed by the connective predicate description, the former without any evaluation of the state of affairs described, the latter providing, instead, also appreciation of it.

Example 1: “The Vatican is free entry for the most part”.

Example 2: “The language is like music to the ears”.

Appraisal might be conveyed through rhetorical devices, like the similarity (underlined) in example 2, or through linguistic choices, like evaluative adjectives or adverbs, as in example 3, or connotative verbs, as in example 4:

Example 3: “people everywhere are generally kind and helpful”

Example 4: “this beautiful and historic city is ruined by 2 things, traffic and graffiti” → here, together with linguistic choices (i.e. the evaluative adjective ‘beautiful’, and the connotative verb ‘to ruin’), it has to be noted a syntactical choice: the reviewer juxtaposes positive characteristics of the destination, that are its beauty and artistic treasure, to problematic aspects, that are traffic and graffiti.

Typical of the morphological configuration of descriptions are third person – singular or plural – pronouns and present tense verbs. The most of the illocutionary acts governed by a connective description correspond to the Searlean category of *representatives* (see section 4.2.3).

Utterances governed by connective description were further distinguished according to their *propositional content*. It means that two consecutive utterances sharing the communicative function of providing a description, but having a different propositional content were classified as distinct segments. In the following example, the utterance can be reconstructed as (a) “Die Leute sind sehr freundlich” [People are very friendly] and (b) “Das Essen ist sehr gut” [The food is really good], and classified as: (a) connective description people and (b) connective description eating.

Synthetic definition and examples for each sub-category are provided below.

- *Description place* – city overviews, general aspects of destination such as atmosphere, arts and history, level of cleanliness, presence of tourists, cost of consumer goods, perceived safety:
  - “Für jeden ist etwas dabei” [There is something there for everybody]
  - “This beautiful and historic city is ruined by 2 things, traffic and graffiti.”
  - “Police are around most times of the night.”
- *Description people* – attitude and cultural characteristics of local people:
  - “Italians smoke A LOT!”
  - “Romans are relaxed and laid back”
- *Description eating* – culinary tradition, places for eating out:
  - “And the food and wine well – fabulous”
  - “No glasses of water (bottled only), no butter for bread either”

- “Restaurants und Pizzerien reihen sich aneinander“ [Restaurants and pizzerias follow one another]
  - *Description attraction* – list of attractions, attraction details
    - “The Vatican is free entry for the most part, anyway”
    - “Hier in Rom befinden sich verschiedene antike Orten z.B. Colosseo, Foro Romano, Pantheon, Pyramide, Terme di Caracalla, und viel anderen in jeder Winkel der Straße“ [Here in Rome there are many ancient places, for example the Colosseum, the Foro Romano, the Pantheon, the Pyramid, the thermae of Caracalla and many others at each corner of the street]
  - *Description transportation* – means of transport and their characteristics:
    - “The public transportation was easy to navigate”
    - “Mit der Metro gelangt man schnell und günstig von einem Ende der Stadt in das andere“ [with the tube you get quickly and cheaply from one side of the city to the other]
  - *Description tourism service* – services for city touring, services at attractions, accommodations, attitude towards tourists:
    - “The open top tour buses are great and good value”
    - “certo è una città turistica e quindi tutti cercano di spellarti” [it is a touristic city, so of course everybody tries to tap you for money]
    - “Hotels sind in Rom leider oftmals unter europäischem Durchschnitt. Das Preisniveau ist nicht extrem überteuert, wie etwa in Barcelona“ [the hotels unfortunately are below the European standard. The price level is not extremely overpriced, like in Barcelona]
  - Description activity* – activities that can be performed at the destination, excluding attractions to visit:
    - “sehr günstige und exzellente Lokale” [very cheap and excellent pubs]
    - “the shopping is also an enjoyable experience”
  - *Description problem* – social and material problems of the city such as homeless people, traffic, pollution, public infrastructures, touts, language barriers:
    - “in areas such as Trevi Fountain etc tourists are approached with a free rose or flower”
    - “è inquinatissima ...a parte quei pochi parchi sparsi qua e là, nei quali continui per forza a sentire il rumore delle macchine” [it’s so polluted... except from that few parks here and there, where you keep on hearing cars roaring]
- With a frequency of nearly **35%**, connective predicates description are the most represented in the corpus. Chart 2 reports the distribution of connective predicate description according to their propositional content.



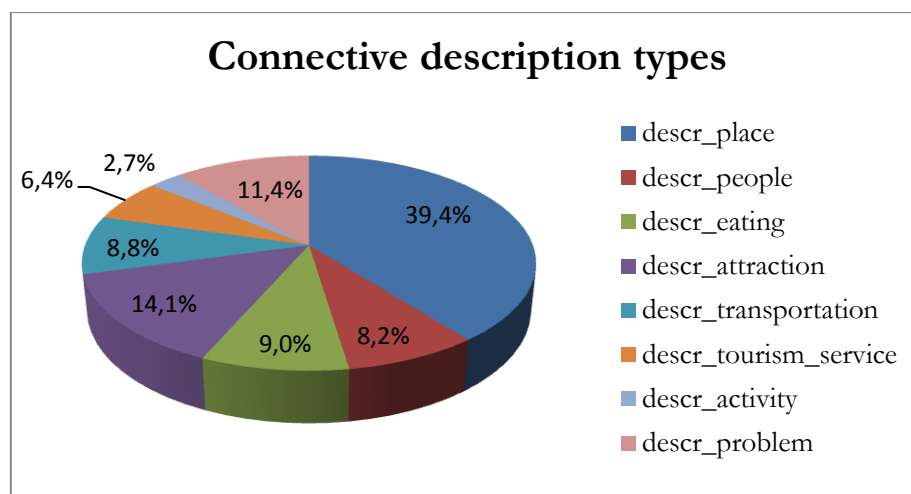


Chart 2: Distribution of *connective predicate description* according to the propositional content

Most of the descriptive utterances focus on general aspects of the place, that are those which immediately leap out at the tourist, even in a short visit; these descriptions give the ‘taste’ of the city. A good number of reviews, then, speak about attractions, that are indeed (as the name points out) elements which make a destination attractive to tourists. Problems are often mentioned, as well, together with eating opportunities, the attitude of local people and means of transport. Activities are the less described aspect: this is an interesting result if it is considered that Rome has a multitude of artistic and shopping offers. Presumably, tourists who decide to go to Rome, are more interested in enjoying aspects as its historic and artistic treasure and the typical food, than in engaging in different activities.

#### 4.2.6 Telling travel stories: connective narration

The fact that OTR report travellers’ personal experiences is made explicit at the textual level with utterances governed by a narrative pragmatic connective, that is one with which:

*the reviewer tells the reader her travel experience at the destination, to help her figure out how her prospective experience at the destination might look like.*

A narrative is the exposition of an event – in this case of a personal story – with abundance of details (Garzanti, 2002). Typical of the morphological configuration of narratives are first person – singular or plural – pronouns and past tense verbs. As for descriptions, the most of the illocutionary acts governed by a connective narration correspond to the Searlean category of *representatives*, but here, indeed, the speaker’s commitment to the belief that what she asserts is or is not the case is even stronger than

in descriptions, because what is asserted represents the reviewer's personal experience: she was a direct testimony of what she reports.

Four sub-categories were distinguished for accounting for the propositional content of utterances governed by connective narration. Synthetic definition and examples for each sub-category are provided below.

- *Narration activities done* – activities performed during the trip (from attraction visited to shopping and entertaining)
  - “We saw amazing historical sites like Bernini sculptures (unbelievable), Michelangelo paintings and sculptures, and churches that made you feel God was right next to you”
  - “E' stato fantastico gironzolare per la città” [wandering about the city has been wonderful]
- *Narration event/situation* – peculiar events happened to the reviewer during the trip and situations she lived, that refer to her personal experience
  - “We were looking forward to trying out our pigeon Italian, but there wasn't much opportunity”
  - “I was struck on the back with a plastic sword when I refused to allow my photo to be taken”
- *Narration trip details* – technical details about trip organization
  - “visiting in January was a good move as while the weather was not great there were few queues and prices were reasonable”
  - “Wir haben in dem Stadtteil Trastevere gewohnt” [we lived in the Trastevere]
- *Narration tourism service* – services used at the destination
  - “we took an audio guide as we had just missed the guided tour and this was great - it brought the place to life”
  - “Utilissimi si sono rivelati i pullman scoperti che fanno il giro turistico della parte cittadina da visitare” [the double-decker that make a tour of the touristic part of the city have been very useful]

Narrative utterances are far less than descriptions, with a frequency of **10.3%** in the corpus. Chart 3 reports the distribution of connective predicate narration according to their propositional content. The most of the narratives (nearly 40%) are about activities reviewers engaged in, while the rest of them equally report about trip details, tourism services or events or situations experienced.

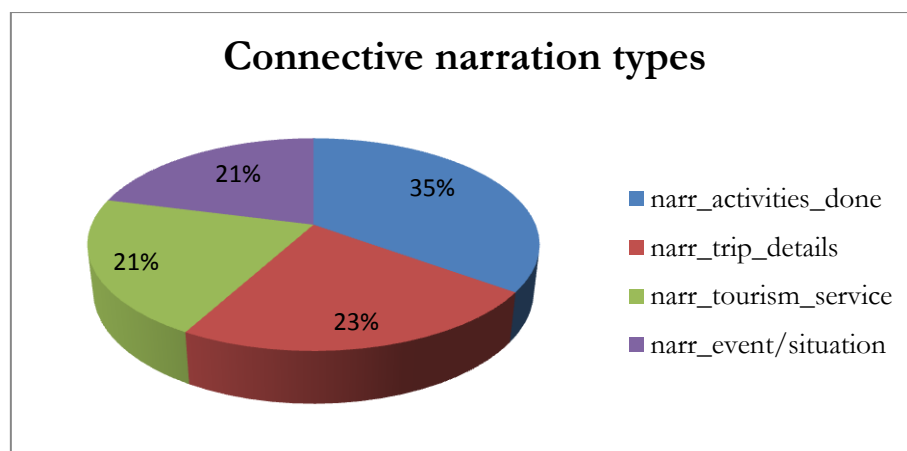


Chart 3: Distribution of *connective predicate narration* according to the propositional content

#### 4.2.7 “If you go there, you should do this ...”: connective suggestion

Besides descriptions of the place and narration of personal experiences, many times in OTR, reviewers give different kinds of explicit suggestions. These types of communicative moves put to the fore the *interpersonal dimension* of monologues of which OTR are a type. The reader is mostly a ‘silent’ presence, since, because of technical constraints, the only feedback she can give is rating the OTR; however, the reviewer knows to which kind of audience she is speaking to, and addresses it directly, even attempting it to do something. Such an attempt reveals the reviewer’s consciousness of (a) the context her review is embedded in, and (b) the communicative social function it should accomplish. (a) The reviewer recognizes that she is addressing an interlocutor who, though (usually) personally unknown to her, is interested in her travel stories, because she is a tourist herself and/or she wants to know more about the destination. (b) The reviewer, then, is aware that her report will inform, in some way, the reader’s decision-making, either the practical decision making about her prospective trip, or the cognitive decision-making of developing an opinion about the destination at issue.

Connective suggestion, thus, can be defined as one with which:

*the reviewer gives the reader suggestions about her prospective visit to the destination, on the base of her previous experience at the destination, for helping the reader to get the most from her trip.*

The illocutionary act performed with this type of utterances is a *directive*, in that the speaker tries to get the hearer to do something (see section 4.2.2). They are, indeed, modest attempts, since there is not any insistence from the part of the speaker.

Recommendations, instead, present a higher degree of strength, in that the speaker tries to get the reader to do what she recommends putting effort and urgency in her attempt.

It should be noted that narrative moves, since they often include an evaluation of what is being told, work as indirect suggestions: by telling to the reader what she did in her trip, and how good or bad it was, the reviewer provides travel tips. The utterance in the following example is governed by a connective narration, but the reviewer's advice intention is clear:

Example: "We found walking from site to site was easy. Stayed right by the Trevi Fountain, walked to the Forum, the Coliseum, and the Hard Rock Café was a breeze"

While telling the attractions she visited, the walking path she followed, and expressing on them her opinion, the reviewer indirectly gives visit suggestions to the reader; it is like she claims: "I visited x and y and liked them; I suggest you to do the same if you want to enjoy the city/have a good time/take the best from your visit".

Also in a descriptive move, actually, a suggestion is implied. When she describes her experience or the destination itself, in fact, the reviewer makes a selection of what she could tell, according to personal preferences and to what she thinks might be of help for the reader. An implication of the utterance in the following example ("people everywhere are generally kind and helpful") which is governed by a connective description, might be, for instance, that the reader should not worry, according to the reviewer, about asking for help to local people, and that, if she asks, she will receive the help she needs.

The difference among description, narration and suggestion pertains to the *main* communicative function of the utterance and, even if other (implicit) functions for the same utterance may be identified, such distinction needs to be accounted for, in order to understand how reviewers' build their texts for them to accomplish OTR pragmatic purpose.

The analysis of the review in the following example I am reporting below, aims at showing a juxtaposition of connectives description, narration and suggestion.

### Example

ANNOTATION CODE
Contextualization
Description
Narration
Suggestion

“Hot tip when visiting Rome”

I have just returned from a 3 night break to Rome. I recommend anyone travelling there to purchase a Roma Pass online before travelling. I booked mine the night before and collected it on arrival at the airport (just presented the confirmatory email). The pass gives free entry to the first 2 attractions visited and free travel on the buses and metro. I visited the Colosseum avoided all the queues, just went to the Roma Pass entrance and went straight in (avoiding those long lines of people who had not been so sensible!). It saved carrying change for the buses – it is definitely a good buy.

Interestingly, the title of the review points out the reviewer’s intention, that is to give travel tips. Descriptive and narrative moves, thus, are communicative strategies she uses for pursuing this goal, and actually work as indirect suggestions.

To account for the propositional content of utterances governed by the connective suggestion, some sub-categories were distinguished. Synthetic definition and examples for each sub-category are provided below.

- *Suggestion transportation* – advices on the best means of transport for visiting the city or for moving in and out:
  - “Another recommendation is to hire a private driver to pick you up at your hotel and take you to airport”
  - “Von dort geht man zu Fuß oder nimmt den Bus zu allen Sehenswürdigkeiten” [from there you walk or take the bus to all sights]
- *Suggestion accommodation* – general or specific advices about places to stay:
  - “try to stay in the city instead of having to travel in”
  - “ideal ist das NH Hotel in Rom i.d.N. vom Vatikan“ [the NH Hotel in Rome in front of the Vatican is perfect]
- *Suggestion eating* - advice about places where to eat, behaviour to have and culinary experiences to make:

- “Just order what you want and don't worry about their first course, second course stuff”
- “und koestlichen Eis ‚artigianale‘ probieren” [and try the delicious “artigianale” ice-cream]
- *Suggestion attraction* – general and technical tips about attractions to visit:
  - “Don't miss the tombs...very emotional”
  - “keine kurzen Hosen im Vatikan! [no shorts in the Vatican!]
- *Suggestion activity* – tips about activities to do at the destination or at specific attractions:
  - “Finally. Go to the Piazza del Pantheon, buy an ice cream and sit on the steps of the fountain and watch the world go by. It's my favorite thing to do when in Roma”
  - “Auch wenn man nicht gläubig ist, sicherlich sehr interessant [ even if you are not religious, for sure it is interesting to attend the Pope's general audience in Vatican on Wednesday]”
- *Suggestion trip planning* – hints on the period for planning a visit, on the time required for planning, on city tour organization:
  - “Just make sure it is going to be on Winter...”
  - “Für den Vatikan und das angeschlossene Museum sollte man mindestens einen Tag einplanen” [for the Vatican and its museum you should plan at least one day]
- *Suggestion tourism service* – hints about general tourism services for visiting the city or about services at attractions:
  - “Highly recommend private tour of the Vatican”
  - “Empfehlenswert der Rom Pass - kostet 25 Euro für drei Tage” [I recommend the Rome Pass – it costs 25 euro for 3 days]
- *Suggestion general tips* – tips about attitude to have, best ways to enjoy the city, technical wariness:
  - “So, if visiting Rome leave your clearly American-looking all-white gym shoes, athletic shorts, and oversized jeans and t-shirts at home ... you will stick out like a sore thumb!”
  - “Munitevi di scarpe comode e tanta pazienza!” [equip yourself with comfortable shoes and a lot of patience]

The amount of utterances governed by the connective predicate suggestion in the corpus is twice the amount of those governed by connective predicate narration, that is

20.7%. Chart 4 reports the distribution of connective predicates suggestion according to their propositional content.

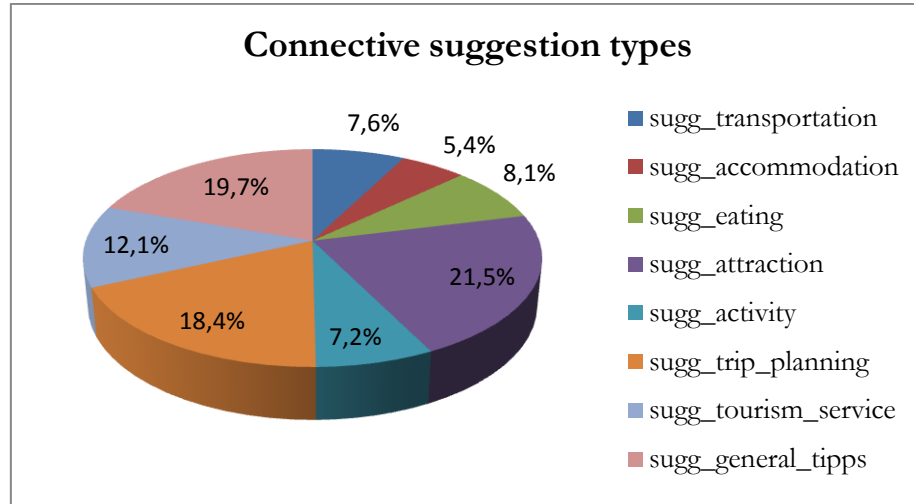


Chart 4: Distribution of *connective predicate narration* according to the propositional content

Most of the reviewers provided suggestions about attractions (21.5%) and trip planning (18.4%), and gave the readers general tips on how to enjoy the city the most, adapting behaviour to local culture and paying attention to small technical details. As emerged also in descriptions, activities to be performed at the destination are mentioned only a few times (7.2%). This pattern confirms that tourists who visit Rome give priority to other aspects than activities, in particular to attractions and local culture, which are best representatives of the city.

#### 4.2.8 “I will be back!”: connective declaration of intents

Together with direct recommendations for visiting/not visiting, in some OTR, reviewers make declarations about their future course of action concerning a prospective visit to the destination. By stating what their future behavior will be, reviewers indirectly recommend to visit/not visit the destination; they represent, in fact, an authoritative source, to whom the reader gives trust, so she presumably expects that the reader may act as she declares she will do (i.e. take the same decision). I called the connectives governing these type of utterances ‘declaration of intents’, and defined them as utterances with which

*the reviewer tells the reader her plans for the future with regard to new possible visits to the destination, to recommend/ not recommend to the reader a visit.*

Examples of declaration of intents are the following:

- “I will return again one day...”
- “Would I go again? No, but that is only because I feel I have had my interest satisfied”
- “Fazit: Waren nicht das letztmal in Rom“ [Conclusion: this was not our last time in Rome]
- “ Voglio tornarci, ma per dedicarci più tempo!” [I want to go back, but in order to spend more time there]

Following the Searlean classification of speech acts, the illocutionary act performed with these utterances is a *commissive*, in that their “point is to commit the speaker (in varying degrees) to some future course of action”(Searle, 1976, p. 11). The direction of fit is world-to-words, as for the directives, and the sincerity condition is the intention of the speaker to really act as she declares. The propositional content, then, is always that the speaker does some future action (Searle, 1976).

Connective predicates declaration of intents, only govern **2.2%** of all the utterances in the corpus.

#### 4.2.9 “Beware!”: connective warning

Warnings are connected with troubles the reviewer had during her trip, and from which she wishes to save the reader. They are expressed with the imperative verbal mood, and often with directives such as ‘beware’, ‘ask’, ‘be warned’. The degree of strength of the illocutionary act of warning is higher than that of advices and recommendations; the reviewer is, in fact, so much concerned with saving the reader from her same trouble, that she nearly arrives at giving the reader an order. The utterances governed by a connective warning are those with which:

*the reviewer warns the reader against unpleasant events, which could take place at the destination, and which could negatively affect the reader’s travel experience, to save her from them.*

Examples are:

- “Beware of touts and cheats or pickpockets as most tourist sites are crowded”
- “Aber Vorsicht vor Fotobetrügern, machen ein Foto und wollen dann 5,- Euro dafür!!!! ” [but pay attention to the picture-liars, they take a picture and want 5 euros for it!!!]

Warnings, actually, are given rarely by reviewers: in the corpus they amount to only **2%**.

#### 4.2.10 “Have a good stay!”: connective wishes

In some rare cases, reviewers close their review writing wishes to the reader for her prospective visit to the destination. ‘To wish’ is a triadic predicate whose argument



places request: a person expressing the wish, a wish about a future course of action or event, and a person receiving the wish. When a wish is expressed in a review, thus, what becomes evident is the fact that the writer has precise expectations about the audience she is addressing and about her role towards that audience; the reviewer, indeed, expects the reader to be a prospective traveller interested in the destination she is talking about, and recognizes that she herself has the role of a reliable authoritative source for such a reader.

The connective governing wishing utterances is one with which

*the reviewer wishes the reader to enjoy her trip to the destination she is reviewing.*

The following are examples taken from the corpus:

- “I wish everyone could experience”
- “We wish you happy traveling”
- “Buona visita!!” [Have a nice stay!]
- “buon viaggio nella città eterna anche ai non romantici...” [a nice trip in the eternal city also to the non-romantic ones]

According to the classification of Searle, members of this category should belong to the (wide and quite vague) class of *expressives*, whose illocutionary point is “to express the psychological state specified in the sincerity condition about a state of affairs specified in the propositional content” (Searle, 1976, p. 12). The propositional content refers to a state of affairs that speaker believes is desirable to the reader: in the case of OTR, the reviewer believes that a positive travel experience is desirable for the reader; no-one, indeed, would wish someone else a negative experience, unless she is ironic. There is no direction of fit, and the truth of the expressed proposition is presupposed (i.e. if the reviewer wishes the reader a happy trip, it is presupposed that she truly would like the reader’s trip to be happy).

Utterances governed by the connective wishes represent the smallest part in the corpus, with a proportion of: **0.5%**.

### **4.3 What does the reviewer do to the reader with her text?**

In the previous chapter, I proposed a definition of the connective predicate governing OTR on a theoretical base, that is the etymology of review, TripAdvisor strategic goal and guidelines for traveller reviews. Here, a definition is given on an empirical bases, that is through the analysis of a corpus of OTR. In particular, the utterances making up the reviews main text are analyzed in terms of the function they accomplish with regard to the whole of the text; adopting the point of view of Congruity Theory, this means to

identify which of the presuppositions imposed by the pragmatic predicate are satisfied in the text.

#### 4.3.1 Occurrence of connectives in OTR

Chart 5 reports the computation of frequencies of different connective predicate types in the corpus, excluding titles. Most of the utterances in OTR are governed by the subordinate connective description (34.9%), followed by connective suggestion (20.7%) and by the dominant connective overall evaluation (15.9%). One tenth of OTR utterances are governed by connective narration (10.3%), while only a minority by the dominant connective visit recommendation (5.9%) and by the subordinate connective contextualization (7.6%). Subordinate connectives wishes, declaration of intents and warning should be considered an exception rather than a typical function of OTR, in that they all together only govern 4.7% of the corpus utterances.

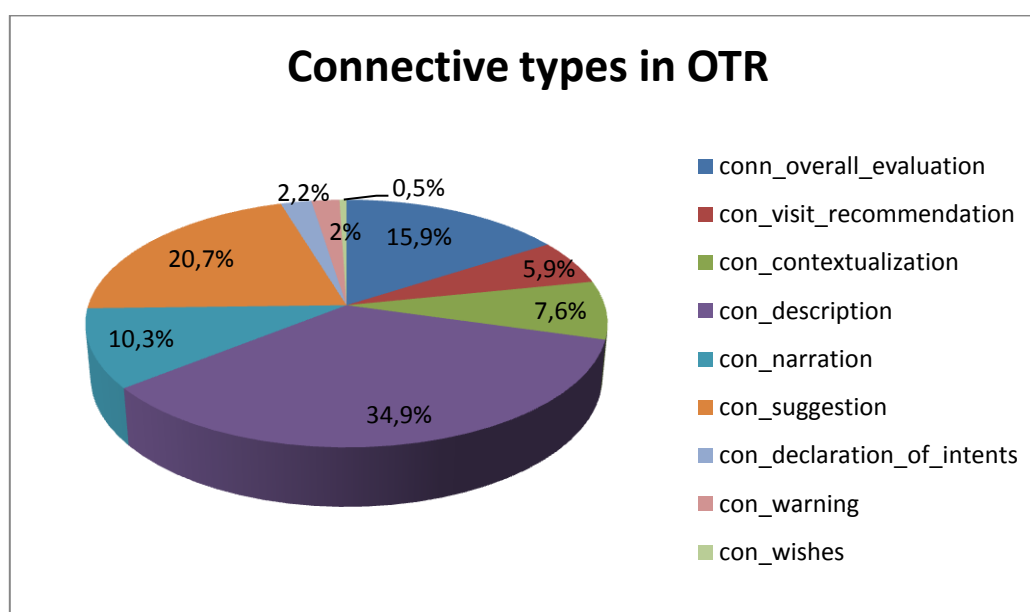


Chart 5: Distribution of connective predicate types in the corpus.

The absolute number of occurrences of each type of connective in the corpus, though, is not representative of its significance in OTR; while, in fact, from one side, it is not necessary to express the standpoint (either the overall evaluation or the visit recommendation) more than once (only in some few cases it is repeated, see section 4.3.3), from the other side, the same type of argument (i.e. subordinate connective), may be used several times to make the point. A measure of the representativeness of each connective is given, instead, by their presence or absence in each OTR; this aspect will be discussed in the next section.

#### 4.3.2 Compulsory and optional connectives in OTR

The frequency of each type of connective predicates within the corpus is not enough, though, for appreciating their importance with regard to the textual genre OTR. It needs, now, to be distinguished between ‘compulsory’ connectives, that are those representing constitutive elements of the textual genre OTR, and ‘optional’ connectives, which enrich OTR but if missing do not change its status. To do so, they have to be identified connectives which are always (or very often) present, and connectives which are less frequent if not even rare. Here, it is not a matter of weighing connectives in the corpus, but rather a matter of recording which connective is or is not used in each OTR of the corpus. Each connective, thus, has to be counted only one time per OTR.

Table 8 reports the number of OTR where each type of connective has been encountered, and the weight of each of them against all the OTR of the corpus. The more, respectively the less used, are highlighted with more or less intense color. Results show that connective predicates description, overall evaluation and suggestion have to be considered ‘compulsory’, since they appear, respectively, in 91% (i.e. in 126 OTR out of 138), 76% (i.e. in 106 OTR out of 138) and 63% (i.e. in 87 OTR out of 138) of the OTR making up the corpus. Connective predicates visit recommendation (41%), contextualization (42%) and narration (38%) have been encountered in a bit less than a half of the OTR, thus they represent typical but not necessary communicative moves for accomplishing the dominant text act; I will call them ‘optional’ connectives. Eventually, connective predicates wishes (4%), declaration of intents (15%) and warning (11%), were employed only in rare cases, and thus they should be considered ‘additional’ communicative moves with which the speaker tries, in a way, to come closer to the reader by directly addressing her (this is particularly the case for wishes and warnings).

Comparing these results with those concerning absolute frequency of each type of connective predicate (previous section), it emerges that:

- descriptions are the most used and also the most representative communicative strategies in the corpus;
- there is a higher number of suggestions (21%) than overall evaluations (16%), but the former are less representative (63%) than the latter (76%), in that they are missing in a larger group of reviews;
- narrations are more frequent than visit recommendations and contextualizations, but are equally representative.

Connective type	Total (138)	% of all OTR
Overall evaluation	106	<b>76 %</b>
Visit recommendation	57	41 %
Contextualization	58	42 %
Description	126	<b>91 %</b>
Narration	53	38 %
Suggestion	87	<b>63 %</b>
Wishes	5	4 %
Declaration of intents	21	15 %
Warning	15	11 %

Table 8: Absolute frequency of connective predicate types in the corpus.

As far as it regards the representativeness of OTR propositional content, that is of the aspects of the destination being reviewed, I did not find any clear pattern in the corpus. Which aspects the reviewer will discuss are mostly unpredictable.

### 4.3.3 Recurrent patterns of connectives sequences in OTR

The corpus was investigated to see if recurrent patterns of connective sequences emerge from the corpus, and if OTR can be segmented according to functionally-based characteristics, that is according to similar patterns of connective predicates. The analysis followed a three steps process: 1) the sequence of connectives for each review in the corpus was pointed out; 2) sequences were compared to identify similarities across the corpus; 3) the distribution of OTR presenting similar functional patterns were observed, to hypothesize how variables interplay (for instance, how functional patterns related to language); results of the third step are described and discussed in sections 4.3.4 and 4.3.5. The second step was driven by the following research questions:

- Which connective predicates do most frequently *open* destination OTR?
- Which connective predicates do most frequently *follow* the most frequent opening connective predicates?
- Which connective predicates do most frequently *close* destination OTR?

Connectives bound to OTR titles were excluded from the analysis, because they accomplish different functions than satisfying some of the presuppositions imposed by the dominant pragmatic predicate on its arguments (see section 4.2.1). Connective predicates wishes, declaration of intents and warning were cumulatively considered as a single subordinate connective, because of their low significance within the corpus.

Table 9 shows that destination OTR most often open with an overall evaluation of the destination or the travel experience (37%), or providing contextual elements (30.4%),

such as information about the traveller, the period of the trip, the travel company. If the percentage of OTR opening with a visit recommendation is summed up to those opening with an overall evaluation, the result is that nearly half of the reviews in the corpus (precisely 45.7%) start with a dominant connective predicate.

Connective type	Total first place	% first place
Overall evaluation	51/138	37%
Visit recommendation	12/138	8.7%
Contextualization	42/138	30.4%
Description	16/138	11.6%
Narration	4/138	2.9%
Suggestion	11/138	8%
Wishes Declaration of intents Warning	2/138	1.4%

Table 9: Distribution of connective predicate types opening OTR.

Three patterns can be distinguished, if the connective predicate immediately following the most frequently opening connectives are considered, as reported in table 10: one-third (33.3%) of the reviews presents the sequence ‘dominant connective – description’, about 20% follow the sequence ‘contextualization – dominant connective’, while only a minority shows the sequence ‘contextualization – narration’ (5%). This means that the evaluation of the destination/experience or the visit recommendation are usually given quite immediately: reviewers do not hesitate to take a position.

Connective predicates sequence	Total sequence	% sequence
Overall evaluation/visit recommendation - description	46/138	33.3%
Contextualization – overall evaluation/ visit recommendation	28/138	20.3%
Contextualization – narration	7/138	5%

Table 10: Recurrent connective predicates sequences in the corpus.

Table 11 helps answer the last question. Except for connective predicates contextualization and narration, the distribution of dominant and subordinate connectives closing the review of the corpus is rather balanced: different connectives are used to close reviews, with a light preference for suggestions.

Connective type	Total last place	% last place
Overall evaluation	24/138	17.4%
Visit recommendation	22/138	16%
Contextualization	1/138	0.7%
Description	28/138	20.3%
Narration	11/138	8%
Suggestion	31/138	22.4%
Wishes	21/138	15.2%
Declaration of intents		
Warning		

Table 11: Distribution of connective predicate types closing OTR.

#### 4.3.4 An empirical definition of the pragmatic predicate governing OTR

These results provide a snapshot of the characteristics of the textual genre OTR in terms of the “relatively stable types of utterances” (using Bakhtinian terms) they are made of, and their function within the whole of the text. Since such characteristics came out from the empirical analysis of concrete utterances written by reviewers in the context of online travel practices, they must be considered representative of a textual genre. It seems useful, here, to quote again Bakhtin’s definition of speech genre: “language is realized in the form of concrete utterances (oral or written) by participants in the various areas of human activity. (...) Each separate utterance is individual, of course, but each sphere in which language is used develops its own *relatively stable types* of these utterances. These we may call *speech genres*.” (Bakhtin, 1986, p. 60).

The textual genre OTR, thus, is one where:

*a travel advice about a destination is given, in the form of a direct or indirect visit recommendation, by expressing an opinion on the destination. A constellation of arguments is put forward to support the opinion, which is based on a personal previous travel experience. Those aspects of the experience or the destination itself that are considered the most relevant are described, and suggestions are provided to help*

*the reader to get the most from her trip. Narratives of the personal travel story and trip details, constitute additional elements which contribute shaping prospective tourists' expectations.*

Connective predicates governing the utterances of the main review text, must satisfy the presuppositions (or conditions) imposed by the dominant connective predicate advice in OTR, in order for the text to be congruent. In chapter 3 (section 3.3.4), I gave a theoretical definition of the pragmatic predicate advice in OTR, and pointed out the presuppositions it imposes on its argument places. Now, on the base of the empirical definition of the same pragmatic predicate, a comparison has to be done, to see which of the theoretically defined presuppositions are actually satisfied by local manifestations of the pragmatic predicate (i.e. by actual OTR), and if other presuppositions should be added, in order to account for the textual genre OTR. In chapter 3, the following presuppositions were identified: [T<sub>o</sub> has to]

- a) report Rwr's travel experience at destination D
- b) provide Rwr's descriptions of D
- c) provide Rwr's opinion on D
- d) show that Rwr's experience in D is worth telling

In the corpus of OTR I analyzed, narrative and descriptive utterances satisfy presupposition a), descriptive utterances, again, satisfy presupposition b), utterances where an overall evaluation is expressed or a visit recommendation is given satisfy presupposition c), utterances constituted by explicit suggestions to the reader and providing details about the reviewer herself (with which the reader can identify herself) satisfy the last presupposition (d).

The empirical analysis allowed to weigh the relevance of each different condition for an OTR to actually accomplish its pragmatic purpose: if conditions b), c) and d) must be satisfied, otherwise the OTR fails to accomplish its purpose, condition a) is not 'compulsory'; if it is satisfied in the text, an element is added which makes the effect of the OTR stronger.

Figure 14 represents the structure of the pragmatic predicate governing the textual genre OTR, at the higher level of the text act and at the local level of utterances making up the text. Continuous lines indicate compulsory connective predicates at the utterance level (i.e. presuppositions that must be satisfied in the text), dotted lines indicate optional connective predicates, and fine dotted lines indicate additional (rare) connective predicates. Compulsory, optional and additional connectives are distinguished also through a different intensity of the line color. At the utterance level, two types of connectives are distinguished: *dominant* connective predicates (DCP), which have been

put on a higher level, and *subordinate* connective predicates (SCP), which occupy the lower levels in the figure.

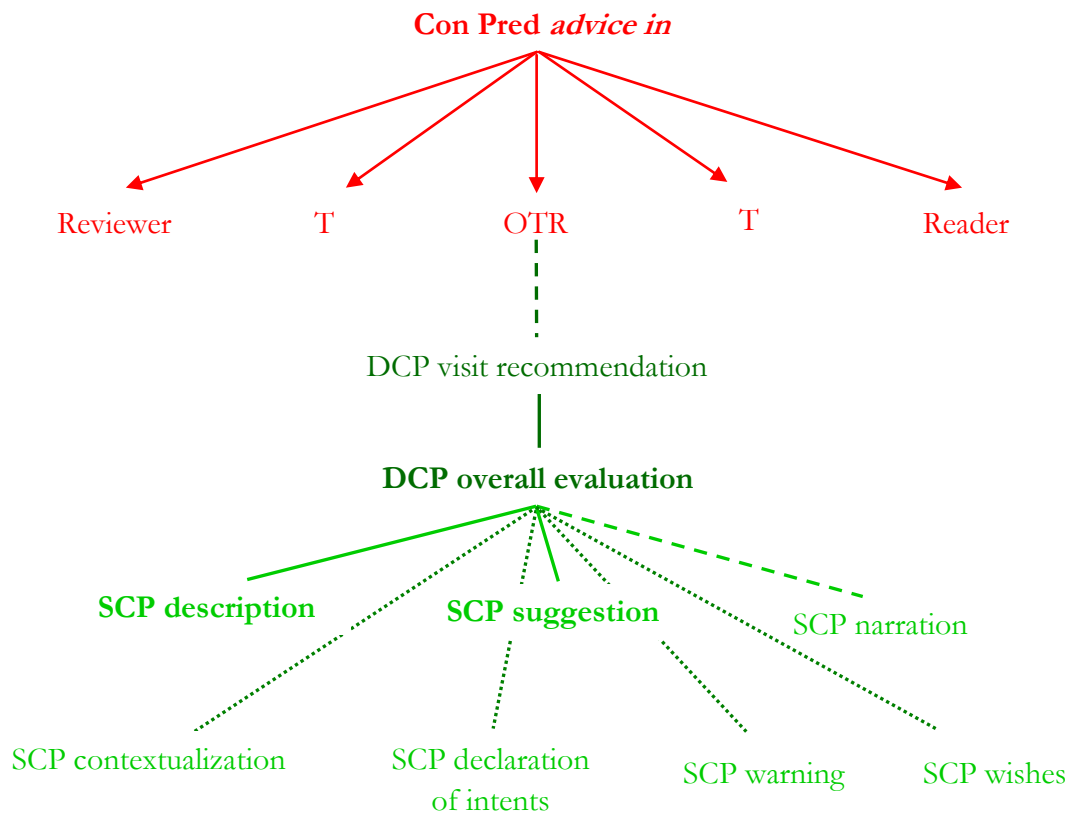


Figure 14: Configuration of dominant and subordinate connective predicates in OTR.

#### 4.3.5 Differences in connective predicates sequences across languages

The sequence of functional units was observed across languages, to investigate if significant differences emerge. Table 12 shows that there are clear differences among languages regarding the connective predicate most often opening the review: English reviews frequently start with a contextualization (56.1%), German reviews with an overall evaluation or a visit recommendation (63.3%), and, with good frequency, also with a description (22.4%), Italian reviews with an overall evaluation (65.7%) and to a smaller extent with a contextualization (21.9%).



	English		German		Italian	
<b>Connective type</b>	Total sequence	% sequence	Total sequence	% sequence	Total sequence	% sequence
Overall evaluation	8	14 %	22	<b>44.9 %</b>	21	<b>65.7 %</b>
Visit recommendation	2	3.5 %	9	<b>18.4 %</b>	1	3.1 %
Contextualization	32	<b>56.1 %</b>	3	6.1 %	7	<b>21.9 %</b>
Description	3	5.4 %	11	<b>22.4 %</b>	2	6.2 %
Narration	4	7 %	0	0 %	0	0 %
Suggestion	6	10.5 %	4	8.2 %	1	3.1 %
Wishes	2	3.5 %	0	0 %	0	0 %
Declaration of intents						
Warning						
<b>Total</b>	<b>57</b>	<b>100%</b>	<b>49</b>	<b>100%</b>	<b>32</b>	<b>100%</b>

Table 12: Distribution of connective predicate types opening OTR across languages.

Relevant differences emerge also if the initial connective predicates sequence is considered. As illustrated in table 13, the typical pattern in English reviews is ‘contextualization – overall evaluation/visit recommendation’ (40.4%); the most recurrent pattern in German reviews is, instead, ‘overall evaluation/visit recommendation – description’; finally, Italian reviews are also dominated by the sequence ‘overall evaluation/visit recommendation – description’, and a good percentage presents the sequence ‘contextualization – narration’ (12.5%). These results suggest a cultural difference, which deserves to be further investigated in future studies: while Germans and Italians go straight to the point, immediately stating their position about the destination or the travel experience, the English first provide some individual context of the trip.

	English		German		Italian	
<b>Connective predicates sequence</b>	Total sequence	% sequence	Total sequence	% sequence	Total sequence	% sequence
Overall ev./visit recom. – description	3	5.3 %	24	<b>49 %</b>	18	<b>56.3 %</b>
Context. – overall ev./visit recom.	23	<b>40.4 %</b>	2	4.1 %	3	9.4 %
Context. – narration	2	3.5 %	1	2 %	4	12.5 %

Table 13: Recurrent connective predicates sequences across languages.

#### 4.3.6 Differences in connectives sequences according to OTR length

Observing the distribution of recurrent connective predicates sequences, it emerged that as reviews become longer, there was a clear change in the sequence pattern. In order to test this observation, the corpus was arbitrarily divided into two sub-groups: the first one included reviews up to 100 words (sub-group A), and the second one included reviews longer than 100 words (sub-group B). Table 14 reports the total number of reviews for each language in the two sub-groups, the respective average number of words, and the weight (percentage) of each group in the corpus.

Language	≤100 words	Average N° of words	>100 words	Average N° of words
English	24	55.5	33	270
German	37	51.5	11	158
Italian	24	51	9	178
<b>Total</b>	<b>85 (61.6%)</b>		<b>53 (38.4%)</b>	

Table 14: OTR in the corpus grouped according to their length.

If ‘compulsory’ and ‘optional’ connective predicates (CP) are looked for in the two sub-groups, the following patterns emerge, as derived from table 15:

A) compulsory CP: description – evaluation – suggestion

Optional CP: recommendation – narration – contextualization

B) compulsory CP: description – evaluation - suggestion – narration – contextualization

Optional CP: recommendation – declaration of intents

Connective type	Total (out of 138 OTR)	% on tot OTR	OTR ≤100 words (out of 85 OTR)	% on tot OTR	OTR >100 words (out of 53 OTR)	% on tot OTR
Overall evaluation	106	76.1	66	<b>77.</b>	40	<b>75.5</b>
Visit recommendation	57	41.3	38	<b>44.7</b>	19	<b>35.8</b>
Contextualization	58	42	24	<b>28.2</b>	34	<b>64.2</b>
Description	126	91.3	77	<b>90.6</b>	49	<b>93.5</b>
Narration	53	38.4	17	<b>20</b>	36	<b>68</b>
Suggestion	87	63	47	<b>55.3</b>	40	<b>75.5</b>
Wishes Declaration of intents Warning	51	9.8	13	<b>15.3</b>	28	<b>52.8</b>

Table 15: Distribution of compulsory and optional connectives according to OTR length.

These results suggest that reviewers who write 'short' OTR choose communicative strategies which allow them to quickly and clearly make their points, that are descriptions of the aspects of the travel experience they consider the worthiest, and specific suggestions to improve the reader's prospective trip. On the other side, reviewers who dwell on telling their adventures and, many times, even do not express an explicit evaluation of the destination or a visit recommendation, choose a descriptive-narrative style. It may be reasonable, thus, to distinguish **two kinds of OTR**: the former, which are shorter than 100 words, are closer to consumer reviews and tour guides, while the latter, which are longer than 100 words, resemble travel diaries or weblogs.

## 5 The argumentative texture of OTR

*The last chapter investigated the argumentative texture of Online Travel Reviews. These types of texts, in fact, present an eminently argumentative structure, where cognitive decision-making processes, leading to the adoption of a standpoint, are combined with practical decision-making processes, oriented to the realization of an action. More precisely, at the level of the main text act, argumentation in OTR is a proposal of courses of actions to reach goals that are assumed to be desirable or good for the addressee (section 5.1). After having characterized pragmatic argumentation (or practical reasoning) borrowing insights from different approaches to argumentation (section 5.1.2), argumentation structures and argument schemes in OTR are analyzed.*

*The technique of argument diagramming (5.2.1) helps to catch recurrent patterns and differences in the structure of argumentation; in particular, one of the software developed for supporting the visualization of arguments is used here (5.2.2). The configuration of standpoints and arguments is reconstructed through a method called Analytical Overview (5.2.3), applied to a sub-corpus of OTR.*

*The analysis is then completed through an investigation of the most representative argument schemes (in section 5.3). The Argumentum Model of Topics (5.3.1) is adopted for the analysis and the evaluation of: the argument from position to know (5.3.2), that is a specific type of the argument from authority, the argument from parts to whole (5.3.3), and the argument from action to goal, that is a specific type of the argument from final cause (5.3.4).*

*The chapter is concluded with a discussion about the dimensions of ethos and pathos in reviewers' travel advice (section 5.4).*

Part of the issues discussed in sections 5.2, 5.2.1, 5.2.2, 5.2.3, 5.3 and 5.3.1 have been presented in the following papers (co)authored by Silvia De Ascaniis:

- De Ascaniis, S. and Greco Morasso, S. (2011). When tourists give their reasons on the web. The argumentative significance of tourism related UGC. In R. Law, M. Fuchs and F. Ricci (eds.), *Information and Communication Technologies in Tourism 2011* (Proceedings of the International Conference in Innsbruck, Austria, January 26-28, 2011), Springer, Wien – New York 2011.
- De Ascaniis, S., Cantoni, L. & Tardini, S. (2011). Argumentation in Tourism: an analysis of User-Generated-Contents about Lugano (Switzerland). In F. H. van Eemeren, B. Garssen, D. Godden, G. Mitchell (eds.), *Proceedings of the 7th Conference of the International Society for the Study of Argumentation*, Amsterdam: SicSat, pp. 335-347.
- De Ascaniis, S. (2009). Integrating Content Analysis and Argumentative Analysis to reconstruct a Media-supported Public Debate. *Studies in Communication Sciences* 9(2): 113-130.
- De Ascaniis, S. (2012). Criteria for designing and evaluating argument diagramming tools from the point of view of argumentation theory. In N. Pinkwart & B. McLaren, (Eds), *Educational Technologies for Teaching Argumentation Skills*, Bentham Science (eBook).

## 5.1 OTR between cognitive and practical decision-making

In the previous chapter, I characterized OTR as eminently argumentative texts, where an opinion on a destination is put forward to support a visit recommendation, and this opinion is, in turn, supported by different types of arguments based on the reviewer's experience at the destination. In chapter 1, moreover, I discussed the fact that prospective tourists need to collect relevant information to increase their knowledge of the alternatives they have and, on this base, make travel decisions, and I pointed out the difference between two types of decision-making: the cognitive decision-making, which brings the person to construct a judgment (i.e. to adopt a standpoint) about an event of the past, and the practical decision-making, which is oriented to the realization of an action. The question, here, is if argumentation unfolded in OTR is of one or the other type. I will show, indeed, that both types are involved.

From one side, in fact, OTR represent people's wish to share their travel experiences online, praising the destination they visited or complaining about them. In this sense, the reasoning at play is a **cognitive** (or knowledge-based) **decision-making**, since the writer advances her opinion on the touristic value of a destination, by arguing on the base of first-hand data that come from her direct experience.

From the other side, argumentation used in OTR should be regarded as a kind of '**practice oriented**' **decision-making**, because it represents a proposal made by the reviewer to the reader to engage in some courses of action, in order to reach a goal that she believes is good or desirable for the reader herself. The reviewer makes an assumption of what the reader's goal is; the assumption about such goal can be reconstructed both a) taking into account the context where the communicative event OTR takes place, and b) analyzing explicit references made by reviewers to their 'silent' audience. a) The context I refer to, here, is constituted by the field of tourism, more precisely by leisure tourism: when one decides to leave for a trip, her final goal is to have a pleasant experience, away from daily routine and commitments, as discussed by Dann (1976). More specific goals may be to meet friendly people, to visit interesting sites, to have a taste of the local culture. b) As for explicit references made by the reviewer to the readers and their supposed goals, following are some examples taken from the corpus:

- "I am not new to the Roman attitude, but it has gotten worse and visitors do not deserve the scornful treatment doled out. Don't accept it! Either stay away or complain loudly." → the reviewer assumes that a desirable goal of a tourism experience is to receive kind (helpful) treatment.
- "[La] suggerisco a tutti [coloro] che vogliono scappare via dalla vita lavorativa e mettersi nell'atmosfera romantica e indimenticabile per tutta la vita." [Trans. I suggest a

visit to all those who want to escape from work routine and to enjoy a romantic and unforgettable atmosphere] → the goal assumption refers to the opportunity to leave behind the daily routine and enjoy a different atmosphere.

- “Hier sind so viele historische Highlights auf einem Platz versammelt, das man immer wiederkommen muss.” [Trans. Here there are so many historic highlights, all gathered in one single square, that one must always come back] → the touristic value to be pursued is represented by the richness of (historic) interesting sites that can be visited.

- “Rom hat so viel zu bieten für jeden Geschmack, dass ich sicher bin, dass sich jeder Reisende hier wohl fühlen wird.” [Trans. Rome has so much to offer to every taste, that I am sure that any traveller will feel at ease] → the reviewer points to the fact that a travel experience should satisfy different desires.

- “(...) and truly a place you could go more than once and get a new experience each time.” → the goal assumption regards the opportunity a trip should give to make new experiences, becoming this way a special time.

Moreover, as shown in chapter 2, it came out from different studies, that OTR creators pursue one main goal, that is to help readers to make more informed decisions about their prospective trip, and that looking at consumers’ comments or other posted materials is the activity that people using the Internet take part in the most during their trip planning. Thus, it is fair to interpret argumentative reasoning in OTR as **a proposal of courses of actions**, to reach goals that are assumed to be those of the addressee.

In order to support my point, that is that both the cognitive decision-making and the practical decision-making are involved in the argumentation unfolded in OTR, I will first reconstruct the intertwining standpoints and arguments in OTR, and then I will analyze and evaluate the most representative argumentative schemes at play, pointing out both ontology-based premises and culture-context-based premises. In the next section, pragmatic argumentation will be characterized as a type of argumentative reasoning.

### 5.1.2 Pragmatic argumentation

Consider the following situation:

After I defend my PhD thesis, my husband wants to take me for a holiday because I need to rest from work and he needs to rest from my PhD related anxiety. In order to leave for a holiday, though, I have to ask for some days off.

The structure of inferences used in this example has a familiar appearance, in that it is the reasoning everyone commonly uses in daily life to decide on how to act in real situations. This type of reasoning is neither inductive nor deductive in nature, but it is of a kind used to select which course of action seems to be the most convenient in a given situation to reach the agent's goals, among a set of alternative possible courses of action (Walton, 2006a). This type of reasoning is called 'practical' because "is a kind of goal-directed reasoning that culminates in an action, or at least a decision that some action is a prudent line of action to take in a given situation" (Walton, 2007, p. 180). Practical reasoning is based on the information that an agent has about its situation, and can be contrasted with various types of 'theoretical reasoning', which instead "seeks evidence that counts for or against the truth of a proposition" (Walton, 2006b, p. 179). The key characteristics of practical inference are, thus, that it leads up to or ends in *action*. More precisely, the end or goal is "*an end of action*. This means that we want to attain the end as a result or consequence of something which we do" (von Wright, 1963, p. 160). The action or chain of actions one engages in is a *means* to the end. In the example above, the end that my husband and I want to attain is to take a rest (for both of us it is a rest from my PhD thesis, though motivated by different reasons), and the means is to go on holiday. To go on holiday, however, I need to get some days off from work; to ask for some days off, thus, is in its turn a means to the end of going on holiday.

According to Walton (2006b), the simple form of practical inference can be represented with the following scheme:

I have a goal G.  
 Carrying out action A is a means to realize G.  
 Therefore, I ought to carry out this action A.

The Pragma-Dialectical approach to argumentation (Van Eemeren & Grootendorst, 2004) characterize "pragmatic" (or "instrumental") argumentation as an argumentation scheme – that is, in general terms, the principle allowing the conclusion to derive from the premises – based on a *causal relationship*. The standpoint is a normative conclusion, which recommends a particular course of action or a goal, and is supported by an argument which refers to a consequence of what is mentioned in the standpoint. Pragmatic argumentation can be used to advise for or against some course of action or some goal (Feteris, 2002). "With respect to the nature of the *standpoint*, we see that the standpoint can refer to various matters. It can involve a course of action, a proposal, or a plan. In general, it is a *normative utterance*. With respect to the nature of the *argumentation*, it involves the *consequences* of the proposed course of action or decision." (Feteris, 2002,

pp. 247-248) According to the Pragma-Dialectical approach, the basic structure of pragmatic argumentation can be represented as follows:

Act X leads to consequence Y.

Consequence Y is (un)desirable.

The two approaches are, indeed, very close to each other. What Walton calls “goal” is none other than the desirable consequence of an action, attained thanks to the performance of that action. Walton, though, makes a distinction between the instrumental basic scheme for practical reasoning, and the *value-based scheme*, which takes into account values of an agent, that may need to be considered when deciding whether to perform an action. “Values are different from goals in that they provide the reasons that an agent has for wanting to achieve a goal” (Walton, 2007, p. 134); value hierarchies, then, are audience-dependent, in that they are bound to personal world views and beliefs. The scheme for value-based practical reasoning (or pragmatic argumentation), is the following:

I have a goal *G*.

*G* is supported by my set of values, *V*.

Bringing about *A* is necessary (or sufficient) for me to bring about *G*.

Therefore, I should (practically ought to) bring about *A*.

Values, in OTR, usually refer to ‘touristic values’, that are the aspects which are given merit and importance when taking travel-related decisions. Touristic values are usually left implicit in the review, but emerge from the choice of arguments and, sometimes, as specifications or constraints imposed on the applicability of the standpoint. Examples of touristic values explicitly revealed in reviews are the following:

- “For anybody who has an interest in History, Art, Architecture and good cuisine a trip to the Eternal City comes highly recommended.” → the reviewer recognizes the touristic value of Rome in some specific aspects, that are history, art and cuisine.

- “La consiglieri a chiunque voglia fare un viaggio in Italia, pagando magari anche poco e senza dover imparare nuove lingue, né dover uscire dal suo Stato” [Trans. “I would advice a visit to everyone who would like to do a trip to Italy, making a small economic investment, without having to learn new languages or getting out from her country”] → the value of a visit to Rome is here connected with some constraints an Italian tourist might consider when planning a trip, such as budget, language and distance.



- “Whilst Rome is a great place to take kids” → one aspect of merit for those who like travelling with the family, is if the destination is children-friendly.

- “I have never seen so many tourists gathered together like sheep (...)This ugliness of this quantity of tourism becomes worse from the beauty of the city itself. (...)Try to avoid the crowds by exploring small churches, each one of them is a hidden treasure” → the fact that Rome is full of tourists represents one demerit mark for those who value quietness and are in search of “hidden treasures”.

Eventually, a distinction must be made on the nature of the means that are brought about to attain the goal. The means can either be a *necessary condition* or a *sufficient condition*. In my example, to leave for a holiday is a sufficient condition for taking a rest from work, since it implies to do something different and less demanding than my job, but it is not a necessary condition because I could rest in different other ways, for instance just staying at home and taking it easy. To ask for some days off from work, instead, is a necessary condition for leaving for a holiday, though it is not a sufficient condition. In fact, if I would not ask for some days off, my chief and my colleagues would be disappointed in my absence and there would be trouble in managing the work I would otherwise be doing. It is not a sufficient condition, because to leave for a holiday my husband and I also need, among other things, to have enough money and to be in good health. Von Wright highlights that when one deliberates which means to an end to choose, “the course of action which has been decided upon is not a practical necessity, since it is but one of several possibilities. When action is a practical necessity, there is no room for choice.” (1963, p. 167) In my example, the decision about the best alternative to choose for attaining the goal of taking a rest is not a practical necessity; while the fact that in order to leave for a holiday I have to ask for some days off is a practical necessity, since I do not have alternatives (at least, legitimate or transparent ones!). In OTR, reviewers suggest numerous courses of actions (i.e. practical inferences) to the readers; below are some examples:

- “Don't forget a shawl to cover your shoulders when entering the Sistine chapel, they are very strict on the dress code.” → the reviewer points out a practical necessity: to reach the goal to visit the Sistine chapel, it is a necessary means to respect the dress code.

- “The cobblestone roads make walking a little difficult, if you don't wear proper walking shoes.” → the reviewer advises the reader of the necessity to wear comfortable shoes, if she wants to avoid problems while walking around. Wearing comfortable shoes, though, is not a practical necessity, but a sufficient condition to walk without troubles on Roman cobblestone roads.

- “Highly recommend a personal tour guide to help get around and see more.” → the reviewer provides a suggestion to the reader on how to get the most from her visit; she proposes, indeed, a means that is a sufficient but not a necessary condition to attain that end. In order to make a good visit, in fact, it is sufficient for the reader to take a personal tour guide, but she can, instead, for instance, ask to a friend who lives at the destination to show her the sites.

Because all of the parts of a pragmatic argumentation can be argued, argumentation may become complex, and different schemes may come in and be used to defend the final standpoint. In OTR, indeed, two levels of pragmatic argumentation may be distinguished: one takes place at the utterance level, where tips and suggestions are given to make the experience at the destination more pleasant; the other takes place at the level of the text act, that is at the level of visit recommendation. While at the utterance level, pragmatic argumentation rarely takes more complex forms than the basic scheme, at the text act level the standpoint (i.e. “It is good for you to visit/not visit destination x”) is supported by complex argumentation structures. A suggested course of action – say a specific tip –, in fact, represents in OTR one step in a longer causal chain aimed at pursuing the final goal (see also the explanation of practical reasoning given by Perez-Miranda, 1997, presented in chapter I). In the following sections an argumentation analysis of a sub-corpus of OTR is provided.

## 5.2 Argumentation structures in OTR

Doing an argumentative analysis of a text means, first of all, to reconstruct those aspects of it relevant for justifying the standpoint (or standpoints) advanced, while neglecting other non relevant aspects. In the case of OTR, aspects that are not (directly) relevant for justifying the opinion about the destination or visit recommendation are, for instance, contextual information as the weather or the visit occasion and personal details. It has to be noted, however, that such aspects may become relevant if they put constraints on the applicability of the standpoint.

The very first step is to point out the structure of argumentation, that is the way “the reasons advanced hang together and jointly support the defended standpoint” (van Eemeren, 2001, p. 20). Laying out the structural relation between standpoint and arguments is not only necessary for understanding how a position is defended, but also for adequately evaluating the argument. Different approaches to argumentation identify different types of argument structures. Snoeck-Henkemans (2001) explains however that, in most approaches, three types of argument structures are at least distinguished: a) serial reasoning or *subordinate argumentation*, if one of the reasons supports the other; b) linked reasoning or *coordinate argumentation*, if each of the reasons given works together to

directly support the standpoint; c) convergent reasoning or *multiple argumentation*, if each reason separately supports the standpoint. These structures are combined in complex arguments.

Each approach to argumentation, then, has developed its method to represent arguments structure; the resulting visual artifacts are called *argument diagrams*. The technique of diagramming arguments has old roots, and was initially developed for didactical aims. Nowadays it is largely used in the field of Artificial Intelligence, for the automation of some argumentative practices (Gordon, 2010; Walton & Gordon, 2012; Rowe & Reed, 2008). A brief outline of the main steps in the development of argument diagramming techniques, helps to understand which elements of a text have to be selected (many times made explicit) in order to account for its argumentative structure, which is their relationship, and how it can be represented in order to facilitate analysis and evaluation.

### 5.2.1 The technique of argument diagramming

Richard Whately (1787-1863), an English logician and Anglican Archbishop of Dublin, is considered the father of most of the modern approaches to argument diagramming. In Appendix III of his textbook *Elements of Logic* (1836), entitled “Praxis of Logical Analysis”, he described a method to figure out the “chain of arguments” based on the backward reconstruction of the reasoning trace. The method was conceived to help his students in the identification of the grounds (premises) for an assertion (conclusion) (Reed & Rowe, 2004; 2007).

In 1917, Legal Evidence theorist John H. Wigmore used diagrams to represent the proof-hypothesis structure in legal matters. His interest was to find a method to provide the validity of the hypothesis. Given the factual evidence, he developed a mechanism for detailing the structure of legal cases, including explicit marking of prosecution and defence, categorization of evidential types and an indication of probative strength. Wigmore is considered the effective founder of the technique, since his evidence chart is what is now called an argument diagram (Reed & Rowe, 2004; 2007). Wigmore’s method does not aim at evaluating arguments nor leading to conclusions, but it is a cognitive tool for reflection.

In the text *The uses of argument* (1958), Stephan E. Toulmin proposed a new model for the layout of arguments, made up of six components: claim, data, warrant, qualifier, rebuttal and backing. The importance of Toulmin’s model lies principally in the function of the *warrant*, that is a hypothetical statement, which licenses an inference from a datum to a claim. With the warrant, Toulmin reintroduced the concept of *enthymeme*, which dates back to ancient Rhetoric, and refers to a syllogism having an implicit component.

The very core of enthymemes are, indeed, the *endoxa*, in that the unstated part of the syllogism is usually a premise (an *endoxon*) which does not need to be expressed because it refers to a common belief or to a shared knowledge within the community of reference. Toulmin's model has been appropriated, adapted and extended by several scholars in different domains (Hitchcock & Verheij, 2006). Relevant for the developing of argument diagramming techniques is the innovation introduced by Freeman in the '90s. He clarified the distinction between linked (or coordinate) and convergent (or multiple) arguments, which is closely connected with the issues of argument structure reconstruction and argument evaluation (Reed, Walton, & Macagno, 2007).

In 1950, the American philosopher of art Monroe Beardsley diagrammatically analyzed a text in his book *Practical Logic* (Reed & Rowe, 2004; 2007). He identified different kinds of links proceeding from premises to conclusion, thus providing the first explicit account of basic types of argument schemes and how they can be composed. He used graphs to teach how to organize the reasons for a claim and to aid in the detection of fallacies. However, the model left no room for controversial passages or for passages needing evaluation or support, since the structure of the reasoning followed logical deduction. It was later extended for pedagogical purposes by Scriven (1976), Johnson and Blair (1977, 1987, 1992), and became the ground of informal logic in the works of Walton (Walton & Krabbe, 1995; Walton, 1998, 2006; Walton, Reed & Macagno, 2008).

It is worth noting that all four scholars developed a method for diagramming arguments having in mind a precise didactic aim, that was to help their students approaching the complex matter of argument analysis, evaluation and production.

### 5.2.2 Software for argument diagramming

The methods elaborated by Wigmore, Toulmin and Beardsley during the last century are considered the roots of argument diagramming or, more properly, the first attempts to define a standard technique. In recent times, argument diagramming has met computer science, giving birth to software applications specifically devoted to the task. They have been designed to be employed for supporting different tasks, from collaborative problem-solving (Veerman & Treasure-Jones, 1999) to individual analyses of reasoning patterns (Reed & Rowe, 2004), in different contexts, from the classroom (Andriessen, Baker & Suthers, 2003; van Gelder, 2002) to the workplace (Eppler, 2006; Reed, Walton & Macagno, 2007), and for including different domains, such as the law, where they have been used to map legal evidences and to organize pleadings (Ashley, Chi, Pinkus, & Moore, 2007; Pinkwart, Lynch, Ashley, & Aleven, 2008).

The tool I will employ for diagramming argument structures in OTR is called *Rationale*, and is the last version of *Reason!Able*, a software developed at the University of

Melbourne and Austhink (the “Australian Thinking Institute”) by Tim van Gelder and Andy Bulka, within the *Reason!* Project. Since the project’s main claim was that critical thinking skills improve with the right kind of practice, the authors set up a “quality environment” – the Reason!Able software – in which students could engage in reasoning tasks more effectively than in other contexts. Rationale supports users to build, modify, evaluate and store argument maps in an easy and rapid way; “you might think of it as a thought processor, helping students structure their thinking in more systematic and logical ways” (van Gelder, 2001, p. 4).

Rationale allows to distinguish among subordinate, coordinate and multiple arguments, and to represent complex argumentation. It is possible, as well, to give some indications of the type of connection which makes the conclusion (standpoint) come from the premises (argument), that is the issue of argument schemes, I will specifically deal with in section 5.3.

### 5.2.3 Analytical overviews

The analytical reconstruction of argumentation structures in OTR will be carried out by means of an *analytical overview*, that is a method proposed by van Eemeren & Grootendorst (2004) within the Pragma-Dialectical approach to argumentation. The analytical overview makes use of four *reconstruction transformations*, aimed at revealing the route that is followed in attempting to defend an opinion. One first transformation is called *deletion*, and refers to the removal of irrelevant parts of the discourse; opposite to deletion is *addition*, which concerns, exactly, the addition of implicit relevant parts that are not expressed in the text; there is, then, *substitution*, which is about the replacement of ambiguous formulation with clearer ones; one last transformation is *permutation*, that is when some parts of the text are rearranged in order to highlight their relevance for the justification of the opinion at stake. The technique of *analytical overview*, though, is a *micro* analysis, apt at reconstructing the argumentative deep structure of a single text or discourse. When dealing with large corpora of data, as the collection of OTR examined in this dissertation, a small sub-corpus must be selected that is representative of the main one, to be reconstructed and analyzed in terms of standpoint-argument relations. OTR present, indeed, quite stable characteristics at the level of textual structural elements – as the analysis in the previous chapter has shown – which slightly differ among different sub-groups and across languages. Also the propositional content, that is those aspects of the trip or of the destination spoken about, follows similar patterns, with an addition of details in longer reviews. Thus, I decided to select for the analytical overview 6 OTR, three of them shorter than 100 words, and the other three longer than 100 words. I drew out OTR randomly, among those that show *all* the structural elements typical of the related sub-group, in terms of configuration of dominant as well

as subordinate connective predicates. This means, for the first three OTR, that I randomly chose among those constituted by all of the following structural elements:

[visit recommendation & overall evaluation & description & suggestion]

For OTR longer than 100 words, I randomly chose among those constituted by:

[overall evaluation & contextualization & description & narration & suggestion]

The selection process resulted in four OTR in English, one in German and one in Italian.

### *5.2.3.1 Analysis of OTR shorter than 100 words*

#### Example 1

“One of the best places to visit”

**Rome**



DawnLouiseAustralia  
Australia

Rome was a fantastic place. I heard from some that it was a dirty city but I did not find it to be so. It is very old but that is part of the attraction. The Roman Ruins are definately a must see and doing it with a tour is also recommended. But be warned that it is best to prebook your entry into such sites as it can be quite crowed when queing for a ticket.

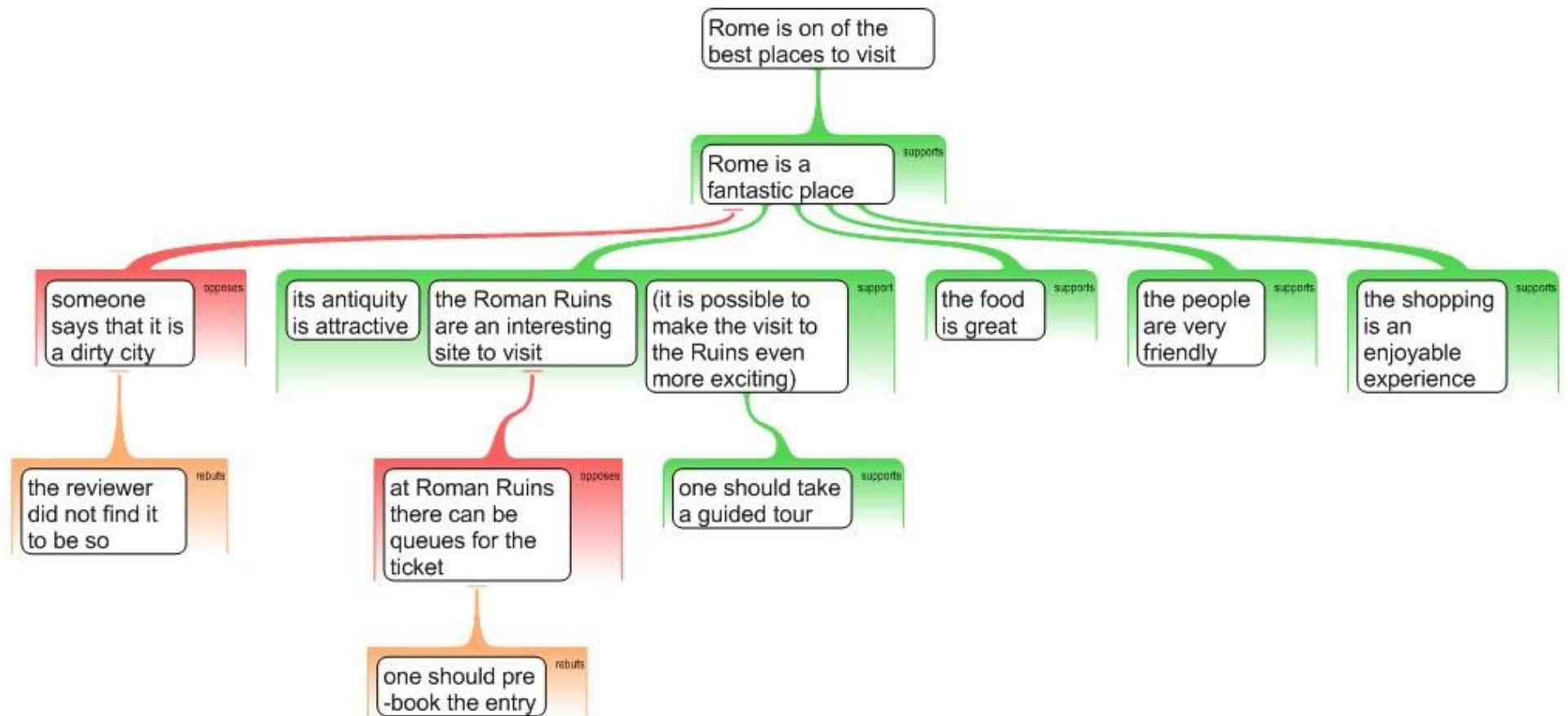
The food is great and the people are very friendly. The shopping is also an enjoyable experience. I could not fault it.

Argument diagram 1 represents the analytical reconstruction of this review. The standpoint is pointed out immediately in the title, where the reviewer gives her travel advice: “Rome is one of the best places to visit”. The argument directly supporting the standpoint is expressed in the opening sentence, and is an overall evaluation of the city: “Rome is a fantastic place”. The reviewer anticipates, right after, a possible counter-argument, but she also denies it according to her experience: someone would question the attractiveness of Rome saying that it is dirty, but this does not correspond to what she saw. The reviewer lists the reasons why, instead, Rome has to be considered a fantastic city, in the rest of the review: it has many old sights to be seen, the food is great, people are friendly and it offers interesting shopping opportunities. They constitute multiple arguments (premises), in that they are independently support the standpoint. The warning that there might be found queues at the Roman Ruins, so that to avoid them it is better to pre-book the ticket, can be reconstructed as a counter-

argument for visiting the Ruins, that is rebutted, suggesting a means to enjoy the visit anyway. The argument according to which Rome is fantastic because it is old, is reinforced by indicating one best ‘representative’ of antique sights worth visiting, that are the Roman Ruins; the reviewer adds a suggestion, that is to take a guided tour for making the visit to the Ruins even more interesting. I represented these three elements as coordinate premises – one of them being implicit (i.e. “it is possible to make the visit to the Ruins even more interesting”) – because they all together cooperate to support the reviewer’s opinion about Rome, and together constitute an argument of the same weight of the others (i.e. multiple arguments). In the case of coordinate arguments, premises must cooperate in order to avoid possible *objections*. Objections to the argument that Rome is attractive because is an ancient city may be something like “Ancient cities are poor in interesting attractions” or “Historic sites in ancient cities cannot be really enjoyed because it is difficult to understand what they represent”. Objections depend on the values the tourist ascribes to different aspects of the destination (such as historical sites), and on the type of travel she has in mind. Objections are here anticipated and avoided by the reviewer providing a rebuttal, in the form of coordinate premises: Roman Ruins *are* an interesting attraction exactly for their antiquity, and it is possible to have a fruitful visit relying on guided tours.

It should be clear, after the detailed explanation of the first example, that the analytical overview helps to systematically account for every passage in a text, which contributes to the ‘final verdict’. As for the other examples, I will just comment on key passages and on some analytical decisions I took, while leaving the reconstruction details to the respective argument diagrams.





Argument diagram 1: Standpoint-argument configuration of the OTR “One of the best places to visit”.



## Example 2

“eine wunderschöne sehenswerte Stadt”

Rome

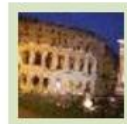


PeterSt2109

Ludenscheid, Germany

Google Translation

om hat so viel zu bieten für jeden Geschmack, dass ich sicher bin, dass sich jeder Reisende hier wohl fühlen wird. Hat man erstmal eine Orientierung, so erkennt man, dass in dieser an sich großen Stadt alle Sehenswürdigkeiten bequem zu Fuss zu erreichen sind. Die Stadt hat ein wunderbares Flair, sowohl im Winter zur Weihnachtszeit als auch im Sommer. Auf mich wirkt die Stadt besonders bei Dunkelheit, wenn alle Plätze und Straßen geheimnisvoll beleuchtet sind. Im Sommer bietet sich besonders eine Besichtigung abends an, da es dann nicht mehr so heiß ist und die Stadt trotzdem mit Cafes und Restaurants sehr belebt wirkt!

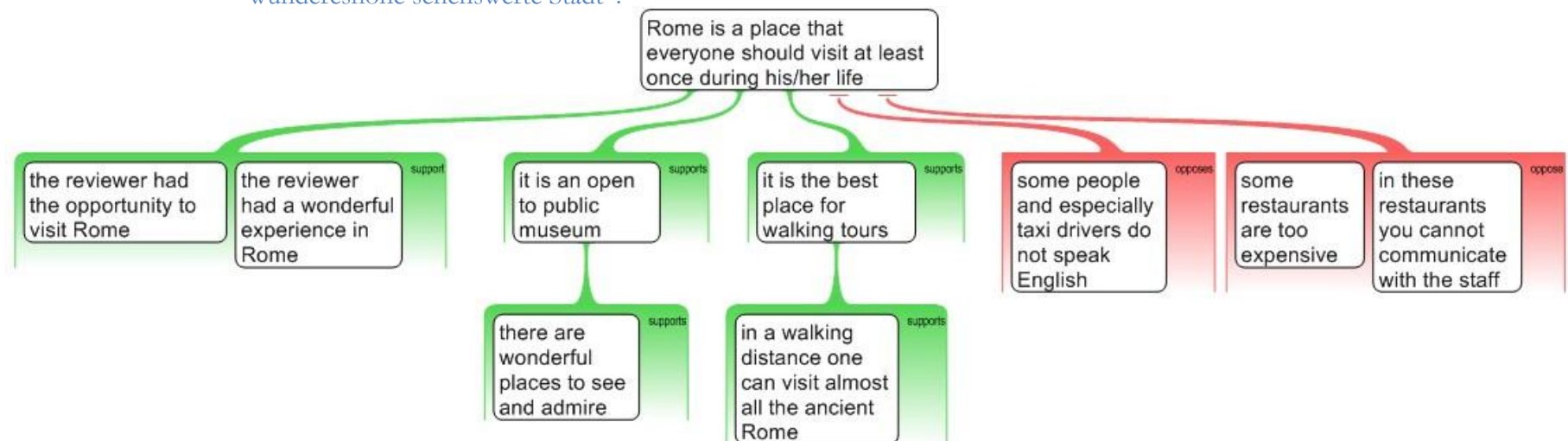


[Translation: “A wonderful city worth to be visited” - Rome has so much to offer to every taste, that I am sure that any traveller will feel at ease. To start with, one needs to get one’s bearings, in order to discover that in this big city all the sights can be comfortably reached by walking. The city has a wonderful flair, both in Winter during Christmas time and in Summer. I am especially struck by the city in the night, when all the squares and the streets are uncannily lit up. In Summer, an evening visit is particularly worth, because in the evening it is not any more so hot and the city is however lively thanks to café and restaurants.]

In this review, like in the previous one, the standpoint is expressed in the title; it is worth noting that the visit recommendation (stdp1) and the overall evaluation of the city (stdp2) are combined. The standpoint is supported with five multiple arguments, praising the fact that: Rome can satisfy every ‘taste’, all the sites can be reached by walking, it has a pleasant atmosphere all the year long, it is especially impressive in the evening and especially exciting in summer. The last two arguments, indeed, support a specific ‘version’ of the standpoint, that is, in the first case “Rome deserves to be visited especially in the evening” and, in the second case “Rome deserves a visit especially in summer”.



Argument diagram 2: Standpoint-argument configuration of the OTR “Eine wunderschöne sehenswerte Stadt”.



Argument diagram 3: Standpoint-argument configuration of the OTR “One open to public museum”.

### Example 3

“One open to public museum”

Rome



dem\_panos  
Larnaca, Cyprus

After visiting approximately 15 different countries, my wife and I had the opportunity to



[More photos](#)

visit ROME. It was a wonderful experience. We both love walking during our holidays....well Rome is the best place to do it. In a walking distance, you can visit almost all the ancient Rome. Wonderful places to see and admire. The only disadvantages are that some people and especially taxi drivers do not speak English and that's a problem. In addition some restaurants are too expensive and you cannot communicate with the staff. But above all it is a place that everyone should visit at least once during his/her life. Will return for sure.

The standpoint is explicitly stated at the conclusion of the review, where the reviewer urges the reader to visit Rome at least once and declares that, as for him and his wife, they will even return. The main reason to visit Rome is that it is like an open museum, full of “wonderful places to see and admire”. The argument is made stronger by the addition of another independent but related argument, that is the possibility to visit such places just by walking. An interesting element of this review is that the writer gives an explicit evaluation of his experience at the destination: it represents, indeed, the strongest argument underlying every review, but that is usually left implicit because it is taken for granted. In fact, the main reason which makes OTR persuasive, and leads the reader to take into account the proposed course of action (i.e. visit/not visit the destination) in her decision process, is connected with the identity of who writes them: it is a specific type of *argument from authority*, that is the *argument from position to know* (Walton, 2006a); I will discuss it in section 5.3.2. Two counter-arguments are given, then, pointing out negative aspects of the destination, which are however insufficient reasons for renouncing to a visit.

### 5.2.3.2 Analysis of OTR longer than 100 words

#### Example 4

“ La città piú bella del mondo ”

Rome



MASPA73

Munich, Germany

Google Translation

Chi ama l'arte, le antichità e la storia non può certo non andare a Roma. È la città ideale anche per una vacanza romantica.

Inutile dire che è una delle città più belle al mondo. Per quantità di monumenti, chiese, fontane, musei e arte in generale non ha eguali al mondo. Per una visita completa una settimana è a mala pena sufficiente, senza contare che anche i dintorni della città offrono molti siti di interesse (Tivoli, Tarquinia, Cerveteri, I castelli, Ostia, etc).

Purtroppo però non si può dire che sia economica. Ristoranti e alberghi in generale sono più cari che la media europea (solo Parigi e Londra sono altrettanto care), e nelle zone turistiche la qualità dei ristoranti e/o il servizio a volte lasciano un pò desiderare.

La città è in generale abbastanza sicura, anche se nelle aree sovraffollate di turisti non mancano ladri e borseggiatori. Però ponendo la dovuta attenzione (...) niente di estremamente pericoloso.

Mi raccomando, dopo una giornata in giro per monumenti non fatevi mancare una tranquilla cena a Trastevere ;)

[Translation: "The most beautiful city in the world"]

Those who love art, antiquity and history cannot miss a visit to Rome. It is the ideal city for a romantic holiday.

Needless to say that it is one of the most beautiful cities in the world. For amount of monuments, churches, fountains, museums and art in general it has no equal in the world. One week is nearly not enough for visiting it thoroughly, also considered that the surroundings of the city have plenty of interesting sites (Tivoli, Tarquinia, Cerveteri, the Castles, Ostia, etc.).

However, it is not cheap. Restaurants and hotels in general are more expensive than the European average (only Paris and London are equally expensive), and in touristic areas the quality and service of restaurants are not so good.

The city is in general quite safe, also if in touristic crowded areas there obviously are thieves and pickpockets. Paying good attention, though (...), this is not really dangerous.

Do not miss a quiet dinner at Trastevere after a day wandering around monuments ;)]

The standpoint is here expressed in the first sentence, using a linguistic device, that is the negation of the contrary of what the writer wants to affirm; applying the *substitution*



*transformation*, it can be stated as “Rome must be visited”. The reviewer, indeed, says something more than this: she states that Rome must be visited by those who love art, antiquity and history, and that the visit should be at least of one week. In order to later evaluate the relevance (i.e. persuasive power) of an argument, it is important to analyze what exactly is said in the standpoint. The same argument, in fact, could be more or less relevant for different types of tourists, and the reviewer may sometimes indicate which type of tourists she is particularly addressing by specifying it in the standpoint, as it is the case for this review. The standpoint is supported by five multiple arguments, two of them constituted by two coordinate premises. One counter-argument is advanced, where the city is complained to be expensive; it is supported by two coordinate premises: the first one points out that Roman restaurants and hotels are generally more expensive than the European average; but since one could object that, maybe, they have high quality and good service, a second coordinate premise is added, which rebuts this possible objection.

#### Example 5

#### “ Beautiful city ruined by traffic ”

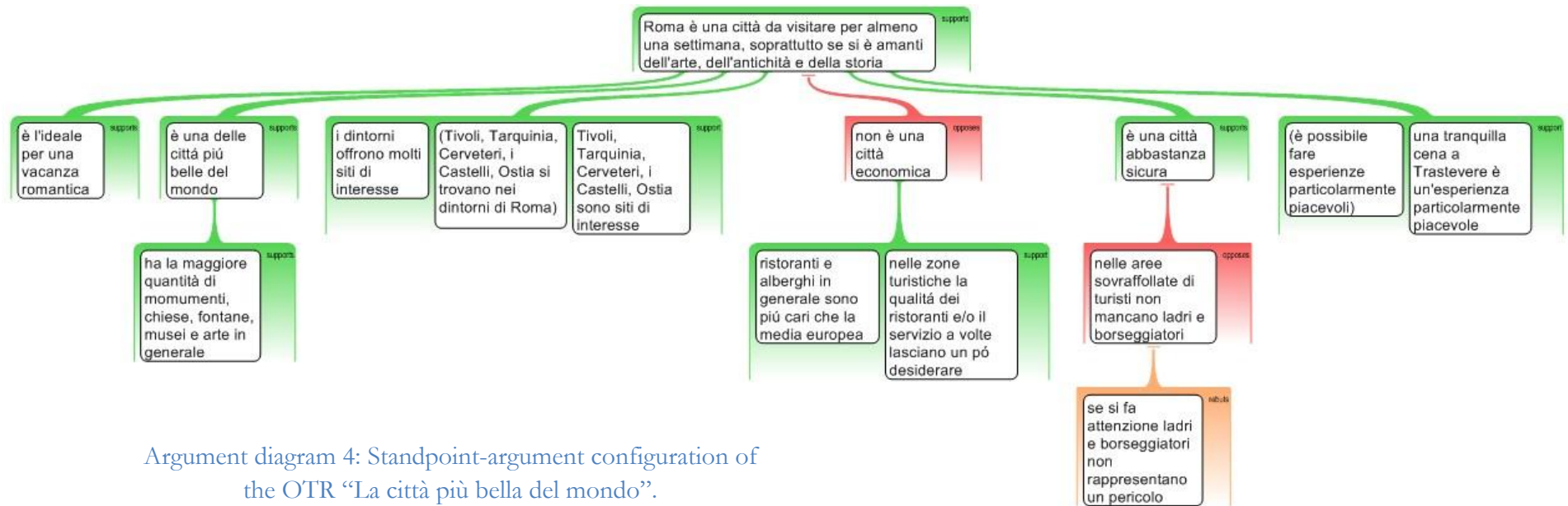
Rome



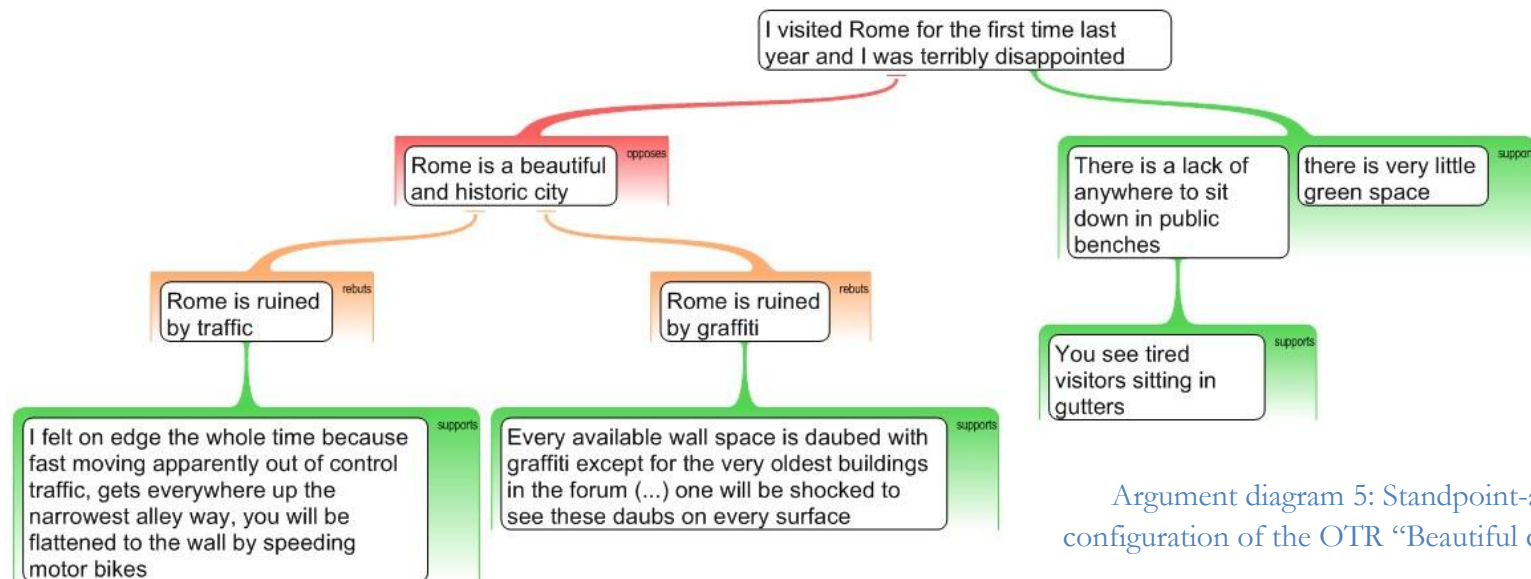
smartesthorse  
suffolk uk

I visited Rome for the first time last year and I was terribly disappointed. This beautiful and historic city is ruined by 2 things, traffic and graffiti. I felt on edge the whole time because fast moving apparently out of control traffic, gets EVERYWHERE up the narrowest alley way you will be flattened to the wall by speeding motor bikes.

Every available wall space is daubed with graffiti except for the very oldest buildings in the forum I am not exaggerating even if you come from a pretty grim British inner city you will be shocked to see these daubs on every surface. There is also a lack of anywhere to sit down ie public benches, you see tired visitors sitting in gutters and there is very little green space, compared with say Paris. I was so relieved to get out of Rome and move to Florence which is much better. The nicest Italian experience I have had by far though is Lake Garda. I never want to see Rome again



Argument diagram 4: Standpoint-argument configuration of the OTR “La città più bella del mondo”.



Argument diagram 5: Standpoint-argument configuration of the OTR “Beautiful city ruined by”

In this review, three independent arguments are given to advise against a visit to Rome; the strongest one is already anticipated in the title, and refers to the traffic. The reviewer acknowledges that Rome is overall beautiful and rich in history, but this is not enough for overlooking the uneasiness that one can experience. Besides the traffic, another major problem is the pervading presence of graffiti, and the lack of public places for resting. For all the arguments, the reviewer provides *data*, that are represented by events which actually happened to her or by things that she saw during the visit. Arguments based on personal experience – i.e. almost all the arguments put forward in OTR – are very strong, because one cannot object that what is said is false, unless she has reasons (and proofs) for doubting the reliability of the writer.

#### Example 6

### “A late comer to the Eternal City”

Rome



Rozmic  
Bedfordshire

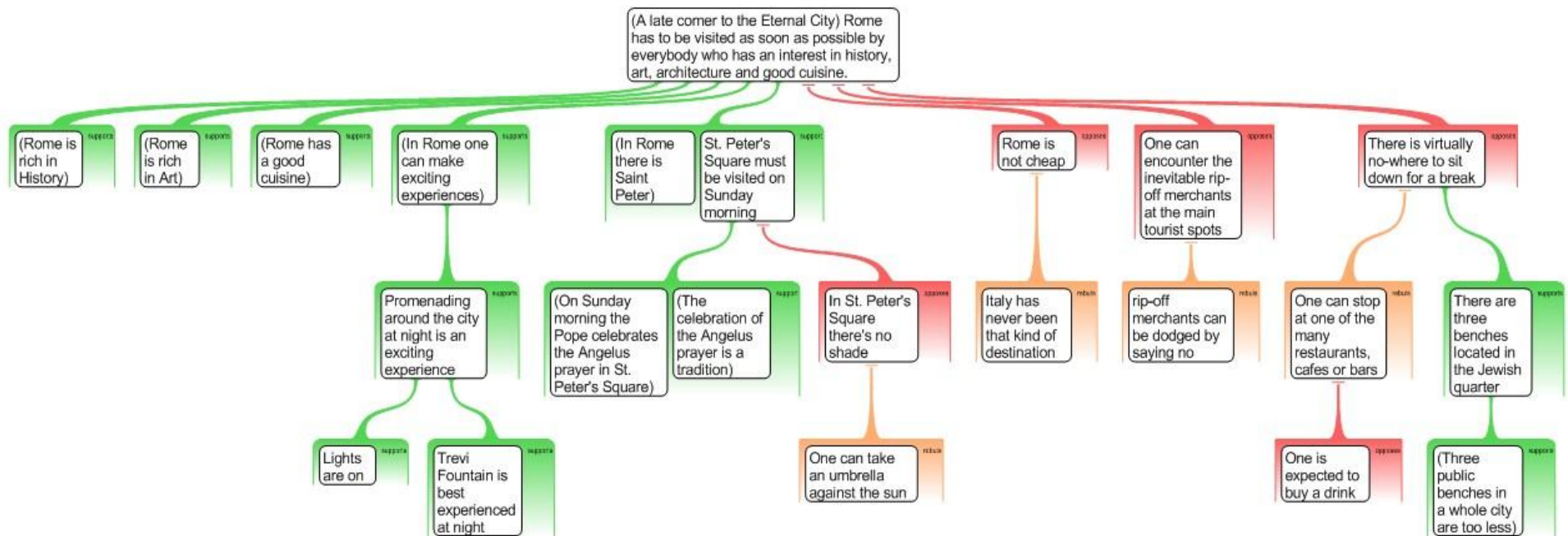
At 60 I have just experienced my first visit to Rome.

For anybody who has an interest in History, Art, Architecture and good cuisine (all of which apply to me) a trip to the Eternal City comes highly recommended. Try to stay in the city instead of having to travel in and thereby have the opportunity of promenading around the city at night (when the lights are on!). The Trevi Fountain is best experienced at night. It's not cheap but Italy has never been that kind of destination. Also, you can encounter the inevitable rip-off merchants at the main tourist spots (eg Colloseum) but we found them to be a low-level irritation. Just say no.

A vist to st. Peter's Square on Sunday morning is a must (whether or not you are catholic) but take an umbrella against the sun; there's no shade! One niggle: Unless you stop at one of the many restaurants, cafes or bars (and hence will be expected to buy a drink!) there is virtually no-where to sit down for a break. Apart from three benches located in the jewish quarter we found none anywhere else!

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The standpoint specifies the audience that is addressed, that are people interested in 'cultural destinations', at the same time highlighting the main reasons why Rome should be considered worth a visit, that are for its richness in history, art, architecture and the good cuisine. Two other coordinate arguments refer, respectively, to a particular activity that is promenading around the city at night, and to a specific attraction, that is the Angelus prayer on Sunday morning in St. Peter's Square, each one allowing the experience to be even more exciting. It is interesting to note that the argument about



Argument diagram 6: Standpoint-argument configuration of the OTR “A late comer to the eternal city”.



the Angelus prayer is for the most part implicit: the reviewer only suggests to visit St. Peter's Square on Sunday morning, while she takes for granted that the reader knows what usually happens on the Square on Sunday morning. Though, she provides a cue, saying that even if one is not Catholic, she should go there: here, the reviewer relies upon and *endoxon*, that is a shared knowledge within the community of interlocutors. Three counter-arguments are finally put forward to show negative aspects of the destination, but two of them are defeated through rebuttals.

#### 5.2.4 Concluding remarks on the structure of argumentation in OTR

The analytical overview shows that the argumentative structure of most of the OTR is not a complex one: visually, it is large horizontally and short vertically. This means that numerous multiple arguments and (some) counter-arguments are provided to support or reject the standpoint; when the reviewer realizes that her argument is weak and may be countered, she provides a further coordinate premise, to make it stronger. In positive reviews, counter-arguments are often anticipated and then rebutted, in order to point out aspects which might be problematic, but that can be easily managed by following the reviewer's tips. The standpoint, then, though may be generalized in the generic statement "It is good for the reader to visit/not visit destination x", is often expressed in more precise terms specifying, for instance, the type of tourist or the type of trip to which the reviewer's advice applies the best, or also the length of stay or the time of year, when the visit should be better performed.

OTR multiple arguments structure may be explained considering the object being reviewed. A destination is a quite complex and rather vague concept. Cooper (2005) speaks of an "amalgam" when describing destinations: according to him, they are an inseparable tourism product – an amalgam –, which includes attractions, amenities, ancillary services and access to them. Looking at tourism destinations as organizational units, the DORM (Destination Online Reputation Model) (Marchiori et al., 2010, 2011) classifies online discourses about a destination according to a set of dimensions and drivers, which indeed represent the propositional content of arguments and counter-arguments advanced in OTR to support the visit recommendation. The dimensions "product & services" and "society" in the DORM, apply to the most part of the propositional content of OTR utterances (see chapter IV). The first dimension refers to: accommodations, food and beverage, site attractions, events, entertainment, transportation, infrastructure; while the second dimension includes: local and culture traditions and attitude of residents. A prospective tourist needs information and advice on as many elements as possible, in order to reduce the level of uncertainty in the decision-making process and trip planning (see chapter I). From here, the attitude of OTR writers – who share with readers the status of tourists and understand their

information needs – is to provide quick and easy comments (i.e. arguments) on different aspects of the destination. Since they do not know their audience, in terms of expectations, type of tourism experience they like or type of tourist they represent, their attempt seems to be one of giving advice about key elements of the tourism experience and highlighting elements which are of relevance for them or which impressed them the most.

### 5.3 Argument schemes in OTR

Though the analytical overview allows to identify the points at issue, the reviewer's position and the structure of the arguments advanced to justify it, it does not help to explain the *nature of the relation* binding the arguments to the standpoint. A more fine level of the argumentative analysis, in fact, is to make the internal *inferential configuration* of each single argument explicit, that is to understand on which logical-inferential pattern it relies and which premises it is founded upon. This level of analysis is based on a combination of tools from logic, linguistic pragmatics and rhetoric, and is necessary to fully understand how argumentation works and to subsequently evaluate it, in terms of inferential correctness and persuasive power. Evaluating arguments is the art of understanding which strong and weak points a certain message has. The analysis of the connection between standpoints and arguments corresponds, indeed, to the debated issue of *argument schemes*, for which different solutions have been proposed by different approaches to argumentation. A point of agreement, though, is that argument schemes are abstract structures to which actual arguments can be ascribed. Ambiguity concerns, instead, the precise definition of argument schemes and their relation to the inferential configuration of arguments, both in terms of how this inferential configuration is constructed and of the degree of specification of its analysis. Among the different proposals advanced to analyze argument schemes, I chose the model elaborated by Rigotti and Greco-Morasso (Rigotti, 2006; Rigotti & Greco Morasso, 2009, 2010, 2011) called *Argumentum Model of Topics*, because of a number of reasons:

- it is not a typology constructed just by listing numerous examples and trying to find commonalities among them, but is based on the tradition of *Topics*, firstly elaborated by Aristotle and later reconsidered along the Middle Ages, by authors as Boethius, Abelard, Peter of Spain and Buridan. Significant contribution came also, before the Middle Ages, from Cicero and Quintilian;
- it takes a clear-cut position with regard to the relation between argument schemes and the Aristotelian notion of *topoi/loci*, which covers a partially overlapping but yet distinct area;

- it allows to identify implicit premises making up an argument, distinguishing the procedural premises (or procedural component) from the material premises (or material component), and focusing on the crossing point between the two. In the analytical overview, instead, usually only premises made explicit by the arguer are included in the reconstruction;
- the context-boundness nature of arguments is made evident in the material component, which elicits the relation between *endoxon* (that is a premise shared within the community of speakers belonging to the same ‘culture’) and *datum*. In order to actually work, in fact, an inferential connection needs to be applied to an appropriate situation and to be adequate to the audience;
- it argues that in order to evaluate the validity of inferential connections, a detailed semantic analysis is needed; inferential connections, in fact, are not mere rules but they state how certain things are connected in reality – that is, they are by definition true – therefore, the ontological relation between such things must be highlighted in order to understand and evaluate the soundness of arguments.

In the next sections, the approach I chose for the analysis of arguments is first presented and then applied to the case of OTR.

### 5.3.1 A model for analyzing and evaluating arguments

De Ascaniis & Greco Morasso (2011) highlight that, amongst the advantages of the *Argumentum Model of Topics* (AMT), a determinant one is that it not only accounts for the formal, logical structure of arguments, but it also offers a methodological tool to identify the common knowledge, beliefs, values and preferences – more synthetically, the cultural or contextual premises – on which these arguments are constructed. Underlying each argument, in fact, there are *cultural premises* that are not necessarily shared by the whole set of potential visitors of a certain destination, but which tells one a lot about the drivers that can bring specific sets of tourists to a certain destination. An example may help to clarify the matter. If one asks to a scuba diver club, they will probably tell her that the Adriatic Sea is the less attractive destination in Italy. A grandmother, instead, might say that it is the best place to bring children because it is not dangerous: even if they jump into the water, they cannot sink because the sea level is low. This example shows that the same morphological aspect can become an advantage when paired with the right contextual premises (“the best sea is the less dangerous one”). The premises identified with the help of the AMT, may then be confronted against the different targets of tourists that may visit a certain tourism destination, and the hold of these premises on these targets may be evaluated (De Ascaniis & Greco-Morasso, 2011).

The AMT represents the internal configuration of arguments as a Y-like structure, constituted by the intertwining of two reasoning lines (see the visual representation of arguments in sections 5.3.2, 5.3.3 and 5.3.4). The right-hand line (Maxim – Minor premise – Final conclusion) represents the logical pattern that underpins the argument; because of its logic-oriented, procedural nature it is called the *procedural* component. The left-hand component (Endoxon – Minor premise – First conclusion) derives from the anchoring of the argument in the cultural and factual premises supplied by the audience to which the argument is addressed; its culture-dependent and context-dependent nature justifies the term *material* component. These two components and their combination need to be better explained.

The procedural component represents, in abstract terms, the type of relation that occurs between the standpoint and the argument. The argument-standpoint relation is called *ontological relation*, as it mirrors a state of affairs in reality; in terms of the traditional approach to the study of arguments, this relation is named with the Latin term *locus*. A locus is, literally, the *place* from which actual arguments are drawn; it is not, though, a physical place, but a conceptual one, a sort of mental space. It identifies the ontological relation between the aspect of reality involved in the argument and the aspect of reality involved in the standpoint. In the case of trip planning, for instance, and in particular at the level of core decisions (i.e. decisions about the destination to visit), it might be expected that a locus based on an analogical relation is exploited: this locus instantiates a relation among similar alternatives, and ‘generates’ inferential rules based on the comparison of such alternatives. In order to find out which locus is at play in one particular argument-standpoint connection, the following question has to be asked: “What is the aspect involved in the argument in relation to the aspect involved in the standpoint”? (Rigotti & Palmieri, 2012).

Rigotti and Greco Morasso (2009, 2010, 2011) elaborated a *taxonomy of loci*, based on the Medieval literature on topics, which distinguished three groups of loci according to their proximity to the standpoint: a) intrinsic, b) extrinsic and c) middle loci. In particular, they build on the classification made by Themistius, followed later by Boethius, and combined it with notions of modern linguistic.

a) Intrinsic loci include both things which have been established in the standpoint and things that necessarily have to be accepted because they refer to possible state of affairs of the standpoint. Since intrinsic loci focus on aspects that are ontologically linked to the standpoint, either directly or indirectly, they can be re-named *syntagmatic loci*. The notion of ‘syntagm’ refers to the set of relations *in praesentia*, such as relations dependent on the semantic content or on the hierarchy of predicates, relations between cause and effect or circumstances and concomitances.

b) Extrinsic loci, from the other side, are “taken from the outside”, in that they refer to relations *in absentia* or of alternativity. Thus, they can be re-named *paradigmatic loci*, where the notion of ‘paradigm’ refers to the set of equal alternatives among which one can choose. The classes of arguments included in this group are based on paradigmatic relations, both of analogy and of opposition.

c) There are, finally, the loci medii, re-named *complex loci*, which are on the borderline between the previous two, in the sense that they are ‘contaminated’ by both by syntagmatic and paradigmatic elements. Examples of this class of loci are the locus from authority and the locus from derivates.

Figure 15 represents the taxonomy of loci according to the AMT approach.

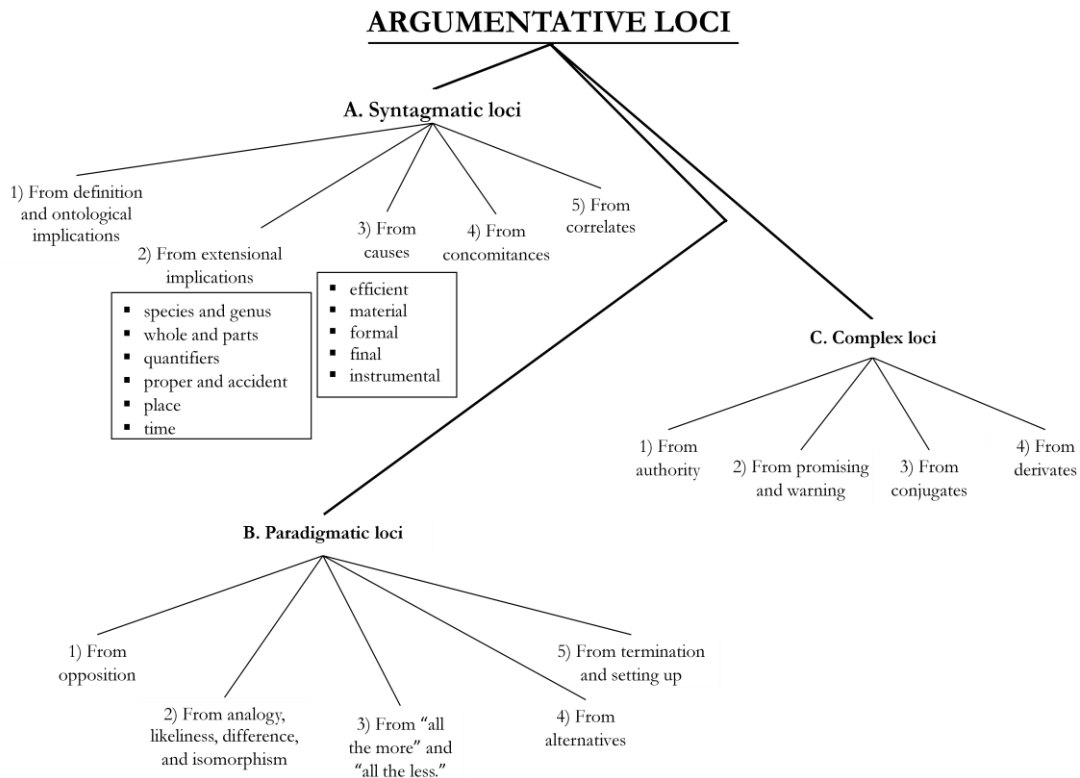


Figure 15: Taxonomy of loci (Rigotti and Greco Morasso, 2012: 48)

The actual inferential connection derived from the locus is called *maxim*, and corresponds exactly to the principle creating the inference. It has not a material, concrete nature, but involves notions belonging to most general categories, as quantity, quality, genus or species. Maxims work as particular type of premises, that are

“procedural” premises. Each locus can generate different maxims (numerous examples of different maxims generated by the same locus are provided in Palmieri, 2012). Maxims are hypothetical statements of the form “if p, then q”, which establish a connection between two propositions, one being the antecedent and the other the consequent. Each maxim, then, activates a *logical form*, usually either the *modus ponens* or the *modus tollens*. In the modus ponens, the major premise of the hypothetical syllogism establishes a connection between the antecedent and the consequent, while the minor premise ‘sets’ that the consequent is the case, so that it derives that also the antecedent is the case. I take one example from the corpus, in order to illustrate it better:

“We learned a few Italian phrases and found that if you do "try" to speak the language you will be treated very well.”

The maxim ruling the utterance in the example is one like: “If an action has desirable consequences, it should be performed”. Reconstructing the example as a hypothetical syllogism, the modus ponens becomes evident:

Major premise: If one tries to speak the language, she is treated very well

Minor premise: We learned a few Italian phrases (i.e. we tried to speak the language)

Conclusion: (We were treated very well)

In the modus tollens, the minor premise of the hypothetical syllogism denies that the consequent is the case, thus the conclusion denies that also the antecedent is the case. The following is one example from the corpus:

“We went to the Coliseum but we saved some money by renting the head phones instead of getting a good tour. We feel that we practically wasted our money and time. We're convinced that a good tour guide would have made this a good experience.”

The maxim ruling the utterance is one like: “If a means allows to reach a desirable outcome, it should be used”. The example can be reconstructed in the following way, to point out the modus tollens:

Major premise: If one wants to have a good experience at the Coliseum, she has to take a tour guide.

Minor premise: The reviewer and her travel company did not take a tour guide when they went to the Coliseum (they rent head phones)

Conclusion: The reviewer and her travel company did not have a good experience (they wasted money and time)

Now, while the maxim is an abstract principle whose validity could be judged independently from its field of application, the factual premise to which an argument is anchored is a questionable statement, as in the previous example of the grandmother bringing her grand children to bathe in the Adriatic Sea because “the best sea is the less dangerous one”. This is why, in arguments, some further backing is usually provided. Such backing is represented by the *material component* of the argument, which shows the cultural premises, knowledge, values and experience that the tourists are evoking. This reasoning line is composed by an endoxon and a datum, which together support the conclusion. Aristotle introduced the term *endoxon* (plur. *endoxa*) to indicate those opinions that are largely shared in a certain segment of the community: “*Endoxa* are the remarkable opinions of a community, that is to say the propositions that are in the common opinion (the *doxa*) and, as a consequence, are generally accepted, reliable and credited within a community” (Tardini, 2005, p. 281). The community to which authors of travel reviews refer to is the generic community of tourists, constituted by all those who intend to organize a trip or are simply keen on travelling; in the case of OTR about a specific tourism destination, the community is somehow smaller, in that ‘members’ are those who have at least some interest in that destination. In the material reasoning line, the endoxon is associated with a datum, that is a peculiar piece of information, a concrete fact; going back, again to the example of the grandmother bringing grandchildren to the beach, that the Adriatic Sea is not a dangerous sea is a fact, since it is proven that there aren’t dangerous animals or currents. As it appears in Figure 16, in the AMT Y-like structure, the conclusion of the material component of the argument corresponds to the minor premise of the procedural component, because it is used in both. The components of the AMT will become clearer in the next sections, when I will apply it to analyze some arguments that are typical of OTR.

### 5.3.2 Argument from position to know

As I anticipated in the discussion about pragmatic argumentation (section 5.1.2), OTR are advices about a course of action, that is to visit or not visit a tourism destination. The main standpoint of OTR, thus, is a pragmatic standpoint, since it is oriented to the realization of an action. However, the fact that a standpoint has a pragmatic nature does not necessarily imply that it is supported by an argument which follows the scheme of practical reasoning (i.e. an action is presented as a means to an end). In OTR, in fact, arguments based on a means-end relation are quite common, especially in utterances governed by the connective predicate suggestion, but the overall claim is supported by an argument referring to the position of the person who gives the advice, that is a particular type of argument from authority: this argument, indeed, is connected with the very idea of eWOM. The components making up the internal configuration of this argument are shown in the figure below (16).

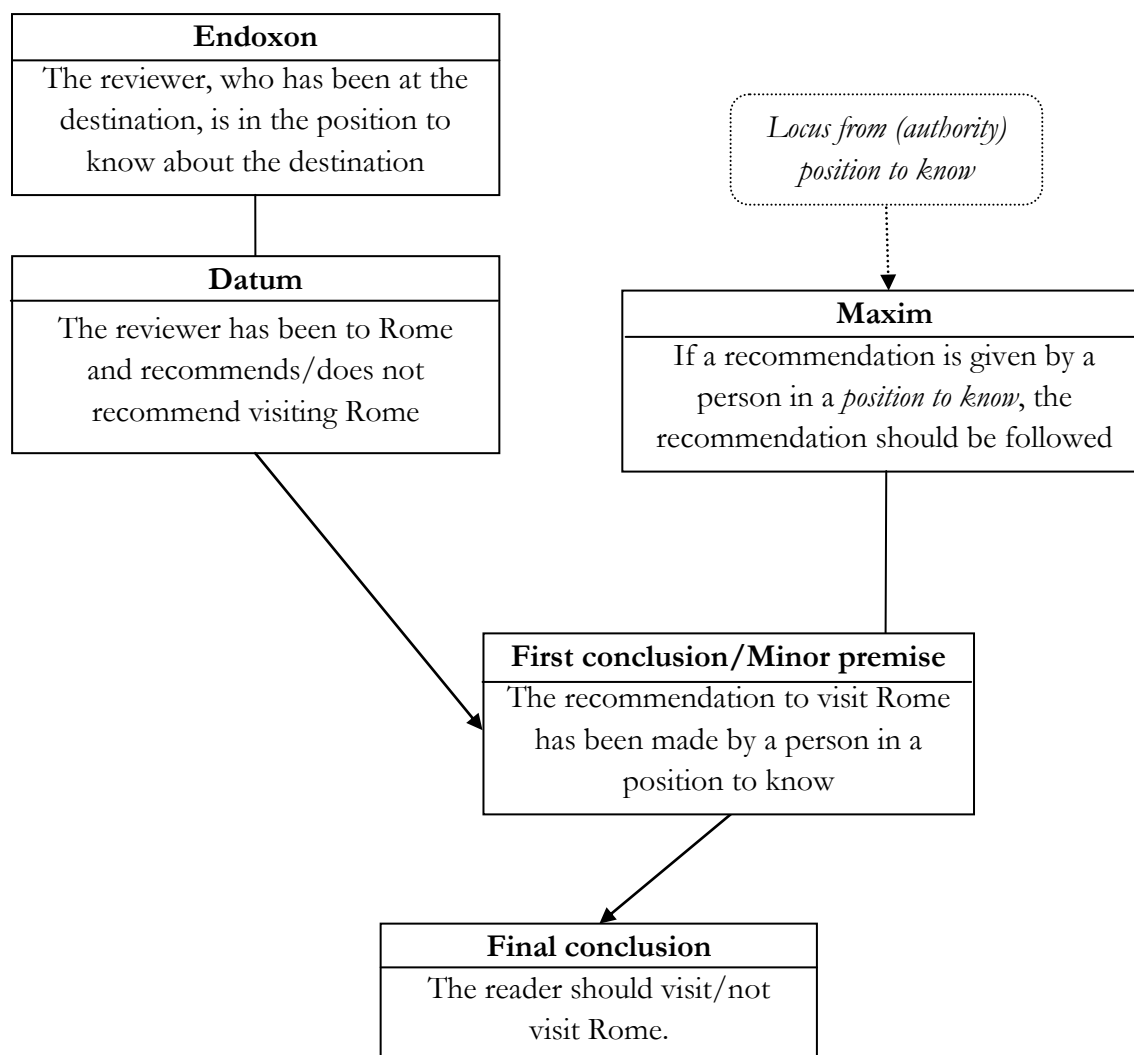


Figure 16: Synergic configuration of the argument from position to know.

The locus from authority is a *mixed locus*, combining syntagmatic and paradigmatic aspects. Rigotti and Greco Morasso (2009) point out that since it points to the quality of the “producer”, it recalls the syntagmatic locus from agent and efficient cause; this locus, though, levers on the aspect of the communicative situation in which the standpoint is being discussed (i.e. a travel advice given by a former traveller to a prospective one) – that belongs to the paradigm –, and not on the ontology of the standpoint itself.



In OTR, often even the datum, that corresponds to the fact that the reviewer visited the destination, and the conclusion of the argument, that is the actual visit recommendation, are missing. The datum, in fact, can be taken for granted, since someone who hasn't been at a destination cannot report about it (one of the guidelines of TripAdvisor is that the review should be written by actual travellers). The conclusion, from the other side, can be easily inferred by the reader, because it derives from everything that has been said in the review. Examples where both the datum and the conclusion are explicit are the following:

- “(...) my wife and I had the opportunity to visit Rome [datum]. It was a wonderful experience. (...) it is a place that everyone should visit at least once during his/her life. [conclusion] Will return for sure.”

- “We have been to Rome 7 times [datum] and each time we go we have found something new to explore. (...) This city should be on your bucket list. [conclusion]”

“Rome - a brilliant trip [datum]. Rome was amazing! I would recommend it to anyone! [conclusion]”

- “(...) muss habe ich nach meinen zweiten Besuch wieder festgestellt [datum], dass mir persönlich die Stadt Rom zum meinen city-favoriten gehört (...) einfach eine super Stadt die man in min. 4 Tagen besuchen sollte! [conclusion]”. [Trans. After my second visit, I have to say that, personally, the city of Rome is among my favorite cities (...) it is simply a super city that should be visited in at least 4 days!]

#### 5.3.2.1 Evaluation of the argument from position to know

Having analyzed the inferential configuration of the argument from position to know, the attention can now be turned to evaluate its argumentative strength. It is an advantage of the AMT that the Y-structure for argument analysis also offers a valuable basis for evaluation, because each node can become the source of *critical questions* (Christopher Guerra, 2008). In the case at issue, two aspects have to be put under question: the first is whether the reviewer is actually in a position to know about what she reports and whether she is an honest (trustworthy) source of information (Walton, 1997); the second is whether reviewer's advice should be followed by anyone.

The position of the reviewer has been already widely discussed in previous chapters (in particular, chapter II section 2.3 and chapter III section 3.3), and some last remarks will be made in the section devoted to the dimensions of *ethos* and *pathos* in OTR (this chapter, section 5.4). It has however to be noted, that the reliability of the reviewer comes from what works as *datum* in the Y-like structure of the argument, that is her travel experience at the destination. The strength of this datum relies on the

reasonableness of trusting fellow tourists as reliable testimonies because they have already visited a given destination; thus, they actually are in the position to know about it. Trusting fellow travellers as reliable testimonies is, indeed, the key to understand UGC in tourism. Like word-of-mouth recommendations, in fact, UGC are supposedly unbiased (differently from official reviews); moreover, an e-tourist normally has access to some different reviews, therefore she has the possibility to confront them and discover if there are ‘big’ biases.

As for the second critical question concerning the adequacy of the advice to the audience, the key to answer it is to closely consider the type of standpoint that is put forward. In the majority of OTR, the advice of visiting/not visiting Rome is directed towards a varied audience, and in some cases it is even explicitly said that “there is something for everyone”: Rome is a destination which can satisfy tourism desires of a wide differentiated public, because it combines a variety of aspects of interest. In some cases, reviewers specify that Rome is particularly interesting for those who love history and art, for a romantic trip, or for those who especially appreciate good cuisine; from the other side, Rome should be avoided by those who suffer crowds and traffic. Eventually, Rome is recommended for any trip length (differently, for instance, from the destination Lugano, whose related UGC are analyzed in De Ascaniis & Greco Morasso, 2011), also if for a complete visit at least one week is necessary.

### 5.3.3 Argument from parts to whole

Going down in the argumentative structure of OTR, the arguments used to support the evaluative claim about the destination (stdp 2), that is, in its turn, the argument directly supporting the visit recommendation, have to be analyzed. One first argument that is widely exploited is based on the syntagmatic relation between the whole and its parts. In particular, the whole – that is the destination – is ascribed a property, because that same property is shared by some of its constituent parts. Two examples of arguments exploiting the *locus from parts to whole* are taken from the sub-corpus undergone to the analytical overview; one supports a positive evaluation of the destination, the other one a negative evaluation.

Example 1: “One of the best places to visit” (traveller rating 5)

*Stdp*: Rome is a fantastic place.

*args*: Roman Ruins are a must see, the food is great, the people are very friendly, the shopping is an enjoyable experience.

Example 5: “Beautiful city ruined by traffic” (traveller rating 2)

*Stdp*: Rome is a disappointing place.

*args*: It is ruined by traffic and by graffiti, there is a lack of public benches to sit down and very little green space.

Figures 17 and 18 highlight the internal inferential configuration of both versions of the argument deriving from the same locus, and sharing the same maxim.

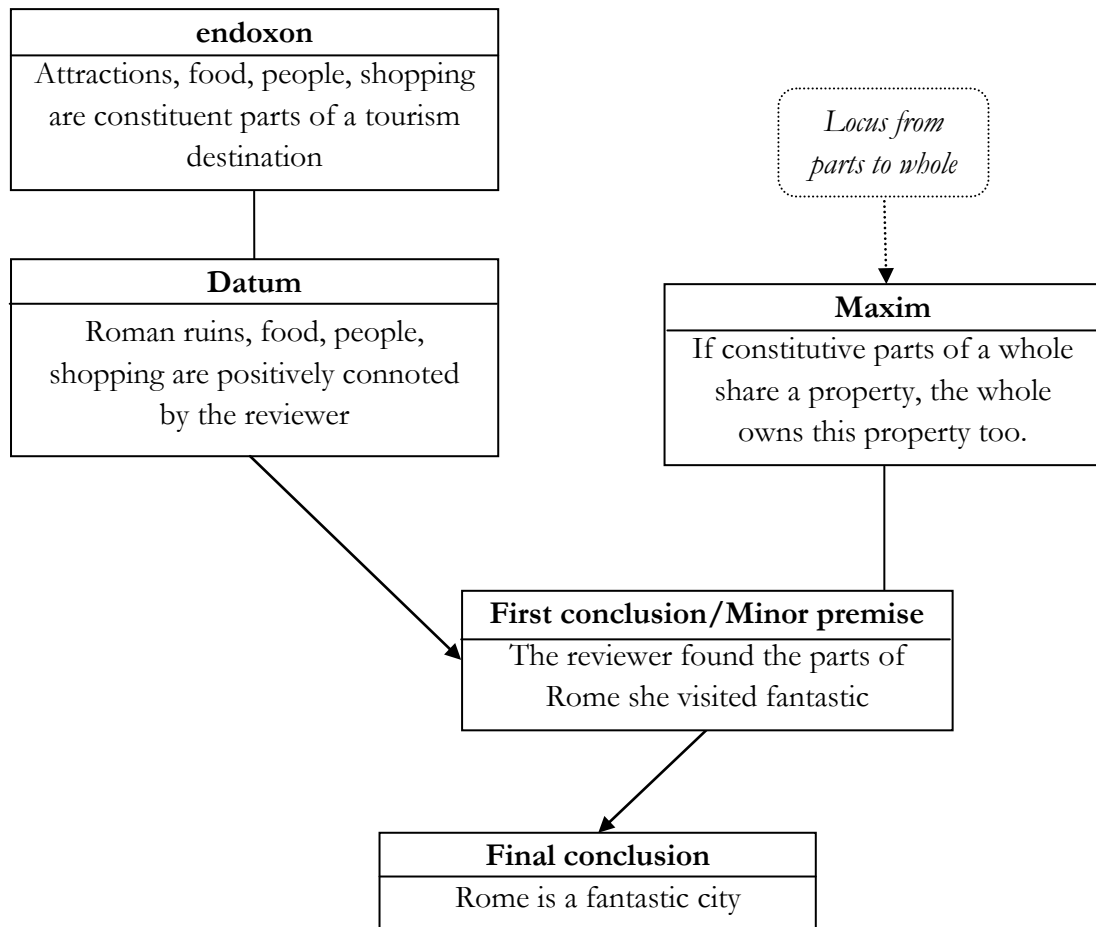


Figure 17: Synergic configuration of the argument from parts to whole, first example.

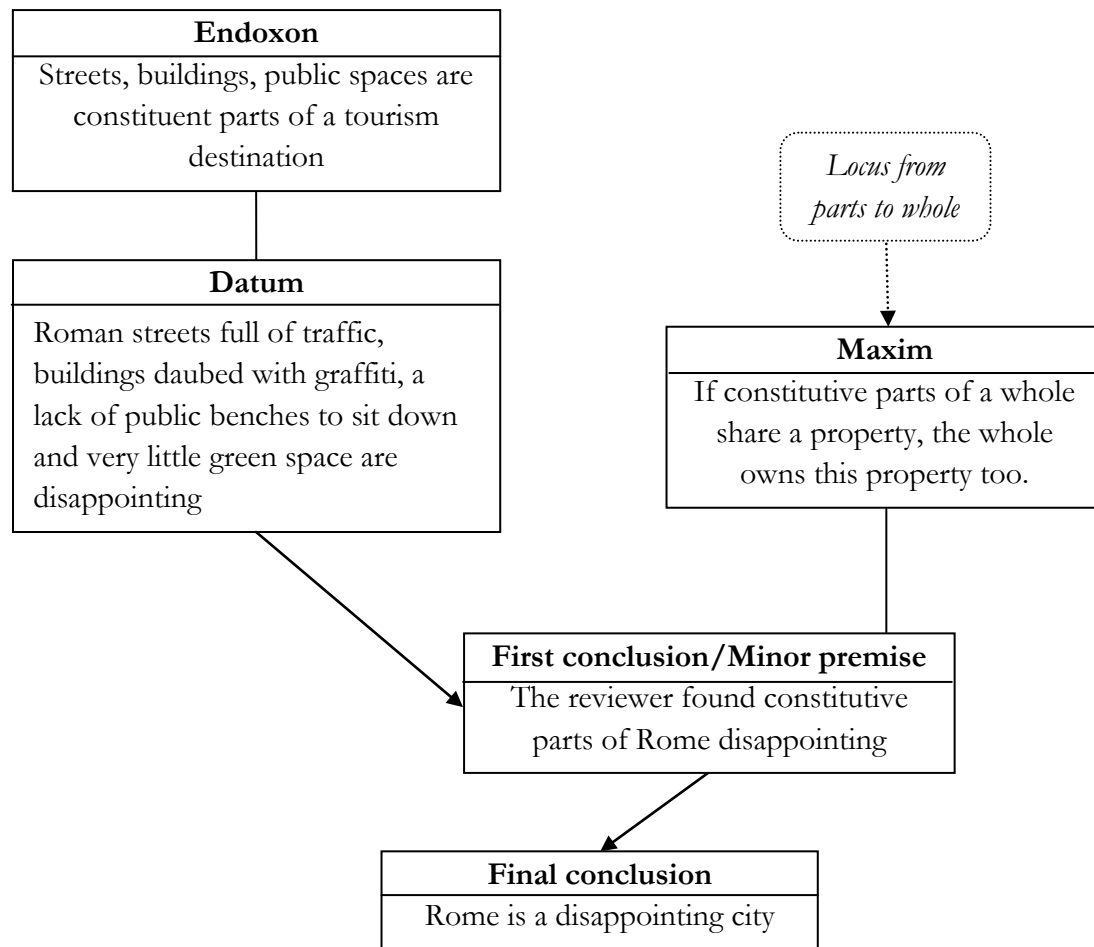


Figure 18: Synergic configuration of the argument from parts to whole, second example.

### 5.3.3.1 Evaluation of the argument from parts to whole

To evaluate the hold of the inference ascribing a property to the whole because that property is shared by constituent parts of the whole, the critical question to be answered concerns, exactly, the property that is supposed to be transferred: can that property be effectively transferred from the parts to the whole (and vice-versa)? The discussion is based on a paper of Van Eemeren and Grootendorst (1999), where the authors analyze in depth the whole-parts argument scheme, identifying the conditions which must be satisfied in order for a property to be transferable. They state that “the transferability is determined by two factors: the nature of the properties which are transferred and the relation between the parts and wholes” (Van Eemeren & Grootendorst, 1999, p. 11). In their analysis, they show that only *structure-independent* and *non-relative* properties can be

transferred. The scheme below sums up the analysis they offer in the paper mentioned above.

Transferable (+) and non-transferable (-) properties	STRUCTURE-INDEPENDENT PROPERTIES	STRUCTURE-DEPENDENT PROPERTIES
ABSOLUTE PROPERTIES	red, white, blue, glass, iron, wooden (+)	round, rectangular, edible, poisonous (-)
RELATIVE PROPERTIES	heavy, small, light, big, fat, slim (-)	good, expansive, strong, poor (-)

According to the scheme, the properties that reviewers ascribe to the destination because they are held to be shared by some of its constituent parts, are neither structure-independent nor absolute. The fact that some aspects of Rome are considered to be fantastic or, instead, disappointing, does not justify that the destination as a whole should be considered fantastic or disappointing. To be fantastic or disappointing, in fact, are relative properties, since “there is an explicit or implicit comparison involved, either directly with something else, or indirectly with a standard norm or criterion” (van Eemeren & Grootendorst, 1999: 11). They are, then, also structure-dependent properties, in that they depend on the structure of the respective coherent whole.

Nevertheless, it has to be noted that the ‘mistake’ is not only the reviewers’ fault, but is a consequence of the nature of tourism destinations. As pointed out in section 5.2.4, destinations are quite complex and rather vague concepts, which cannot be really characterized as “coherent structured wholes”; therefore, how can one say which properties are structure-dependent and which are structure-independent? Furthermore, which ‘parts’ of a destination should be considered ‘constituent’? This discussion concerns the definition of a tourism destination ontology, which is still widely debated. Then, since OTR are basically advices based on opinions, though relative properties as ‘fantastic’ or ‘disappointing’ cannot technically be transferred from the parts to the whole, they provide readers with those opinions they can decide to rely or not rely upon in their decisions.

#### 5.3.4 Argument from final cause

A means-end relation between standpoint and argument(s) is typical of suggestions: the reviewer indicates which action (means) should be performed in order to reach a desirable goal (end) related to the travel experience. Following Rigotti (2008), the inferential connection between an end (goal or purpose) of an action and the action itself, is generated by an ontological relation activated by the *locus from final cause*. It is a

syntagmatic locus, based on a relation *in praesentia* between a cause and its effect. Different variants of the same type of argument are used in suggestions; here, some utterances taken from example 6 of the sub-corpus are analyzed, in order to point out its core formulation.

“Try to stay in the city instead of having to travel in thereby have the opportunity of promenading around the city at night. (...) The Trevi fountain is best experiences at night.”

*Stdp*: Taking an accommodation in the city (action) allows to reach desirable goals.

*Arg 1*: To have the opportunity of promenading around the city at night is a desirable goal.

*Arg 2*: To see the Trevi fountain at night is a desirable goal.

Both arguments refer to a particular condition or atmosphere – i.e. the night – which can make the visit of some attractions more enjoyable; thus, they can be generalized with a more generic form, as: Visiting attractions in the best atmosphere is a desirable goal of a tourism experience.

“You can encounter the inevitable rip-off merchants at the main tourist spots (eg Colloseum) but we found them to be a low-level irritation. Just say no.”

*Stdp*: To say ‘no’ to rip-off merchants at the main tourist spots is an action leading to a desirable goal.

*Arg 1*: (to avoid troubles during the visit is a desirable goal)

“A visit to St. Peter's Square on Sunday morning is a must (whether or not you are catholic) but take an umbrella against the sun; there's no shade!”

*Stdp*: To go to St. Peter's Square is a necessary action to reach a desirable goal.

*Arg*: (to see the most impressive attractions of a destination is a desirable goal of a visit to that destination)

*Stdp*: To take an umbrella is an action leading to a desirable goal.

*Arg*: To protect oneself against the sun is a desirable goal → this argument can be reformulated in more generic terms as: to protect oneself against adverse weather conditions is a desirable goal.

“One niggle: unless you stop at one of the many restaurants, cafes or bars (...) there is virtually no-where to sit down for a break.”

*Stdp*: To stop at a restaurant, café or bar is a necessary (“unless”) action to reach a desirable goal.

*Arg*: To sit down for a break is a desirable goal → this argument can be as well reformulated in more generic terms as: resting during the visit is a desirable goal.

The Y-like structure of every one argument slightly differs from each other, as also endoxa and data differ, but the locus and the maxim are the same. Figure 19 is a cumulative representation of the synergic structure of the inferential configuration of this type of argument.

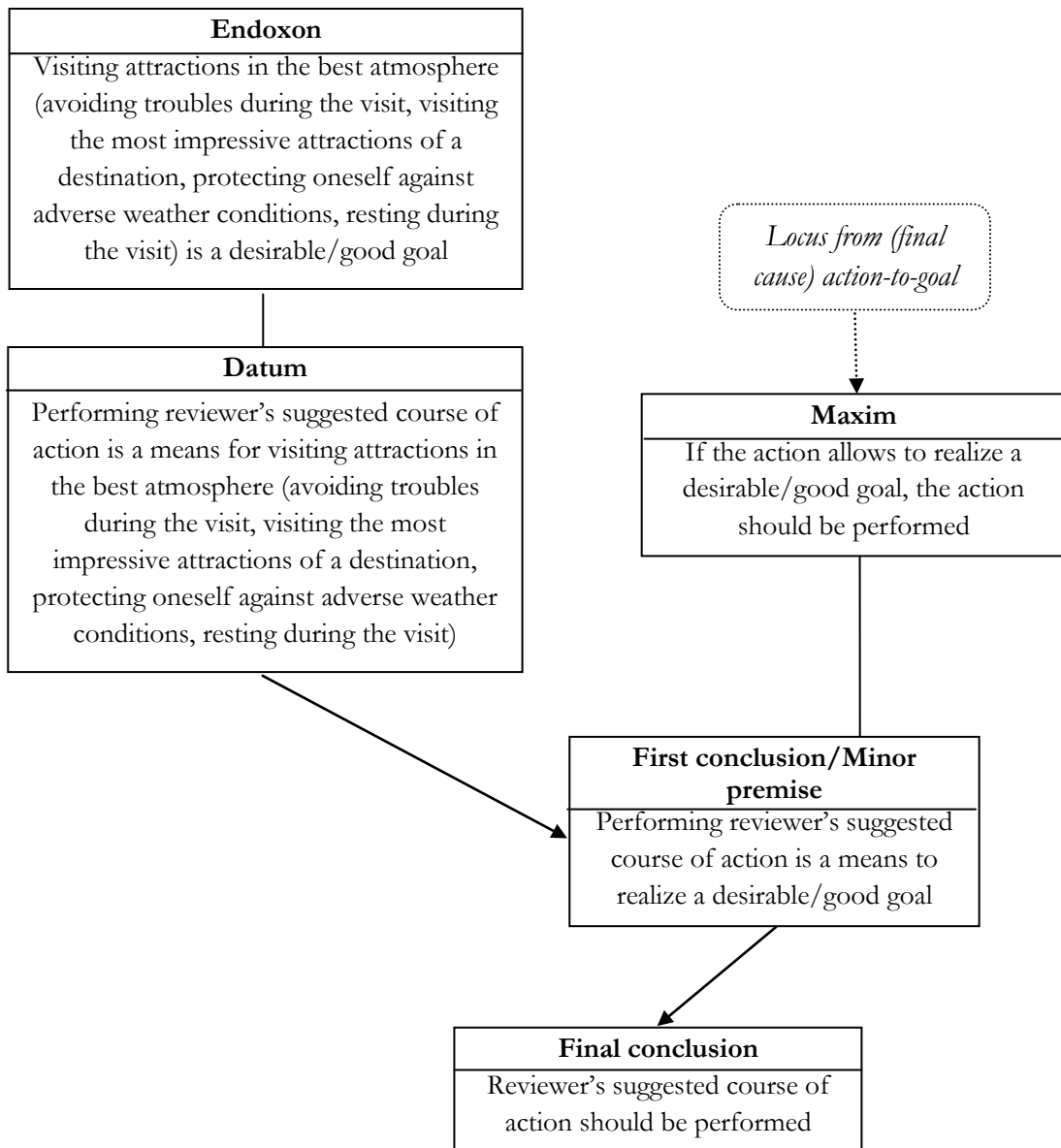


Figure 19: Synergic configuration of the argument from action to goal.

#### *5.3.4.1 Evaluation of the argument from final cause*

The argument from action to goal, that is a specific type of the argument from final cause (Rigotti, 2008), follows the basic scheme for practical reasoning illustrated by Walton (2006, 2007), who also lists the critical questions to evaluate the inference suggested by this type of argument. Observing the different components of the Y-like structure, critical questions which need to be answered in this case, are:

- a) is the goal pointed out in the endoxon actually shared and desirable within the community of tourists?
- b) is the course of action suggested by the reviewer the only one means to reach the goal? Is it a necessary or a sufficient means?

a) The answer to the first question is, unsurprisingly, yes. Every wise tip, which may improve the tourism experience, is welcome, because a vacation is expected to be also a vacation from troubles and uneasiness. A comment made by one reviewer (taken from the corpus of OTR) exactly focus on the meaning of a tourism experience: “travel is the best experience one can have in learning about the planet we live on and the people that we share it with. Travel well and smart.” In certain types of travels, though, the endoxa making up this argument may be not shared or not relevant. If one thinks to a pilgrimage, the pilgrim is not interested, primarily, to visit the most impressive attractions of the destination, but rather the holy place representing the goal of her pilgrimage. One, for instance, may wish to go to Sydney to visit the tomb of St. Mary of the Cross MacKillop, the first Australian Saint canonized in October 2010, and pray on it, ignoring famous points of attraction as the Opera House or Darling Harbour, or giving them a minor importance. For a pilgrim, then, resting is usually just the very last thing after having reached the holy place, it is like an award. As for troubles, the pilgrim tries to avoid them when possible, as anyone, but is prepared to accept them as obstacles along the way which leads to the holy goal.

b) The courses of action suggested by the reviewer are not necessary means to reach desirable goals (i.e. visiting attractions in the best atmosphere, avoiding troubles during the visit, etc.), in that the same goals might be reached also with different means. To enjoy attractions in the night atmosphere, one does not need to choose an accommodation in the city, which is likely more expensive than an accommodation in the surroundings; she can decide, instead, to stay awake overnight and rest the day after, or to spend just one night in a hotel in the city. Alternative solutions may be found for the other situations described in the example. It is true, however, that reviewer’s suggestions represent sufficient, and probably the most convenient solutions to reach the goals.



#### 5.4 The dimensions of *ethos* and *pathos* in reviewer's advice

The analysis of arguments structures and argument schemes focused, mainly (even if not only), on the dimension of *logos*, that is on the rules of reasons related to the construction of arguments. A good, persuasive argument, though, does not depend only on logical force, but also on the choice of the right cultural and contextual premises (*endoxa*) and on its capacity to appeal to the audience. Aristotle into the *Rhetoric*, emphasizes that an argument, to be persuasive – i.e. for convincing the public it is addressed to – needs to achieve a balance between *logos*, *ethos* and *pathos*. These are called “persuasive proofs”, that are the means through which argumentation is realized in a discourse.

“The *logos* is persuasive through showing what is true or appears to be so from the means available for each individual subject” (I.2.6). For Aristotle, it was exactly the role of Rhetoric to teach people how to identify the available means of persuasion in each particular case (as opposed to other sciences, such as medicine or geometry, that aim at teaching and persuading about their specific subject (*Rhet.* I.2.1)).

A second means through which a speech may convince the interlocutor about one's argument, is creating a sense of *character* with an emphasis on trust. The extent to which people are inclined to go along with an argument because of who expresses it, is called *ethos*. There is persuasion through character when “the speech is spoken in such a way as to make the speaker worthy of credence; for we believe fair-minded people to a greater extent and more quickly on all subjects in general and especially where there is not exact knowledge but room for doubt” (I.2.4). Character represents, for Aristotle, almost the strongest form of argument, the most authoritative form of persuasion, because it relates to the social nature of persuasion, that is on the dependence that we generally place on each other for what we believe and value. “There are three reasons why speakers themselves are persuasive; for there are three things we trust other than logical demonstration. These are practical wisdom and virtue and good will” (II.1.5). Tindale (2004) points out that Aristotle's explanation of *ethos* is limited to the effect of character as conveyed through language. One, however, may have a prior authority in front of an audience, with whom association can be made and trust built. When I went to the Holy Land with my parents, for instance, the mayor of my town was in our group of pilgrims, and when he spoke – not only about politics or civil matters – his position tended to be agreed upon by the most of the group. I am convinced that it was not only because he usually had good arguments, but also because of his perceived authority. The case is different for OTR. In fact, since usually the reviewer is unknown to the audience, as the audience is mostly unknown to the reviewer, the reviewer cannot rely on any kind of prior authority to gain the audience's assent, but she can only convey her character

through her words. Some platforms for travel review, as TripAdvisor, assign particular ‘authoritative’ role to some reviewers; these are the so called “destination experts”, who are granted the status of expert because they are residents or have relevant previous experiences in a given destination. Trust, however, cannot be compelled; it must be given. A speaker cannot make an audience trust her but can create the conditions for that trust to develop, and knowledge of things is one basic required condition (Tindale, 2004). The authority of any reviewer, indeed, comes from her direct experience, from her actual knowledge of the things – the Aristotelian “practical wisdom” – and from her mainly altruistic goal, that is the “good will” driving her writing: she is reckoned a reliable testimony. In OTR, communicative strategies used by the reviewer for showing her “practical wisdom”, that is for creating the conditions for trust to develop, are varied. She gives details about herself, the type of trip and the travel company (connective predicate contextualization), so to convey the reader her sense of character of the speaker and allow her to better put herself in the speaker’s shoes. She tells her travel story (connective predicate narration), as if she was writing a personal diary or speaking to a good friend, in order to allow the reader to enter a part of her life, creating a sense of closeness if not even friendship. She describes places assigning them values (connective predicate description), this way characterizing them beyond technical details (e.g. “die Stadt ist wie ein ganzes Museum” [the city is like one entire museum], or “it is a sea of chaos and people bustling around!”).

Aristotle identifies a third means to persuasively argue in front of an audience, that is to lead it through the speech to feel *emotions* (I.2.5). Since the whole person is addressed when speech aims at persuasion, emotions must be given their own place. Our judgments, in fact, change according to our emotional state. This means or rhetorical proof is called *pathos*, and refers to the set of feelings, emotions, intuitions, sympathies and prejudices that people bring to decision. Aristotle describes emotions (*pathê*) as “those things through which, by undergoing change, people come to differ about their judgments and which are accompanied by pain and pleasure, for example, anger, pity, fear, and such things as their opposites (II.1.8).” Tindale (1999) highlights that the causal line here is speech to emotion, emotion to judgment. Emotions alter a person’s judgments, but not in an unrestrained way, rather somehow ‘rationally’, in that each emotional state involves understanding and deliberation about the social situation and the expectations one has of others. If another’s behavior does not conform to expectations, emotion that is felt and expressed may become more intense as a consequence of the perceived incoherence. Taken the case of a politician who does not keep her promises after having been elected, this may elicit greater anger than another person, from whom one has lower or even no expectations, who is considered to have not kept her promises. In OTR, *pathos* is reached through linguistic choice, register, use

of rhetorical figures, and is particularly emphasized in the destination overall evaluation and in visit recommendations. Reviewers try to describe the emotions they felt in their travel experience, that they keep in their memory and importantly contribute to shape their travel opinion, this way driving readers 'to taste' their same emotions, to create expectations and, in the end, to take the proposed course of action (i.e. visit or not visit the destination).

### 5.5 Some linguistic insights on destination OTR

From a linguistic point of view, reviewers express their judgments making an extensive use of *intensifiers*, that are modifiers which amplify the meaning of the word they modify. Different lexical items can be intensified, and the way they are intensified is language dependent. Hereafter I only report examples taken from English reviews:

- intensified adverbs, example: "everyone should visit at least once during his life", "you can visit almost all the ancient Rome"
- intensified nouns, example: "a must destination", "every turn you take, every street you walk through"
- intensified verbs, example: "you really feel that you are going back in time", "you can easily reach the attractions", "take good care of your belongings"
- intensified adjectives, example: "Italian food is the most delicious food ever" (intensification through adjective grade), "the private guide was awesome" (intensification through a strong adjective), "I was very sad leaving" (intensification through an adverb).

The *register* usually adopted in OTR is a colloquial one, typical of informal contexts and spontaneous speeches; in OTR not technical or refined words are generally employed. The colloquial register is a cue of the audience writers expect to have and the situation they picture to speak in. The audience is constituted by peers, that is by people who share with the writer the status of travellers, and the situation is one where a decision has to be taken and the decision-maker relies on the advice of an experienced peer. Examples showing the colloquial register are the following: "Everything is pretty expensive, so your dollars don't get very far", "è troppo caotica e mi viene il mal di testa solo a pensare di spostarmi in macchina" [it is too chaotic, and I get a headache by only thinking to have to move around by car], "Even the homeless were chic! No, I'm not kidding!".

Frequently used *rhetorical figures* are:

- metaphors for describing the city, as: “Rome is an open air museum”, “Die ewige Stadt Rom.” [Rome, the eternal city]

- enumeration, anaphora and hyperbole, especially employed in descriptions, as: “Cosa vedere? C’è l’imbarazzo della scelta: il Colosseo, San Pietro, i Musei Vaticani e il Vaticano, Castel S’Angelo, ...” [What to see? One can be spoilt for choice: Coliseum, St. Peter, Vatican Museums and the Vatican itself, St. Angel Castle, ...], “Don't worry, virtually every restaurant, bar, café is open” (enumeration); “Every turn you take, every street you walk through, every piazza you come across” (anaphora); “It which ended up a nightmare day”, “Rome has to be the most romantic place on earth” (hyperbole).

A close connection can be seen between *logos*, *pathos* and *ethos*. Pathos and ethos both have a decisive influence on the persuasiveness of an argument; if a claim is, in fact, the conclusion of a logically correct reasoning, but does not appeal to the audience – focusing on the character of who expresses it or generating emotions in the addressee – it will likely fail. A close relation exists, then, between pathos and ethos. As I showed, the crucial element in the building of character is trust. People trust those they like; and like those they trust. Trust is, thus, both a feeling and a judgment. People who make us feel good and who are perceived to act for our good or for the common good, are assigned greater value in our eyes; this means that more likely we will accept *their* judgments. In OTR, the fact that reviewers do not get anything in return for their review (except for some kind of hedonistic reward, like to boast about personal travel experiences or acquired expertise), but they are mostly led by altruistic reasons, make readers like them and assign them greater value than, say, business-oriented actors.

## 6 Conclusions

The aim of this research was to understand how Online Travel Reviews contribute to and inform travel decision-making. In order to reach this goal, OTR were analyzed as communicative events, pursuing a specific purpose and taking place in a quite defined mediated context. A semantic-pragmatic analysis of a corpus of OTR about a destination allowed them to be characterized as an emergent textual genre. In a second phase, the reasoning texture interweaving OTR texts was considered, undergoing an argumentative analysis of the same corpus of texts, which allowed this research to reconstruct the constellation of standpoints and arguments, and to identify and evaluate typical argument schemes.

While only a few studies, so far, have tackled specifically OTR, a huge literature has considered the issue of UGC, addressing it from different perspectives, and focusing on different aspects. This literature provides insights on a number of elements, which must be taken into account to fully analyze OTR as a communicative event. A review of the literature highlighted elements of interest for the sake of the research, and to identify gaps and unsolved problems. It came out, in particular, that there are a lack of studies which, taking a comprehensive communication perspective, investigate UGC as artefacts produced for assisting a process of decision-making, and presenting, thus, semantic and pragmatic properties, as well as singular inferential structures.

### 6.1 Results

The research question driving this study was: *which kind of communicative event is an Online Travel Review?* The research question was split up in sub-questions. I hereafter summarize the main findings, by systematically answering each sub-question.

#### 1) *What is the communicative goal of an OTR?*

The communicative purpose of OTR can be expressed using the formula for the connective predicate: “With the review, the reviewer tells her travel experience at destination x, giving an opinion on x, in order to help the reader to make a decision (about her future travel experience in x), committing herself to the reliability of what she says.” The connective predicate governing OTR can be defined as *advice*, since the dominant speech act is an advice about a future course of action.

#### 2) *Which communicative strategies are adopted to pursue such goal?*

To reach the communicative purpose, reviewers make use of **argumentative strategies**. OTR, in fact, present an eminently argumentative structure, where the standpoint is constituted by the travel advice, and the argument is the reviewer’s opinion

about the destination. Thus, the main argumentative move of OTR can be generically expressed in these terms: “I advice/recommend you to visit  $x$ , because  $x$  is  $y$  OR because my experience in  $x$  was  $y$ ”. This argument becomes, in turn, a standpoint for a lower level argumentative move, where data are provided by the reviewer to support her opinion. Data can be, for instance, descriptions of attractions or reports of travel events. Using the method of analytical overview, it was shown that the argumentative structure of most of the OTR is not a complex one: visually, it develops mostly horizontally, that means that numerous multiple arguments and (some) counter-arguments are provided to support or reject the standpoint. One explanation for this type of structure may reside in the vagueness and complexity of the object of review, that is a destination: reviewers try to provide quick and easy comments (i.e. arguments) on key aspects of the destination, highlighting those aspects that were of relevance for them, or impressed them the most. To make their point, reviewers rely on three main inferential principles or argument schemes. One is the “argument from position to know”, which exploits the authority of the arguer who ‘knows’ the facts because she was there. In a second type of scheme, that is the “argument from parts to whole”, properties of constitutive parts of the whole – e.g. attractions, food, people - are attributed to the whole, i.e. the destination. The last scheme represents the basic scheme for practical reasoning: here, the advice of performing some course of action is justified by its consequence, that is the possibility to reach a desirable/good goal.

### *3) How is an OTR typically structured?*

The structure of destination OTR in terms of combination of the **types of utterances**, emerged through the analysis of dominant and subordinate connective predicates. Some types of utterances are relatively stable or ‘compulsory’, in the sense that they constitute common communicative strategies used by reviewers to convey their message, while others are ‘optional’, because they serve different contingent purposes. In terms of dominant and subordinate connective predicates, OTR can be defined as:

“A travel advice about a destination, in the form of a direct or indirect visit recommendation, given by expressing an opinion on the destination. A constellation of arguments is put forward to support the opinion, which is based on a personal previous travel experience. Those aspects of the experience or of the destination itself that are considered most relevant are described, and suggestions are provided to help the reader to get the most from her trip. Narratives of the personal travel story and trip details, constitute additional elements, which contribute shaping prospective tourists’ expectations.”

An investigation of recurrent patterns of connectives sequences pointed out that destination OTR most often open with an overall evaluation of the destination/travel experience or a visit recommendation followed by a description, or providing contextual elements about the trip and the traveller followed by an overall evaluation. To immediately state the position about the destination/travel experience or to provide identification elements seem to be, thus, the reviewers' favorite communication strategies.

A difference in the sequence of functional units emerged among languages, suggesting a cultural difference in the communication strategy adopted. English speaking reviewers first provide some individual context of the trip, while Germans and Italians go straight to the point, immediately putting forward their position about the destination/travel experience. English reviews, in fact, frequently start with a contextualization followed by an overall evaluation, while German and Italian reviews usually open with an overall evaluation followed by a description.

A difference in the configuration of compulsory and additional types of utterances emerged in connection with OTR length. To test the hypothesis of a dependence between length and connective predicates configuration, the corpus was arbitrarily divided in two sub-groups: A) OTR shorter than 100 words; B) OTR longer than 100 words. Two different configurations came out:

A) compulsory connective predicates: description – evaluation – suggestion

optional connective predicates: recommendation – narration – contextualization

B) compulsory connective predicates: description – evaluation - suggestion – narration – contextualization

optional connective predicates: recommendation – declaration of intents

These results suggest a distinction between two kinds of OTR: 'short' reviews, which are closer to consumer reviews and tour guides, and 'long' reviews, which resemble travel diaries or weblogs.

OTR present, however, singular characteristics if compared with other genres of travel reviews and online reviews; such characteristics give them the status of an **'emergent' textual genre**. They differ from tour guides mainly for the communicative purpose; tour guides, in fact, aim at promoting, encouraging and evaluating a destination. Travel diaries, from the other side, present a prominently narrative structure, while in OTR the narrative component is just one among the others. Travel diaries and blogs, then, are 'views' and not 're-views', in the sense that they tell a story, with more or less emphasis,

but are neither expected to make a critique of what is told, nor to provide advices to the reader, in the case she would find herself in a similar situation. The key element of OTR, on the contrary, is the **reasonable critique** of the object of review. Finally, OTR are different from other types of consumer reviews, and also, OTR about destinations are different from OTR about specific tourism services, because of the 'object' being reviewed. A destination, in fact, is a quite complex and rather vague concept; the evaluation (i.e. review) of the destination, then, is intertwined with the evaluation of the tourism experience as a whole, which is not a formalized experience, as that of a movie, but falls in the domain of creativity, freedom and identity. The description and evaluation of a tourism experience, therefore, can hardly be expected to move along predictable lines.

#### *4) What is an OTR about?*

The analysis of OTR structure was performed together with the analysis of their content. To answer the question about the content, a distinction has to be made. On one side, the classification of propositional content of OTR allowed to identify '**content patterns**'; from the other side, though, such patterns cannot be completely separated from the specific object of review, that is destination Rome. The answer to the content question is better distinguished in: a) content of descriptions, b) content of narratives, and c) content of suggestions.

a) When reporting about their travel experience in Rome, tourists describe general aspects of the place, to convey a first overall 'taste' of the city; they describe, then, attractions, eating opportunities, the attitude of local people, and the problems they encountered. The fact that the touristic value of Rome is constituted, mainly, by its historic and artistic heritage, is supported by only a few mentions of activities which can be performed besides visiting sites, and also if Rome, indeed, offers a variety of activities. Its historic and artistic heritage, provides Rome the epithet "eternal city", and puts it on the podium, as one of the most beautiful cities in the world.

b) As for the story tourists tell, they concern, above all, the activities they engaged in, but also trip details, tourism services and events or situations experienced. Narratives are anecdotal; events that are usually reported concern 'cultural' experiences, like interaction with local people or unexpected customs, and 'visiting' experiences that struck the tourist. For Rome, the most appreciated cultural experiences regard the food, the positive attitude of Romans, and the atmosphere that is created by all the traces of the past scattered around (many reviewers told that it is how to go back in time); visiting experiences, on the other side, often concern famous attractions as well as 'hidden treasures', and walking paths, which allowed the traveller to admire beautiful sites



without the stress of getting there. The fact that Rome is a 'walkable' city, indeed, is very often mentioned as a desirable feature for a destination; I would say that, here, the reason is not only that one can avoid the stress of moving here and there, but also that when one can easily reach what she likes or needs, she feels at home. Disappointing experiences, in the case of Rome, are connected with the lack of public spaces, traffic, and people who try to take advantage of tourists, are also often mentioned.

Reviewers suggestions, in the end, are mostly about attractions and trip planning, besides general tips on how to enjoy the city the most, adapting behaviour to local culture, and paying attention to small technical details. At the first place among Rome attractions are the Vatican, the Roman Forum, the Coliseum, and the thousands of churches with their artistic treasures.

*5) Which elements of the technological context, cultural context and individual context have to be taken into account to analyze OTR?*

The **technological and cultural context** of OTR has been analyzed in terms of interaction field, that is the piece of social reality where the communicative event takes places, and the interaction schemes it activates, that are a sort of culturally shared 'recipes' for interaction. The interaction field where an OTR is produced gives a frame for its interpretation and provides the common ground for its understanding. At a higher level, the interaction field of a destination OTR is represented by the tourism destination, conceived as people who travel and businesses providing services to facilitate their travel. At a lower level, it is constituted by the implicit dialogue taking place between tourists reporting their experiences online and prospective tourists looking online for information and advice for taking trip decisions. Technical characteristics of the medium (i.e. the online platform) shape the interaction schemes that are made available to inter-agents; in the case of platforms for travel reviews, users can engage in other activities besides reading reviews, like booking, looking at pictures, linking to other websites; this plethora of interaction schemes made available by the platform represents an 'extension' to the review itself.

As for the **individual characteristics** of reviewers, they emerge from the text, both when they are directly unveiled by the author (in connective predicate contextualization), and when constraints or specifications are put to the standpoint. Rome, in particular, is often advised as a suitable destination for history and art lovers, for romantic holidays, and for cultural tourism; but warnings are given to those who suffer confusion and crowds.

## 6.2 Limits

The decision of considering only OTR published by one platform, in a timeframe limited to one year, and concerning only one destination, was driven by the necessity of building a corpus of an adequate size for undertaking a (qualitative) text analysis, but representative enough to somehow generalize results. Since the characteristics of the medium influence the message, though, the application of results to OTR published by other platforms than TripAdvisor should be carefully pondered. It has to be noted, in addition, that the strategic goal of TripAdvisor and the guidelines for traveller review, were basis for defining the communicative purpose of OTR.

There might be, then, slight differences in the structure of OTR published before and after 2011, because of the constant changes in the technological design of platforms.

Limiting the corpus to one destination is not expected to put limits on the generalization of results about structure and argumentative texture of OTR, but yet on their propositional content. Content is, in fact, bound to the object of review, not only in terms of what is exactly said, but also with respect to the topics that are spoken about. Thus, the fact that Rome visitors discuss mainly about attractions, atmosphere and food, does not mean that the same pattern holds for other destinations.

A further investigation of cross-languages specificities may point out differences both in the configuration of dominant and connective predicates, and in the argumentative structure and frequency of certain argument schemes instead of others.

Moreover, the dependence between connective predicates configuration and OTR length needs to be further examined, applying non-arbitrary criteria based on stronger empirical evidence.

The large majority of the OTR in the corpus gave a positive evaluation of the destination and made encouraging visit recommendations; a comparison among positive and negative OTR may reveal differences at the structural level, especially in the configuration of standpoints and arguments.

## 6.3 Future openings

The potential number of OTR that can be retrieved of the web for the same tourism product is incredibly high (at least for products and services related to popular destinations). Such a big amount of information actually exceeds people's information processing capabilities and, in many cases, redundant, in the sense that the same information is provided by many different sources. Vacation planning on the web can, therefore, turn out to be a frustrating experience (De Ascaniis & Gretzel, 2012).

Websites for consumer review usually give the possibility to make a selection of the retrieved content according to some criteria, such as publication date, travellers rating, travel company (e.g. reviews for families, couples, singles or business), helpfulness of the review according to online readers. Nonetheless, they represent external criteria, which do not help to group reviews according to content specific characteristics and, then, they do not allow users to select the reviews with the highest probability to satisfy their information needs and be in line with their decision criteria. Someone looking for a hotel in Rome, for instance, may assign importance to the cleanliness and the location; her search will be driven by a certain idea of what is a clean room, by certain reasons for preferring a location to another, and by a certain image of the location where she would like to stay. The possibility to sort reviews according to the publication date, travellers rating or review helpfulness will not help her that much. She would better need to filter search results according to her definition of cleanliness and to location characteristics. The results of this research form the basis for providing consumer websites designers with indications for supporting online users in the process of information seeking and selection. The elements of OTR, which cannot be missing for an OTR to be a good one (that is, a review that reaches its communicative purpose), have been identified. A formalization effort would now be worth making, to apply theoretical results in two directions: for developing automated strategies to exclude OTR, which do not reach the minimum information standard or provide incongruous or superfluous information; for developing tools for the automatic filtering of OTR, on the base of users' preferences. Pivotal, for this last step, is to extract and formalize constraints and specifications added to the standpoints, as well as reviewer's personal information.

There are, then, different reasons for travelling, from leisure to business reasons, from health to religious reasons. There are, as well, different tourism ideals: the 'beach and sun' vacation maybe ideal for someone but absolutely boring for others. It is possible to speak, in this sense, of *tourism cultures*, which can be more or less stable and prominent, and may vary over time. When someone looks for travel related information and suggestions, she processes search results according to her specific reasons for travelling and, most probably, according to the ideal vacation she has in mind or the tourism culture she belongs to. The identification of tourism culture indicators, and their use for searching OTR, may be of great help for information first selection. Argumentation theory provides, in this respects, suitable tools.

The present research did not give a full account of the linguistic characteristics of OTR. Reviewers use a colloquial and spontaneous register, and do not care for grammatical, form or spelling mistakes. The language is highly emotional, and tends to exaggeration; a wide use of rhetorical figures is made, especially of metaphor, hyperbole and

enumeration. A linguistic analysis would allow to depict the language of OTR, pointing out how emotions are conveyed, how the interlocutor is represented, and characterizing them as a social phenomenon of our time.

A comparative study, then, would be of interest to let emerge the difference between:

- destination reviews and reviews of touristic services as hotels or restaurants, specifically observing which aspects of the former are discussed in the latter, and vice-versa;
- OTR written by travellers and the answers given by the respective business (i.e. DMO, hotel, restaurant), especially in the case of negative reviews, with a focus on the argumentation strategies that are adopted.

As pointed out in the description of the corpus of data (section 3.4), also if the linguistic code prevails, a consumer review is a multimodal artefact, which comprises elements belonging to different semiotic codes. A multimodal analysis, which considers the communicative function of pictures and graphs accompanying the text as well as the role of the text layout, would provide interesting insights in the communicative strategies adopted by reviewers to convey the message, in their impact and effectiveness. The integration of multimodal resources in documents is the focus of the work of Bateman (2008), who provides an overview of issues, approaches and methods, and could therefore lead an investigation in this direction.

One last research direction, I would personally like to follow, pertain to the discussion about the ‘touristic beauty’. What is considered beautiful and desirable is not a shared opinion, but depends on personal values, desires and beliefs. Argumentation theory provides tools to trace the endoxa people rely upon when giving and defending opinions. The reconstruction of the inferential patterns underpinning the opinions about beauty and desirability represents a method to investigate the issue.

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## Annex

### CORPUS OF DATA



## My Trip: Rome

### Online Travel Reviews shorter than 100 words

#### English

“Best food for life” - Traveler rating: 5

I've been to there from 1999.

Italian food is the most delicious food ever.

“Still here in Rome and do not want to leave” - Traveler rating: 5

romantic + beautiful + history everywhere + hot + amazing food + friendly people + one of my favourite place + very good friends in here

“A Must destination” - Traveler rating: 5

Rome in March, slightly off season, was a wonderfully pleasant surprise. Every turn you take, every street you walk through, every piazza you come across is a new discovery and a sensation. The open bus tour gives a good first overview of the city but one really needs to walk through the streets to absorb the vibrancy, sensuality and magnificence of detail. All in all, I highly recommend Rome as a destination for a minimum of 3 days.

“Asthmatics beware!” - Traveler rating: 2

Our visit to Rome and Venice was pretty average, but we did encounter some problems: 1. Italians smoke A LOT! so beware if you are asthmatic, because you might need an extra inhaler. 2. Tourists get charged more, so ask before you buy anything that doesn't have a price. 3. Everything is pretty expensive, so your dollars don't get very far. 4. At the restaurant, be smart, and don't order secondo (which is the meat course)--just skip it altogether (20Euros each). Always order the house wine when available. Beers are expensive at restaurants (6 Euros each) and 1 liter of house wine is about 14Euros (quite the deal).

“Great Rome experience!” - Traveler rating: 5

Rome is a great city, one of the top of the world, so much to see, to do and to enjoy! From Ancient world to modern and contemporary Art, it's such a complete city! I've had a great experience with our tour operator, Beyond Travel services who organized five awesome tour for us, Imperial Rome, Vatican Tour, Classical Rome, Roman Architecture and Italian Cooking Classes, also the hotel they have booked for us was excellent, a great way to live a city. I found Roma Pass also very useful and convenient.

“Hot Tip when visiting Rome” - Traveler rating: 4

I have just returned from a 3 night break to Rome. I recommend anyone travelling there to purchase a Roma Pass online before travelling. I booked mine the night before and collected it on arrival at the airport (just presented the confirmatory email). The pass gives free entry to the first 2 attractions visited and free travel on the buses and metro. I visited the Coliseum avoided all the queues, just went to the Roma Pass entrance and went straight in (avoiding those long lines of people who had not been so sensible!). It saved carrying change for the buses - definitely a good buy.

“Italy’s best place to eat” - Traveler rating: 4

I have spent there 6 days and I was very sad leaving. Rome has a delicious cuisine which we experienced in local restaurants, a bit further from the center. That allowed us to get

in touch with the locals and go to places they personally recommended us. It was a completely different experience but I must recommend it to everybody! This is how every vacation should be!

“My Favorite place in Italy” - Traveler rating: 5

The best city I have ever been to, fun lots of things to do. Food is to die for and the people are more than happy to help. Get to the outskirts of Rome and the food gets better and the people get nicer. Italy is my favorite....

“My favorite Italian City” - Traveler rating: 5

Being a regular traveller to Italy for both business and pleasure this just has to be the best Italy can offer city wise with something for everyone. I have been 8 times and every time I return it's like being there for the first time. They call it the eternal city and it's eternally worth revisiting. My favourite haunting grounds are the Lungotevere walkway and the Trevi fountain area and Piazza di Spagna just perfect to soak up the true atmosphere of this city

“One of Many beautiful Places to visit in Italy” - Traveler rating: 5

My family and I (2 daughters 20 and 22) visited Italy on a 15 Day cosmos tour and our tour started in Rome and Finished in Rome. Included in our tour was the Vatican, Roman Forum, Colosseum and Piazza Navona just to name a few but it was absolutely fantastic. We also did the Angels and Demons tour with a private guide who was awesome. We did this all on foot, so make sure you have good walking shoes and plenty of water. An wonderful experience and can't wait to visit again

“One of the best places to visit” - Traveler rating: 5

Rome was a fantastic place. I heard from some that it was a dirty city but I did not find it to be so. It is very old but that is part of the attraction. The Roman Ruins are definitely a must see and doing it with a tour is also recommended. But be warned that



it is best to prebook your entry into such sites as it can be quite crowded when queuing for a ticket.

The food is great and the people are very friendly. The shopping is also an enjoyable experience. I could not fault it.

“One open to public museum” - Traveler rating: 4

After visiting approximately 15 different countries, my wife and i had the opportunity to visit ROME. It was a wonderful experience. We both love walking during our holidays....well Rome is the best place to do it. In a walking distance, you can visit almost all the ancient Rome. Wonderful places to see and admire. The only disadvantages are that some people and especially taxi drivers do not speak English and that's a problem. In addition some restaurants are too expensive and you cannot communicate with the staff. But above all it is a place that everyone should visit at least once during his/her life. Will return for sure.

“Protect your belongings in Rome” - Traveler rating: 2

Overall, we enjoyed our stay. The history is beyond description. However, take good care of your belongings. We left a suitcase on the train. As soon as we realized it, we called, the concierge called, we returned to the train station, all to no avail. When we filed a police report, we were told that Rome does not have a lost and found, things found are discarded. The train company agreed and would not even talk to us...a lesson learned.

“Really do not wanna leave the city” - Traveler rating: 4

I stayed in Rome for three whole days. So many nice places to visit. Italian pasta we tried a lot. Of course, do not miss the Italian handmade ice-cream. Italian are very helpful, when we need help, they helped us a lot. We both like that city. Hope we can re-visit Rome in the future.

“Rome - a brilliant trip” - Traveler rating: 5

Rome was amazing! I would recommend it to anyone!

My must dos:

Colosseum, try and do the underground tour if you can it was amazing and worth the extra fee; Basilica san Clemente, a church with a secret! Sistine Chapel, breathtaking; Aventine Keyhole, look through and be stunned!

My must eats:

Luzzi's near the Colosseum - great pizza, great price; Da Baffetto near Piazza Navona - great pizza, great atmosphere.

The transport in Rome was easy to use and the one day pass for €4 was well worth it.

Make sure you have comfy shoes as you will be doing lots of walking!

“Rome is an open Museum” - Traveler rating: 5

it is one of the top ten city to visit in Europe, the best time to go there in Spring, Autumn when it is cool weather, don't miss to visit San peter Cathedral and Vatican Museum, walking around Navona Square on the evening, enjoy setting at Piazza del popolo don't miss the taste of roman food

“Rome the great city of Europe” - Traveler rating: 5

Rome is a must see city and it was a great experience. One advise never never never buy a TIM mobile phone or any TIM mobile service. It will let you down at all times. Everything was good but if you are planning to buy a prepaid mobile service never buy TIM.

“The Eternal City” - Traveler rating: 5

Rome is an amazing place, it never sleeps. If you are looking for an honest and reliable airport transfer service look no further than Rome Airport Transfers. They are fantastic and very professional. We were delayed at the airport nearly two hours after the flight had arrived but our driver was still waiting for us. Also during our stay we had to go to a different part of the city and all taxis were on strike but this company was able to take us

to our destination. I would certainly contact them again if we have another Roman holiday.

“The eternal city” - Traveler rating: 4

I have been in Rome two times and I threw coins into Fontana di Trevi again... So I hope to go back again :-) Rome is a beautiful and exciting city. The famous dishes, the hospitality of the people and of course the atmosphere are unforgettable. Beside the sightseeing-musts (St. Peter's Church, Colosseum, Pantheon, Circus Maximus etc.) it is worth to make an unplanned walk in the ancient city, treasures are to be found on almost every corner. The only negative: potential thieves on subway lines...

“What a beautiful city!” - Traveler rating: 5

Rome is truly a beautiful city. These have to be the most fashionable people on earth. Even the homeless were chic! No, I'm not kidding. So, if visiting Rome leave your clearly American-looking all-white gym shoes, athletic shorts, and oversized jeans and t-shirts at home...you will stick out like a sore thumb! Try to stay in the city's center area where you can easily reach the attractions (the Vatican, the Colosseum, the Roman Forum). The restaurants and hotels are more expensive but they are quite nice and the convenience is worth it.

“When in Rome do as the Romans do!” - Traveler rating: 5

We have been to Rome 7 times and each time we go we have found something new to explore. What can I say - the small intimate restaurants in and around the Vatican are wonderful. We usually use the Tiber limo service to take us on the trips just outside of Rome. This city should be on your bucket list.

“Wow!!!” - Traveler rating: 5

I can't believe I waited 40 years to visit Rome!! Wow! I had no idea how much there is to be seen.

Between the Vatican and the INCREDIBLE St Peters Basilica to the numerous churches and monuments I was blown away. It is an amazing city. I almost did not go to see the Colosseum as I assumed I had seen it all in books and the internet. What a mistake!! It is vast in person and has miles of ruins all around. In any case, make sure you spend several days here. It is a shame to be rushed in a city like this.

“A lot of places to discover, great vacation for families” - Traveler rating: 5

the historical monument , the culture and the people what makes the city utterly gorgeous . we are a big family with 2 children under 9 and we had so much fun . it was a great family vacation . Italian people are extremely friendly and the italian cuisine is delicious , we dinned in alot of pizzerias and all of them had delicious food and clean friendly staff . i'd go there again if i had the chance.

“Walking around Rome” - Traveler rating: 5

For those tourists who find walking boring - just try Rome. Start on Via November and make your way to the Trevi Fountain - and all the other sites around. It's truly amazing because you really feel that you are going back in time seeing all the historic places. Taxis are all over so when you get tired walking it's an inexpensive alternative to get to the next spot to see.

## **Italian**

“Bellissima!!!!!!” - Traveler rating: 4

Roma è davvero una città stupenda! La Fontana di Trevi è magnifica, uno spettacolo incantevole! Andate a visitarla e non l'avete vista!

“E' la città eterna” - Traveler rating: 5

Roma è la città eterna, fantastica atmosfera e ricca di storia e cultura, un tutt'uno di divertimento e relax.

“La piu' bella citta' al mondo!!” - Traveler rating: 5

Il top.... non ho mai visto altra citta' con cosi' tanti luoghi, monumenti, rovine, e bellissimi posti da scoprire e visitare!!!

Indimenticabile!!!

“la città eterna...” - Traveler rating: 5

una città che ti toglie il fiato!!! eterna dal colosseo al cuppolone... passeggiare x piazza navona non ha prezzo..

“Caotica ma fantastica” - Traveler rating: 5

Come si fa ad non innamorarsi di Roma.

Hai in pratica tutto a portata di mano.

Vieni catapultato in un'attimo nel glorioso impero romano e muori dalla voglia di tornare indietro nel tempo....

A parte ciò...è troppo caotica mi viene il mal di testa solo a pensare di spostarmi in macchina.

E' inquinatissima...a parte quei pochi parchi sparsi quà e là, nei quali continui per forza a sentire il rumore delle macchine...

Devo ammetterlo, mi piace da morire ma ne farei solo un'oasi per pedoni e ciclisti...

“Er mejio” - Traveler rating: 4

La città è assolutamente meravigliosa, da visitare ed apprezzare in ogni piccolo angolo o vicolo dove tutte le persone cercano di darti il meglio in merito alla assistenza e cordialità (anche se talvolta sono leggermente oppressivi), sicuramente gli stranieri apprezzano più degli italiani ma rimane un punto di forza assieme a tutti i monumenti meravigliosi, anche quelli che dovrebbero essere rimodernati.

“LA CITTA PIU BELLA DEL MONDO” - Traveler rating: 5

La città più bella del mondo, è sempre un piacere tornare a Roma, viverla in ogni suo angolo. E' l'unica città del pianeta che ti offre la possibilità di ammirare l'arte negli spazi pubblici, in strada, nelle piazze, ovunque ci sono opere d'arte.

E' stupenda.

“LA CITTÀ ETERNA” - Traveler rating: 5

La città è bellissima, ricca di storia e di arte. Non ho avuto la possibilità di visitarla come avrei voluto, ma quel che ho visto è stato un'esperienza indimenticabile. Unico neo l'invasione e la maleducazione dei tanti pseudo artisti di strada nei pressi del Colosseo, che di sicuro rovinano l'immagine di Roma agli occhi dei turisti.

“La più bella città del mondo” - Traveler rating: 5

Roma, che abbiamo visitato recentemente io e la mia famiglia composta oltre che da me da mio figlio e mia moglie, è una città bellissima. E' stato fantastico girare per la città, in un clima che ha spesso sfiorato i 20 gradi centigradi. I monumenti ben conservati, i vicoli e i ristoranti oltre agli alberghi, fanno di questa città, la città più bella del mondo. LA GENTE E' MOLTO AFFABILE E I PREZZI VERAMENTE CONTENUTI A FRONTE DI SERVIZI OTTIMI. Tutti dovrebbero visitare la città eterna e andare almeno una volta a vedere e visitare San Pietro e Fontana di Trevi.

“Luogo dove vivo attualmente!” - Traveler rating: 4

Roma è una città incantevole.....

Ho visitato un po' di città europee, ma Roma è una delle città che merita di essere vista assolutamente!!! Io ci vivo da 3 anni, secondo me il periodo migliore per visitarla è in primavera!!! Consiglio a tutte le persone di qualunque età...VISITATELA

“ROMA città ETERNA” - Traveler rating: 4

parlare di ROMA è assurdo tuttila conoscono e ne sono entusiasti ,certo è una città turistica e quindi tutti cercano di spellarti ma se sei accorto te la puoi cavare senza troppo danno,non si può parlre dei monumenti altrimenti ci vorrebbe 100 libri e non in commento insomma la città eterna è SUBLIME

“Roma” - Traveler rating: 4

Roma è una città bellissima, veramente emozionante. La consiglierei a chiunque voglia fare un viaggio in Italia, pagando magari anche poco e senza dover imparare nuove lingue, nè dover uscire dal suo stato. Roma è perfetta per qualsiasi tipo di attrazione: bellissima!

“Rome” - Traveler rating: 5

La Capitale della storia..passeggiare a Roma vuol dire immergersi nell'antichità e sentire il passato attraversarti..è caotica e metropolitana ma piena di stimoli..eccellenti i musei sia di arte classica che moderna..si mangia benissimo..attenzione ai ristoranti del centro..potrebbero essere eccessivamente cari.

“Splendida capitale” - Traveler rating: 4

Sono stata a Roma dopo anni e con solo qualche vago ricordo di quanto avevo visto da bambina. Roma è una città splendida, è un museo a cielo aperto: ovunque ti giri, passeggiando per cercare un bar, puoi vedere ritrovamenti archeologici, pezzi di storia che ti seguono dappertutto. Nonostante il traffico intenso, girarla a piedi da turista è molto piacevole, soprattutto in primavera.

“Un weekend romantico per ricordare” - Traveler rating: 5

La città bellissima per vacanze romantici o per viaggio di nozze. Monumenti sono stupendi, La città vecchia rappresenta tutta la storia dal periodo di Imperia, lo shopping puo essere come carò come è stupende i divertente. Suggerisco a tutti che voliano scappare via dall vita lavorativa e mettersi nell' atmosfera romantica e indimenticabile per tutta la vita.

“Una delle meraviglie del mondo” - Traveler rating: 5

Piena di storia e di cultura, a Roma c'è tutto: vi interessa la pittura, l'architettura, la storia, la scultura, il design, lo shopping, la natura, il cibo, la vita notturna? A Roma c'è e tutto è rappresentato al massimo grado. Per gli amanti dell'arte e della storia nessun'altra città europea è così piena di testimonianze, praticamente un museo a cielo aperto che comprende perle di bellezza dalla preistoria ai giorni nostri. Un concentrato che richiederebbe anni solo per una visita non troppo approfondita, una meraviglia sempre, anche per chi ci vive.

“città eterna” - Traveler rating: 5

roma è una città fantastica, i suoi monumenti le chiese, i vicoli e la vita notturna sono una cosa che non si può dimenticare. girare tra i monumenti in vaticano o trovare una trattoria dove gustare qualcosa di particolare sono una cosa che non ci si può fare mancare nel caso si faccia un giro a roma

“città eternal” - Traveler rating: 5

Cosa vedere a Roma!!!!!!!!!!!! T U T T O!!!!!!!!!!!! Non so cosa scartare perchè ogni angolo ogni cosa anche se piccola dà una certa emozione. Io personalmente ho trovato i romani persone carinissime, gentili, simpatici e socevoli. Non so se avete capito che io amo Roma anche se caotica nel suo traffico ma se siete in vacanza cosa importa il tempo..... Andateci sicuramente vi rimarrà dentro di Voi qualcosa. C'è il mal della Sardegna, il mal d'Africa io ho il mal di Roma

“la mia città preferita per shopping” - Traveler rating: 4

Parlare di roma e fare una recensione della città eterna è un esercizio puramente didattico. La città offre tutte le attrazioni turistiche e di intrattenimento che normalmente vengono richieste quando si viaggia per affari o per piacere. Gli amministratori della città dovrebbero solo aumentare il livello della pulizia delle strade. In città si respira sempre una certa sicurezza che altre grandi capitali non offrono. Personalmente trovo strano che una città come Roma non abbia grandi isole pedonali o



aree del centro esclusive per i pedoni. Il traffico è uno dei peggiori problemi di una città simile.

“la piu' bella del mondo” - Traveler rating: 5

Beh..... che dire? potrei star qui a scrivere per ore ed ore,Roma,la città eterna, la città Santa, la città piu' bella del mondo!! io abito a circa 45 km da roma e comunque,ancora continuo a scoprire scorci nuovi! e' semplicemente fantastica! cosa vedere? beh c' l'imbarazzo della scelta: il colosseo, san pietro,i musei vaticani e il vaticano, castel s.angelo, san pietro e paolo, ara pacis, altare della patria, piazza di spagna,via condotti ,il palatino, il gianicolo,il panteon,le terme di caracalla, il circo massimo,fontana di trevi... personalmente la adoro di notte, e' veramente mozzafiato.

“roma città eterna” - Traveler rating: 5

roma è una città che con la mia fidanzata visito appena posso. mi basta qualche ora di treno e ci troviamo in centro alla stazione termini. poi un alberghetto nelle vicinanze e la città si può tranquillamente visitare a piedi e secondo me in un lungo weekend (3/4 gg) è possibile vedere molte cose interessanti! una giornata dedicata a san pietro e vaticano, una all'antica roma con il colosseo ed una per semplicemente girare la città nelle piazze e fontane magiche. e la sera un ristorante tipico conclude in modo perfetto la giornata. almeno una volta all'anno da visitare!

“roma x 4 x 3 giorni” - Traveler rating: 4

viaggio con figlia e due nipoti.viaggio in Frecciarossa eccezionale (3 ore Milano-Roma) tempo splendido visite come da programma da me elaborato.bed and breakfast (bbcorso22) come da commenti online solo sorpresa di mancanza di connessione wi-fi promessa.ottimi pranzi soprattutto da Paris in trastevere Roma è troppo bella e meritava anche qualche giorno di più

“un salto indietro nel tempo” - Traveler rating: 4

Una città unica, da visitare in almeno quattro giorni, x godere delle sue antiche radici e incredibile patrimonio artistico...e' un po' cara, ma se ci si organizza si risparmia..meglio

andarci in periodi non troppo caldi e studiare prima le varie tappe, x sfruttare a pieno il tempo. Consigliati i bus turistici, magari meglio il primo giorno, cosi' ci si orienta meglio..sicuramente ci torno! Luca

## **German**

“Eine der schönsten Städte der Welt” - Traveler rating: 5

Rom war definitiv eines der Highlights auf meine Reise durch Italien.

Schöne, saubere Stadt mit schönen Menschen und tollen Sehenswürdigkeiten. Super Lokale und tolle Hotels.

“Rom, eine wirklich bezaubernde Stadt” - Traveler rating: 5

In dieser Stadt gibt es viele Einkaufs- und Erlebnismöglichkeiten. Hier kann man den Kulturtourismus leben. Sehr günstige und exzellente Lokale und viele Grünflächen ergänzen das positive Image.

“Sooooo romantisch” - Traveler rating: 5

Rom ist wunderschön, romantisch, super Essen, tolle Sehenswürdigkeiten, die Stadt hat Charme, Leidenschaft, pulsiert, Flair. Leider etwas teuer aber es ist es wert!

“Ausflug in die Antike” - Traveler rating: 5

Nicht unbedingt im Sommer aufgrund der Hitze empfehlenswert, aber im Frühling und Herbst ein absoluter Traum. Super Rückblick in die Antike mit unzähligen Sehenswürdigkeiten. Aber auch zum Shoppen für den gefüllten Geldbeutel sehr geeignet. Sehr gutes Essen an jeder Ecke rundet das Bild ab. Für jeden ist etwas dabei.

“Beeindruckende Stadt” - Traveler rating: 5

Rom ist auf jedenfall eine Reise wert. Wir waren im Frühling dort, das ist eine besonders gute Jahreszeit für Städtereisen, man hat ohne zu schwitzen die Möglichkeit in Ruhe

die Stadt und all die Sehenswürdigkeiten zu erkunden . Und Sehenswürdigkeiten hat diese Stadt sehr viele zu bieten. Neben Colosseum und Engelsburg ist natürlich der Petersdom und der Trivibrunnen ein absolutes Muss. Sehr schöne Stadt.

“Beste Pizza und Eis der Welt!” - Traveler rating: 5

Bei einer Sightseeing-Tour durch Rom muß man sich nicht zwingend in ein Restaurant zum Essen begeben.

Einfach bei einem der zahlreichen Pizzabäckern ein, zwei oder drei Stückchen Pizza (wird auf Wunsch auch nochmal warm gemacht) oder auch bei einer Gelateria ein Eis im Cornetto (Hörnchen) holen und auf einen Platz setzen und das "dolce vita" genießen!!!

“Das schöne Rom” - Traveler rating: 4

Rom ist eine sehr schöne Stadt, in der es vor Touristen nur so wimmelt. Die Spanische Treppe ist beeindruckend, Restaurants und Pizzerien reihen sich aneinander und die Aussicht auf die Stadt von einer Anhöhe aus (z.B. Kuppel des Petersdoms) ist atemberaubend.

Der Ablauf am Flughafen ist leider etwas chaotisch, hat den Ausflug aber nicht negativ beeinflusst.

Ein Besuch in dieser Stadt ist also sehr empfehlenswert!

“Die Stadt in Europa” - Traveler rating: 5

Eine der schönsten Städte in Europa, wenn nicht in der ganzen Welt. Geschichte pur und ein einmaliges Erlebnis. Rom MUSS man einfach besuchen und die Geschichte, das Stadtleben und das gute Essen genießen. Am besten reist man individuell und wohnt man in einer der Privaten Zimmer im alten Stadtzentrum. Von dort geht man zu Fuß oder nimmt den Bus zu allen Sehenswürdigkeiten.

“Die Stadt überhaupt” - Traveler rating: 5

Rom ist für mich die Stadt überhaupt. Ich war jetzt schon unzählige Male in Rom und könnte immer wieder hingehen. Allein am Trevi Brunnen zu verweilen ist so schön. Leider ist Rom doch immer sehr voll, aber man muss dennoch alles sehen.

“Die ewige Stadt” - Traveler rating: 5

Die ewige Stadt Rom. Im Hochsommer kann es sehr heiß werden - im Winter nur kühl. Daher Juli und August für den Besuch eher meiden. Zahlreiche antike Bauwerke lassen historisches Feeling aufkommen und vermitteln, was die Menschheit vor 2000 Jahren schon alles zu schaffen vermochte.

“Ein touristisches \_Muss” - Traveler rating: 5

Rom muss man erleben und gesehen haben! Kirchen, museen oder auch nur die quirilige italienische Hautstadt mit ihren schoenen Plaetzen und kleine Strassen. Das Einkaufsviertel bei der spanische Treppe, wo alle grossen Marken dieser Welt zusammenfinden, die Tourismusmagneten rund um den Trevi Brunnen oder den Corso, der am Wochenende autofrei wirklich seinem Namen die Ehre macht. Der Vatikan mit seine Kunstschaetzen als Zentrum einer (geistigen ) Weltmacht beeindruckt, der Petersdom ueberwaeltigt. Wie geagt: ein Muss fuer jeden Reisenden welcher Interessenlage auch immer.

“Geschichte pur” - Traveler rating: 5

Nicht umsonst sagt man, dass Rom die schönste Stadt der Welt ist. Über 2000 Jahre Geschichte. Wenn man die Stadt besucht, kommt man nicht vom Staunen heraus. Trotz des vielen Verkehrs, findet man wunderschöne, ruhige Piazas um jede Ecke.

Wir haben im Stadtbezirk Trastevere gewohnt, was uns sehr gut gefallen hat. Auf dem Platz gibt es täglich ein Wochenmarkt. Dieser Bezirk hat ein besonderes Flair. Hier gibts eine Menge gute und vor allem sehr günstige Restaurants, was wir von Rom nicht gedacht hätten.

“Jederzeit nochmal hin” - Traveler rating: 5

In Rom atmet quasi jeder Quadratmeter Geschichte. Man sollte sich mindestens drei bis vier Tage Zeit nehmen, um auch nur die wichtigsten Sehenswürdigkeiten besuchen zu können. Besonders schön sind der abendliche Petersplatz mit dem beleuchteten Petersdom, die Fontana di Trevi und natürlich das Forum Romanum mit dem beeindruckenden Colosseum direkt daneben.

Wer zeitlich variabel ist, sollte hier unbedingt die Hochsaison meiden.

“Kulturhauptstadt Europas” - Traveler rating: 5

Rom ist eine TOP-Wahl für eine Städtreise. Einfach per Flugzeug zu erreichen, bietet Rom eine große Auswahl an kulturellem Angebot.

Mit dem Kolosseum, dem Forum Romanum etc. sind zahlreiche Bauten des antiken Roms auf einem Raum vorhanden. Zudem lockt der Vatikan. Abend laden stimmungsvolle Plätze wie der Piazza Navona zum Flanieren und Speisen an.

Mindestens 2 volle Tage sind einzuplanen. Beste Jahreszeit im späten Frühling oder Herbst, da im Hochsommer die Besichtigungen sehr anstrengend und heiß sind.

“Rom - Reise durch die Zeit” - Traveler rating: 4

Rom hätte ich mir nicht so toll vorgestellt. Das Colosseum, die Stadt an sich, alles erinnert an alte historische Zeiten! Wir haben in einer kleinen Trattoria zu Mittag gegessen, mit karierten Tischdecken, hausgemachten Nudeln und leckerem Wein bei Sonnenschein. Rom ist einfach wundervoll! Aber vorsicht vor Fotobetrügern, machen ein Foto und wollen dann 5,- Euro dafür!!!!

“Rom - die ewige Stadt” - Traveler rating: 5

da ich nun schon sehr sehr viele städte von europa kenne, muss habe ich nach meinen zweiten besuch wieder festgestellt, dass mir persönlich die stadt rom zum meinen city-favoriten gehört. ich bin von dem flair von dieser stadt einfach extrem begeistert. schon alleine die richtig alten gebäuden die antike stadt rom und die vielen guten restaurants und cafe sind einzigartig. ebenso die unzähligen geschäfte die eine super qualität bieten und dies auch zu normalen preise finde ich spitze. natürlich gehören die mopeds und

das quirlige Leben auf den Straßen auch dazu. Einfach eine super Stadt, die man in min. 4 Tagen besuchen sollte !!!

“Rom - empfehlenswertes Reiseziel” - Traveler rating: 5

Die wunderbare Stadt von langer Geschichte und wichtiger Punkt für christliche Pilger. Rom bietet den Reisenden zahlreichen Aktivitäten und Sehenswürdigkeiten an. Sogar während des kurzen Aufenthalts muss man Vatikan mit fabelhafter St. Peter Basilika besuchen und köstlichen Eis „artigianale“ probieren. Hier in Rom befinden sich verschiedene antike Orte z.B. Colosseum, Foro Romano, Pantheon, Pyramide, Termini di Caracalla und viel anderen in jeder Winkel der Straße, mehr Kirchen als Tagen im Jahr und die Hauptstadt der Christenheit – Vatikan. Ich empfehle diese Stadt sowohl für kurzen Wochenendtrips als auch für längere Aufenthalte, denn immer ist es zu kurz um diese Stadt gut kennenlernen zu können.

“Rom sehen und genießen” - Traveler rating: 4

Rom ist bekanntlich eine der historisch wichtigsten Städte Europas. Eine ganze Epoche lang wurde von hier geherrscht. Die alten Gebäude aus der Zeit sind heute zwar Ruinen, aber doch interessante und lohnenswerte Ziele. Mit der Metro gelangt man schnell und günstig von einem Ende der Stadt in das andere. Der Vatikan ist ebenso mit seinen sakralen Bauwerken eins der Highlights der Stadt.

“Rom, wirklich die ewige Stadt...” - Traveler rating: 4

Rom, die Hauptstadt von bella Italia, ist sehr gut sowohl per Bahn, Flugzeug und auch per Auto zu erreichen. Wie schon das Sprichwort sagt: "Alle Wege..." Rom hat unendlich viel an kulturellen, historischen und wunderschönen Bauwerken zu bieten. Mein Tipp: Genießen Sie die vielen kleinen Parks und machen dort zur Mittagszeit Picknick unter einem schattigen Baum!

“Rom.- Führung Kulturelles Highlight” - Traveler rating: 5

Ich war vergangene Woche mit meinen Kindern (9+11 Jahre) in Rom und habe bei "DurchDieEwigkeit"-Führungen eine Tour über die Foren und durch das Kolosseum

gebucht. Absolut super und empfehlenswert! Sowohl für mich äußerst interessant, aber auch spannend für die Kinder (gerade für Kinder ist es ja häufig langweilig). Unser Führer war extrem gut vorbereitet und nahm sich viel Zeit für unsere Fragen. Man hatte den Eindruck, dass keine Standardtexte runtergeleiert wurden, sondern die Führung speziell für uns erdacht wurde.

“Schöne Stadt, zuviele Touris” - Traveler rating: 4

Rom ist eine sehr schöne Stadt mit jeder Menge Sehenswürdigkeiten, wie es auch zu erwarten ist.

Was mir allerdings nicht so gefällt (und ich bin mir bewußt, dass ich auch ein Teil davon bin) ist die Tourismus-Industrie. Die Sehenswürdigkeiten sind völlig überlaufen von Touris und dazu kommen noch diese tierisch nervigen Straßenverkäufer.

Vorsicht Taschendiebe, vor allem in Bus und Bahn wird alles geklaut, was nicht niet und nagelfest ist.

Nichts desto trotz, man muss die ewige Stadt mal gesehen haben!

“Schönste Stadt der Welt!!” - Traveler rating: 5

Rom die ewige Stadt. Rom ist (zusammen mit Paris) die schönste Stadt der Welt! Nirgends gibt es so viele Sehenswürdigkeiten, kleine gemütliche Kneipen, gute Restaurants kulturelle Angebote wie in Rom. Rom ist so romantisch mit seinen wunderschönen Plätzen, Parks, Brunnen und Gärten. Die unzähligen Obeliskten, Kirchen antiken Sehenswürdigkeiten oder die Vatikanstadt verleihen Rom den Status der unübertroffenen Einzigartigkeit! Die Szenetreffe, Diskotheken, Clubs und Bars sorgen dafür, dass in Rom niemals die Lichter ausgehen und für alle immer was los ist. Rom ist die Stadt, in der man für immer leben möchte!

“Sehenswerte Stadt” - Traveler rating: 5

Rom ist eine sehr schöne Stadt, die mit vielen Sehenswürdigkeiten jährlich eine Menge Touristen aus aller Welt in ihren Bann zieht. Die jeweiligen Sehenswürdigkeiten wie der Vatikan und das Colosseum sind mit der Metro sehr gut zu erreichen. Ein Tagesticket kostet mit 4 € auch recht günstig. Eine Pizza kann man etwas abseits der Haupttouristenziele auch recht günstig genießen.

“Tausend Wege führen nach Rom” - Traveler rating: 5

Die wunderschöne antike römische Stadt ist einfach was herrliches für verliebte Paare !! Rom ist mit dem Flugzeug aus Deutschland, Österreich und der Schweiz sehr leicht zu erreichen. Zahlreiche Fluglinien fliegen mehrmals täglich nach Rom. Der Flughafen Fiumicino liegt etwas ausserhalb der Stadt, jedoch ist er mit dem Leonardo Express sehr leicht von der Innenstadt zu erreichen. Für ein Taxi muss man ca. 45-50 € berechnen, jedoch wenn man mehr als 5 Personen ist, muss ein Großraumtaxi her, was zusätzliche Gebühren auf sich zieht !

“Traumhaft schöne Stadt” - Traveler rating: 5

Die italienische Hauptstadt ist bekannt für ihre vielen Sehenswürdigkeiten. Man sollte sich viel Zeit nehmen und am Besten alles zu Fuß erkunden. So kann man vom Colosseum über den Zirkus Maximus bis hin zur Spanischen Treppe und der Fontana di Trevi alle Sehenswürdigkeiten zu Fuß erkunden. Rom ist auf alle Fälle ein Reise wert und sollte jeder mal gesehen haben.

“Wer Italien mag.....” - Traveler rating: 5

.....für den ist Rom auf jedenfall ein Reise wert. Speziell im Frühling sehr zu empfehlen. Wenn es noch nicht so heiß ist, macht Sightseeing viel mehr Spaß. Es gibt sehr viel zu sehen. Vorallem für Kulturbegiesterte und Freunde der Geschichte ist es auf jedenfall einzigartig! Viele wunderschöne Gebäude und Ausgrabungen gibt es zu bewundern, auf der einen Seite, und auf der anderen sehr moderne Viertel mit super Einkaufsmöglichkeiten!! Traditionellerweise gibt es wunderbares Essen und gemütliche Kaffees und Bistros!!

“eitreise in die Vergangenheit” - Traveler rating: 5

Fuer Rom sollte man viel Zeit einplanen, die Stadt ist wie ein ganzes Museum. Nicht verpassen sollte man das Colosseum, den Petersdom, den man kostenfrei besichtigen kann, das Pantheon, den Trevi-Brunnen und die Engelsburg. Die Stadt sollte man zu Fuss erkunden. Man sieht ueberall tolle Sachen. Man muss gut auf sein Geld aufpassen,



es gibt ueberall Taschendiebe, vor allem in den öffentlichen Verkehrsmitteln und bei Touristenansammlungen.

“Zentrum der alten Welt” - Traveler rating: 5

Rom mit seinen sieben Hügeln war die Hauptstadt der antiken Welt. Auf dem kleinsten Hügel steht das Kapitol. Nach Theodor Heuss ist das Kapitol neben der Akropolis und Golgota einer der Hügel, auf denen Europa gegründet wurde. Mit Senatorenpalast und der Treppe ein beeindruckender Ort. Rom muss man einfach gesehen haben. Hier sind so viele historische Highlights auf einem Platz versammelt, das man immer wiederkommen muss.

“Zu viel Information für drei Tage” - Traveler rating: 4

Rom, mit seiner Geschichte, ist wirklich schön anzuschauen. Zwar stören die vielen Baustellen und Ausgrabungsstellen das Gesamtbild der Stadt, aber ohne diese wäre es eben nicht Rom. Alles ist sehr gut zu Fuß zu erreichen und man kommt gar nicht mehr zur Ruhe zwischen den ganzen Sehenswürdigkeiten. Ein riesiger Nachteil: Für eine so Internationale Stadt wie Rom, ist die Tatsache, dass Hinweisschilder an den jeweiligen Sehenswürdigkeiten lediglich in Italienisch, Französisch und Englisch betextet sind, ein absolutes No-go!!! Von den doch zum Teil sehr hochnäsigen Italienern (besonders den Bediensteten in den Restaurants gar nicht zu sprechen.

“die ewige Stadt” - Traveler rating: 5

hallo, ich war zum 2. Mal in Rom und im Holiday Inn Express mit 4 Personen. Das Preis/Leistungsverhältnis ist sehr gut und das Hotel sauber und zentral gelegen- Frühstücksbuffet sehr gut und ausreichend- Service sehr gut- Zimmerqualität sehr gut- Lage sehr gut, direkt an U-Bahn oder Buslinie zum Zentrum ca. 20 Minuten

“die ewige Stadt” - Traveler rating: 5

Nicht um sonst sagt man , dass Rom die schönste Stadt der Welt ist. Sehr viele Sehenswürdigkeiten und antike Architektur. Der Vatikan, Stadt in der Stadt , ist auf jeden Fall ein Muss. Wir haben in dem Stadtteil Trastevere gewohnt. Sehr gute

Verbindung. Ein Ticket für die Tram kostet 1 Euro, muss man aber vorher in einem Kiosk besorgen. Wir haben ein Tagesticket für Hopp on hopp off Bus gekauft, um die wichtigsten Sehenswürdigkeiten zu sehen und vorallem zu hören, da man im Bus die Sprache wählen kann. Sehr empfehlenswert.

“eine wunderschöne sehenswerte Stadt” - Traveler rating: 5

Rom hat so viel zu bieten für jeden Geschmack, dass ich sicher bin, dass sich jeder Reisende hier wohl fühlen wird. Hat man erstmal eine Orientierung, so erkennt man, dass in dieser an sich großen Stadt alle Sehenswürdigkeiten bequem zu Fuss zu erreichen sind. Die Stadt hat ein wunderbares Flair, sowohl im Winter zur Weihnachtszeit als auch im Sommer. Auf mich wirkt die Stadt besonders bei Dunkelheit, wenn alle Plätze und Straßen geheimnisvoll beleuchtet sind. Im Sommer bietet sich besonders eine Besichtigung abends an, da es dann nicht mehr so heiß ist und die Stadt trotzdem mit Cafes und Restaurants sehr belebt wirkt!

“historisches rom” - Traveler rating: 4

in rom kann man die meisten sehenswürdigkeiten zu fuß erkunden: ob der petersdom mit seinem riesigen platz davor, ob der trevvi brunnen oder das forum romanum. nicht zu vergessen sind das colloseum, in das auch ein blick ins innere lohnt. weiter ist auch noch das pantheon erwähnenswert. im hochsommer kann die tour wegen der hitze und des gestanks der mopeds allerdings sehr anstrengend sein

“mein Favorit in Italien” - Traveler rating: 5

Ich bin eigentlich kein so großer Italienfan, aber Rom sollte man mal erlebt und gesehen haben. Das Mausoleum, die Vatikan-Ecke, das ganze italiensiche Flair, einfach toll und erlebenswert; fast auch zu jeder Jahreszeit, denn Italien hat einfach ein gutes Klima.

“mein Favorit in Italien” - Traveler rating: 5

Rom ist einfach genial, wegen der Freundlichkeit der Leute, und deren Essen. Nicht zu vergessen die ganzen einmaligen Sehenswürdigkeiten!! Eines braucht ihr sicher: Geduld bei der Bushaltestelle,...es gibt keine Uhrzeiten. DeB Bus kommt wenn er will.

“sehr sehenswert” - Traveler rating: 5

Mit öffentlichen Verkehrsmitteln ist Zentrum der Stadt vom Flughafen Ciampino aus preisgünstig zu erreichen zuerst per Bus (Haltestelle direkt vor dem Flughafen, Bezahlung beim Busfahrer) bis zur U-Bahn Station „Anagnina“, dann weiter mit der U-Bahn. Als Fahrtdauer sollte man ca. 1,5 Stunden einplanen. Wer plant, etwa eine Woche in der Stadt zu bleiben, für den wird die Anschaffung einer Wochenkarte (kann schon an der U-Bahn Station „Anagnina“ gekauft werden) empfohlen. Mit dieser Wochenkarte können alle U-Bahn-, Bus- Linien genutzt werden, oder die Bahn- Linie zum Meer.

“wunderbare stadt” - Traveler rating: 5

immer ein dauerbrenner zum nachleben vor allem der römischen und päpstlichen epochen, am besten wohnt.

## **Online Travel Reviews longer than 100 words**

### **English**

“A beautiful walkable city” - Traveler rating: 4

When in Rome try to know the city by walking. Start in the Coliseum and after admiring this architectural beauty enter the Roman Forum and also walk along its ruins. It is a wonderful experience. The Trevi Fontana is beautiful in the evening and you can not miss the magnificent church in front of it. After spending at least one hour there you can continue your walking tour to the Pantheon area and have dinner in one of the restaurants which surrounds the piazza. This is only a brief summary of the many things you can do and see in Rome when you only have one and a half day there, which was our case. We were there because we were taking a cruise at the Civitavecchia port, so we try to take advantage from our tight schedule. But we did a lot. Another hint: it does not matter your religious beliefs, but spending at least five hours on Vatican city is something simply special. And make it more special trying to climb to St Peter's basilica dome....no words.

Last , but not least, beware of Rome's traffic. Double check before crossing a street.

“A late comer to the Eternal City” - Traveler rating: 4

At 60 I have just experienced my first visit to Rome.

For anybody who has an interest in History, Art, Architecture and good cuisine (all of which apply to me) a trip to the Eternal City comes highly recommended. Try to stay in the city instead of having to travel in and thereby have the opportunity of promenading around the city at night (when the lights are on!). The Trevi Fountain is best experienced at night.

It's not cheap but Italy has never been that kind of destination. Also, you can encounter the inevitable rip-off merchants at the main tourist spots (eg Colosseum) but we found them to be a low-level irritation. Just say no.

A visit to St. Peter's Square on Sunday morning is a must (whether or not you are catholic) but take an umbrella against the sun; there's no shade!

One niggle: Unless you stop at one of the many restaurants, cafes or bars (and hence will be expected to buy a drink!) there is virtually nowhere to sit down for a break.

Apart from three benches located in the jewish quarter we found none anywhere else!

“Absolutely Wonderful Trip to Rome and Venice!” - Traveler rating: 5

I was a little apprehensive about going on this trip. We had booked a flight and a hotel and only one tour. I'm generally not a "fly by the seat of your pants" kind of girl! Needless to say this trip was wonderful! After 10 days I didn't want to go home. We stayed in a little B&B called B&B Giovy near the train station. Giovanna one of the hosts and the rest of her family made you feel like you were part of her family. Honestly!

Yes, adjusting to a new culture and city was challenging at times, but my husband and I discovered people everywhere are generally kind and helpful. We made mistakes but had fun and a little frustration trying to figure out how to solve our little dilemmas. We saw amazing historical sites like Bernini sculptures (unbelievable), Michaelangelo paintings and sculptures, Pompeii (a tour we took from Rome worth every penny), and churches that made you feel God was right next to you!

A day trip to Venice was my husband's idea. I was not overly enthusiastic about it because of the distance. Believe me it was one of the highlights of our trip! We took an express train from Rome to Venice. Seeing the Grand Canal for the first time is awe inspiring! Our pictures do not do it justice. i could write more than a thousand words to describe our trip. Every day was an adventure I wish everyone could experience.

“Beautiful city ruined by traffic” - Traveler rating: 2

I visited Rome for the first time last year and I was terribly disappointed. This beautiful and historic city is ruined by 2 things, traffic and graffiti. I felt on edge the whole time because fast moving apparently out of control traffic, gets EVERYWHERE up the narrowest alley way you will be flattened to the wall by speeding motor bikes.

Every available wall space is daubed with graffiti except for the very oldest buildings in the forum I am not exaggerating even if you come from a pretty grim British inner city you will be shocked to see these daubs on every surface. There is also a lack of anywhere to sit down ie public benches, you see tired visitors sitting in gutters and there is very little green space, compared with say Paris. I was so relieved to get out of Rome and move to Florence which is much better. The nicest Italian experience I have had by far though is Lake Garda. I never want to see Rome again

“Best City of all (excluding London)” - Traveler rating: 5

Have always maintained that I will never visit anywhere more than once (the world being a big place) HOWEVER that was before I went to Rome. Now on my sixth visit.

From Imperial to Renaissance Rome, what with fabulous sites and museums (many free to European pensioners), a bustling, lively city life, pavement cafes for late night brandy and coffee- Navona, Rotunda etc.

Obvious places;

Colosseum, Forum, Vatican , Catacombs plus the slightly less obvious: Ostia (one of my favourites), the Carracalla Baths, the Church of Santa Maria Della Concezione dei Cappocchini (just off Piazza Barberini) the church of the skeletons! I could go on and on and I still have not visited Villa D'Este, Hardians Villa and possibly many other wonderful sights .

Any suggestions?

“Beware the touts!” - Traveler rating: 4

Rome is best discovered by wandering around by yourselves. However, one firm tip: IGNORE the touts telling you they will get you in past the queues (which are fast moving, anyway). They charge huge fees for telling you in barely understandable English things which you can discover from the guide leaflets/books freely available. The Vatican is free entry for the most part, anyway. Don't miss the tombs...very emotional.

Especially do not let the "gladiators" take your foto...with your own camera!...as they DEMAND 5 euros per person to do this; a fact which they will not reveal before they snap you. Ditto rose-givers...this is NOT a romantic gesture, and the rose price is also 5 euros, non-negotiable. I was struck on the back with a plastic sword when I refused to allow my foto to be taken, causing him to snap me before I could recover.

The open top tour buses are great and good value. Look down minor streets for wonderful restaurants.

“Brilliant Weekend away” - Traveler rating: 5

Just returned from a brilliant weekend in Rome and what a amazing place it is. Spend the whole 3 days walking around in astonishment at the historical and cultural relics dotted all round this interesting city. Wherever you look, theres always something that catches your eye, whether it be a centuries old church or a quaint pizzeria theres something for everyone. The size of the city makes getting around and seeing everything you need to a doddle as you could probably walk from one end of the city to the other in about 45 minutes (be warned the Roman city streets aren't the easiest on the feet, very uneven and cobblerly). Very much recommend seeing all the sites with a tour guide -especially the colosseum and the vatican city! Other than that.... just explore. The city felt pretty safe with a quite an strong police presence (take that as you will). Our hotel was perfectly placed for us to walk to all the attractions. On arrival they gave us maps and were very helpful with organising trips, etc. Room was basic but clean, modern and had everything we needed for just a few nights! Would definitely recommend the Residenza Bourghese and the Restaraunt a Marina just literally to the left of the hotel!

ROME IS A MUST DO!!

“Celebrating 25 Years of Marriage in Roma - An Amazing City” - Traveler rating: 5

We celebrated 25 Years of Marriage by staying a month in Europe in May 2010. A few days in Roma was a must and amazing. Highly recommend private tour of the Vatican. We found most of the guides are Profs. in Archeology and are a well of information on history, old and new politics, the great artists, (gossip) and you get to walk right in to everywhere. We found walking from site to site was easy. Stayed right by the Trevi Fountain, walked to the Forum, The Coloseum, and the Hard Rock Cafe was a breeze. And the food and wine well - fabulous. Fun to walk down side streets and find a local cafe where everyone is speaking Italian and you are the only tourist is just our cup of tea. Another recommendation is to hire a private driver to pick you up at your hotel and take you to airport. It cost us 50 Euros. Can't image what taxi would have costs as it is a long ways from downtown to airport. We are already planning our next trip. There is just to much to see, do, wine to drink, and food to eat. And the language is like music to the ears. We learned a few Italian phrases and found that if you do "try" to speak the language you will be treated very well.

“Great sites shame about the rest” - Traveler rating: 2

Rome has a lot to offer in terms of historical sites and that's its main draw and the italians seem to take advantage of that and there is a lot of negative things which it should try and improve on. Noone mentions the ignorance of the people or the stench of urine on the streets from the homeless and the queues for the sites and touts on the streets all of which made the experience for me somewhat marred and disappointing for what was supposed to be a treat and special experience. So many reviews say how you will want to return and i really do not. It was my fortieth birthday a special occasion which ended up a nightmare day. The food was well below average and despite horrendous queues we missed out on the vatican museum by 5 minutes and they are so inpolite about it.

“Most romantic place on earth!” - Traveler rating: 5

Rome has to be the most romantic place on earth. You can walk hand in hand to all the monuments. You can marvel at the beautiful statues and monuments, and be saddened by those whose purpose was not for beauty. There is so many cafes to sit and enjoy the scenery, people watch, enjoy the food and wine or just listen to the many sounds of Rome; from street vendors, street musicians and even police whistles whisking you away from defacing the monuments. The cobblestone roads make walking a little difficult if you don't wear proper walking shoes. We did so much sight seeing that we left no time for shopping, but the clothes in the windows were classy and fashionable. I will return again one day...

“Our favourite view of Rome from the hills and tip on the Vatican Museum” - Traveler rating: 5

-Totally by coincidence we ended up on the Passegiata del Gianicolo and were so surprised to find this promenade overlooking Rome, where most Roman families come for a walk with their families on Sunday morning. You can catch a bus up or get a taxi and walk back down in only a few minutes. The view from the promenade is really worth it and there's a couple of places you can get a coffee / drink.

- second tip is to book the Vatican museum online, it will save you a huge amount of queuing, in fact in high season it may save you up to 2 hrs of queue !! Make sure to book in advance as you get specific visiting times, but at least you do not need to queue at all.



Don't forget a shawl to cover your shoulders when entering the Sistine chapel, they are very strict on the dress code.

- when entering a restaurant, make sure to study the price list for the drinks, we realised that very often there's no price advertised and then it's too late and you're paying up to 7 euros for a beer !!

“Roma a true wonder” - Traveler rating: 5

What can one say, well we threw our coins in the Trevi Fountain wishing our return, wishful thinking I know but one we will action. We stayed only one day due to our cruise itinerary but that one day was filled with seeing amazing things. Rome would have to be one of the most incredible cities on the planet if not the best. Next time we will stay for many more days, yet it will still not be enough. The Colosseum, Forum, Catacombs, Pantheon, Trevi Fountain, Spanish Steps, Vatican City, the people, the food and the shopping, I can go on, but where else can you see and do so much in one city in one day. And I know I have left so much out, but we only had one day, our guide played the song Arrivederci Roma on our way back to our ship, what a fitting way to end our short tour of Rome, we will be back.

“Roma!” - Traveler rating: 4

A beautiful city with many amazing sites! Loved seeing all the art work in the Vatican - what an amazing experience. Well worth a visit. The Trevi fountain and the Spanish Steps are a must see. As a single woman I found many Romans quite stand offish. The one bad experience I had was at the hotel I stayed in. The Stella Hotel was run by an extremely rude manageress. I arrived to find they had made a mistake and not booked me in for the first night of my stay, and were loath to sort this out, and then were very rude to me for the rest of my stay! This was a real shame, as it really marred what was otherwise a lovely trip.

“Rome - City of Gelato and Pizza!!!” - Traveler rating: 5

I just wanted to share with you my experience of Rome.

Travelling in on the train from Fiumicino Airport, once you hit Rome, oh my goodness it is a sea of chaos and people bustling around!

Trying to find our bus to the hotel was a nightmare!

Let me ease your mind...in actuality, Rome is very easy to negotiate once you get your bearings. One key piece of advice I would give anyone travelling there is to invest in a 'Roma Pass'.

For 29euros each, you receive a little card that enables you to travel on public transport (busses and trains and underground) for free for 3 days. You also get FREE entry to the first 2 sightseeing attractions and further discounts with this card! It ended up saving me and my boyfriend an awful lot of 'wasted money' (which I consider to be anything you spend on anything other than food and gifts!

“Rome in 5 hours” - Traveler rating: 4

We had one day in Rome as part of a cruise ship destination. With a lot of fast walking and some good planning we were able to see: the colosseum, the forum, the ruins, the Trevi fountain, the parthenon, Spanish steps, St Angelo castle, temple of Hadrian, St Peter's square and several other monuments and buildings in between, and grab a delicious pizza lunch on a small patio at an out of the way cafe. Sure it was a rushed day but we were actually able to see more of these tourist sites than fellow travelers who used a cab to get around. If you are going to be in Rome for any length of time then I'd want to spend a lot longer than we did at each place, but it was a great way to get a quick picture of the highlights of the city.

“Rome wasn't built in a day and you can't see it in only one either!” - Traveler rating: 4

Wow what a city! It is huge and there is so much to see that the next time I go I am staying a minimum of one week - just in Rome. I like to tell people that I had the Cliff Notes version of Italy. I was in the country for 10 day's and saw from Venice to Pompeii and a lot in between, but the most impressive was Rome. It left me awestruck. The public transportation was easy to navigate and most people spoke English. The Only negative thing I have to say is there are TONS of people who take advantage of the tourists (this was in EVERY Italian town I visited). If you want the audio tours get the devices at the site you want to see - NOWHERE ELSE - not the tourism bureau or any vendors -get it at the gate when you get your ticket to get in! Don't get in a picture

with ANY characters (Except Venice during Carnival) - they gouge you for money and are very insistent that you pay them for posing with you. We paid for a guided tour of the Vatican - this was actually worth it - you get some good anecdotes to go with what you are seeing and it is nice to have someone to ask questions of. Overall Rome is spectacular and I highly recommend it.

“Rome, Italy” - Traveler rating: 4

I and my wife had a two day visit to Rome in the beginning of this month. Few lessons learned are given below. Hotels are expensive compared to other cities in Italy. Public transport is good. We stayed in a hotel close to a metro station. So the transport costs were minimal. The termini station in Rome is large as it is a shopping centre too. So there is chance that one can get lost in there. One site requires a day to see. Beware of touts and cheats or pickpockets as most tourist sites are crowded. We faced a trio out of which two pretended to be from police and flashed an identity card and tried to con us at Vatican. When we made noise and are going to the police station they went away. Every souvenir they sell are high prized and mostly made in china. They charge tickets to enter into most sites and long queues can be seen every where. Use of internet booking where ever available is a must to avoid waste of time and energy.

“Rome, Italy - An Open Air Museum” - Traveler rating: 5

Spent 4 days in Rome, Italy and found it to be fantastic. It was truly like being in An Open Air Museum. There is so much to see and do. Highly recommend a personal tour guide to help get around and see more. It is well worth the money spent. Our tour guide was named Luca for our trip and felt like we were with family the whole time. Very knowledgeable and easy to talk to. Spoke good english and knew history facts to go with the visual tour with a lot of stopping and getting into the buildings and attractions. Rome was beautiful and truly a place you could go more than once and get a new experience each time. Stayed at Hotel Oxford near Spanish Steps and was nicely done and very European. No negatives to discuss on this entry. Hotel was within a few blocks of American Embassy and several attraction sites like Trevi Fountain. Totally enjoyable.

“This is one exciting city” - Traveler rating: 5

This is my second time visiting Rome, and the more i spend time in this city, the more i fell in love with it. Just like that movie, Roman Holiday, Rome gets into your blood and it becomes a nostalgic place in your heart. Walking on cobbled stones, sitting at Spanish Steps, doing window shopping or shopping at via del Corso, visiting best kept gelatto's place, enjoying Roman food, exploring this city, and sitting at a cafe on top of Vittorio Emmanuel, were the activities that i recently did with my family. We stayed here for 4 nights, and we wished we could stay there longer. We love Rome and its vibe. How could you not? This is an exciting and adventurous city.

“When in Rome- Beware” - Traveler rating: 1

After spending 5 days in Rome with my daughter and husband, I will never return. It was my 2nd trip there (last one was in 1982) and I was excitedly looking forward to sharing it with my daughter. I was disappointed in several ways: 1.) The Italians (in Rome) were not friendly. 2.) There is so much graffiti that it broke my heart to see these incredible, historical structures defaced. 3.) It was ridiculously expensive- \$4 for a scoop of gelato. 4.) Pickpockets (gypsies roaming the city) were all over. "Google" and "You Tube" pickpockets in Rome before you go. I have never been so glad to return home. My advice would be to spend only 2 days in Rome and head to the smaller towns like Orvieto or Northern Italy.

“History comes alive-Rome was surely not built in a day!!” - Traveler rating: 4

Just take walk on the Roman streets if you really want to sense the vastness and detailing of Roman construction and designs. The colosseum, Julius Caesar's grave, Roman Forum, the Pantheon all have a larger than life effect and its better to hire a guide(better than a recorded tour) to discover its intriguing history. If you are a honeymooning couple spend some time by the fountain Trevi in the eve(though its usually crowded) to enjoy the lights. The market place around it is advisable for shopping mementos and souvenirs. While visiting the Vatican(which is of course a must) i suggest take help of your hotel front desk team as they have good tie-ups for guided tours.

“3 nights in Rome in Oct 2011” Traveler rating: 4

My Wife and I, ages 73 and 74 were in Rome Oct 23 to Oct 26 2011.

Some things we did right:

1. Booked transportation, before leaving home, with Romelimosines.com to get us from the airport(FCO) to our Apartment. The price was less than a taxi and the service was excellent.
2. Before we left home we went to airbnb.com and rented a small apartment near downtown. It was nice at a good price( \$101 per night plus a \$32 onetime fee to airbnb.
3. Before we left home we booked a Vatican tour through Roman candle tours. It was expensive but the guide(Bryan) was very good

This was worth what we paid for it.

4. We learned to use the Metro(underground rail). Learning to use it was quick and easy to learn and to use. The tickets are 1Euro per person and are good for 1 person for 75 minutes from the time you enter through the turnstyle to board. It is quick and easy but I would not attempt this with luggage larger than a modest piece of

Some things we did wrong:

- 1: We went to the colesseum but we saved some money by renting the head phones instead of getting a good tour. We feel that we practically wasted our money and time. We're convinced that a good tour guide would have made this a good experience.
2. Had we known how well the Metro underground worked we would have gotten an apartment out near the end of the Metro line. This would have gotten us much more apt. for the money but more importantly the places to eat and shop in those areas would have been much better quality and lower priced. This is information that others who stayed further out gave us.

We wish you happy travering;

“A Weekend in Rome Traveler rating: 5

Visited Rome for a weekend In january 2011 for the first time. firstly suprired and pleased at how reasonable it was, it cost one euro for 75 mins on the buses. When outside of the tourist hotspots eating out was very reasonable from 4 euros a pizza.

Ice cream from ' the old bridge' near the vatican museum was delicious. apparently big queues in the summer. visiting in january was a good move as while the weather was not great there were few queues and prices were reasonable.

day 1 saw st peters, the vista and vatican museum. This is really a full day. Got the audio guide at st peters but don't bother unless you're into all the religious aspects. apparently the tour guide is a more historical take. st peters is well sign posted inside. caught the elevator for the view from the top - more suited to a pleasant day. the vatican museum reminded me in principle of the British museum but obviously centered around religious aspects. The Sistine chapel was busy even in january and does tend to neck ache.

the travestere area is a lovely area near the river in which to wander and eat at sensible prices.

day 2 saw the spanish steps, trevi fountain, pantheon, the typewriter, colosseum, roman forum and palatine Hill. the only way to see the colosseum is by means of a combined ticket with the forum and palatine hill. took an audio guide as we had just missed the guided tour and this was great - it brought the place to life and there is quite a bit that can be seen and visualised unlike the forum. Intend to return to the colosseum but next time will pre book tickets to avoid large queues.

we returned to the airport on the terravision coach from termini station 4 euros which we had pre booked. however it was hard to locate the stop which is actually a cafe because we were initially on the wrong side of the station - allow time. also you have to show your ticket in the cafe to get a boarding pass or they won't let you on. lots of travellers queued for the coach and then had to dash back into the cafe.

Overall Rome is a lovely city which was easy to walk around.

“Day Trip” Traveler rating: 4

Our day trip to Rome started with a 0445 meet at Stansted ( that is not a human time ) Flying with Ryanair to ciampino. Tell me why do people clap when the plane lands ? I thought it was supposed to. Our arrival was followed by nearly an hour of waiting for a Terravision Bus ( part of the package ) in the end this was abandoned and a different bus took us to the centre of Rome. We walked to all of our locations but in hindsight I think the open top bus would be a good idea because its impossible to do the vatican as well otherwise. We had fantastic weather and had a nice taster of the city. The buildings were great. Shame about the graffiti everywhere. Lots of very smart Police Officers too.

I am glad we went in April, I think the summer heat in the city would be awful. As it was it must have been at least 20 degrees.

Toilets were a bit of an issue, dont expect public ones. A small beer cost between 3 and 5 euro. A huge icecream more than big enough for two was 6 euro.

Wear comfortable shoes, everywhere is cobbled or uneven.

Would I go again ? No, but that is only because I feel I have had my interest satisfied. Is a day trip recommended ? Yes. If you are on a cruise go for it or if like us make sure you plan in advance and have the day off afterwards to recover !

“Great day out with Children in Rome” Traveler rating: 5

We had a wonderful time in Italy, my husband, myself and 2 children aged 9 and 11. Spring is a wonderful time to visit. Warm enough to enjoy some lighter clothes, but not too hot as to be intolerable. We walked, took photos, ate gelati and generally soaked up the atmosphere. Our favourite day was the day we spent at the Borghese Gardens. We made our way to Piazza del Popolo by bus and had a coffee, in one of the side streets away from the Piazza, as it was quite pricey in the Piazza. Then we walked around, admired one of the many fountains in this city and then headed toward the steps leading upward to the Borghese Gardens. On the way just under the steps I noticed a banner advertising the Leonardo da Vinci Museum beneath it, where I had wanted to take the children whilst in Rome. It was fantastic and very interactive. We spent ages in there before heading up the steps to the Garden. It was well worth the effort. The views from this garden are beautiful. You can see all of Rome before you. Then we ate an icecream at one of the vendors selling gelati (overpriced and not as good as elsewhere) and made our way to the cart and bicycle hire. The children hired a bike each and we hired a cart and spent the rest of the day riding around this magnificent place. It was amazing. Statues, fountains, cafes, a zoo, a lake, walled gardens, temples, museums and beautiful buildings waited for us to explore them all. Whilst Rome is a great place to take kids, we are spoilt for green where we live and it was refreshing to take them to a place where the children could run around and let off a little steam and see some green trees and grass.

“Lost me!” Traveler rating: 1

After numerous trips to Rome over the past fifteen years, I can honestly say that the city's reputation for rudeness has grown to a stage where it is more like an endurance test to stay here. Not even my adored Caravaggios will entice me back.

It isn't as though I am a difficult tourist - I am always well dressed, can speak enough Italian to ask sensibly for things, do my research before arrival and treat people graciously. For my trouble I have been subjected to the consistently worst service I have experienced ANYWHERE in the world - and I am fairly widely travelled. This is not to say that everyone I met was rude but the percentage of bad behaviour was extraordinarily high. The drivers are getting worse - crossing the street here has always been challenging but now the drivers seem to be bolder and want to show you who's boss. Even the police ignore pedestrian safety at crossings. Now I understand the constant sound of sirens.

The visit to the Sistine Chapel was sooo unpleasant. They crammed so many people into that room that it was literally suffocating and the din was disgusting for a church. At least at the Museo Borghese it is handled with greater sensitivity by insisting that visitors book in advance and limiting the time - two hours being ample for the visit.

When I voiced my disappointment in the Romans to a young man in a shop who was actually helpful - he suggested that perhaps I just didn't understand their manner. I then related various incidences of my perceived bad service and he admitted that it was unacceptable. Again, I reiterate that I have been to Rome numerous times (about 8x) so I am not new to the Roman attitude but it has gotten worse and visitors do not deserve the scornful treatment doled out. Don't accept it! Either stay away or complain loudly.

“ONLY DURING WINTER!!!” Traveler rating: 4

I have a friend in Italy and he advised me once that i should go in Rome during winter.

Of course i took it as a joke and reserved my trip for May.

How bad could it be?

It wasn't bad indeed but it wasn't as good as it could be too.

No doubt Rome is a wonderful city (especially in the eyes of people that live outside Europe) but the whole character of the place is disappeared by the hordes of tourists.

It is insane!!!



I have never seen so many tourists gathered together like sheep, people that would never go to take one glimpse at any museum of their own country i suppose, suddenly here they are so anxious not to miss a Da Vinci or a Caravaggio, taking thousands of pictures and souvenirs, really horrible picture of its own.

This ugliness of this quantity of tourism becomes worse from the beauty of the city itself.

I know a lot of people in Rome and i know they are not very fond of this situation.

Of course the money is fine for everyone but i do believe (as Italians too) that there must be a quality level...

What's the point to see fontana di trevi the way that i did?

In my mind i had the picture of Fellini's movie but the reality looked more like a bad sequel of "American pie"

I won't say anything about the city, i agree that once in a lifetime everyone must go to Rome... Just make sure it is going to be on Winter...

One last thing... Try to avoid the crowds by exploring small churches, each one of them is a hidden treasure (and they do also have the Caravaggio's that no one wants to see...)

“Roma, la città eternal” Traveler rating: 5

I am half Italian and spend a lot of time in Roma. My best advice is to throw away the map and wander the streets. You will find something of interest around almost every corner. Most things in Roma are free (Trevi, Spagna, Vaticano and much more). If you are an EU citizen and have children with you then bring passports on days out. Places such as the Colosseum, Foro Romano and museums don't charge for under 16's from the EU. This will save you a little money.

Coffee. Avoid the tourist piazza's and remember if you sit on a seat the cost could treble.

You will see tourist menus for 10/12 euro but ask if there is an additional service charge. This could be as much as 5 euro per person. Also, is anyone eating there? Look at the portion size. Your tourist menu could mean very small portions. Pizza bought by weight or porchetta (roast pork sandwich) are good value for lunch on the move.

To eat I very much recommend Il Ponentino – Piazza del Drago 10. Tourist menu is very good and even the main menu prices are good. 3 courses, coffee and something to drink can be done for under 30 euro per person. Their, zuppa di fagioli e pasta and carbonara are to die for.

A one day travel pass for the local trains, metro and buses currently costs 4 euro (March 2011). Passes are also available for longer periods, 5 and 7 days. This is really good value for the tourist as it will take to as far as Ostia Antica where there is a ruined Roman town. You can buy the full range of passes from the machines in metro stations. These passes won't take you to the airport, a separate ticket is required.

Remember, Romans are relaxed and laid back. When in the city try to be the same and you will enjoy your visit all the more.

Personal safety. I have never felt unsafe in Roma and have been around the city at all times of the night and day. My advice is simple. As with any large city there are dangers. Just take sensible precautions.

Italian police have a reputation for being not so friendly. Don't believe this for one moment. If you need some help don't be afraid to ask.

Most useful phrase, uno di questi per favore... one of those please :)

Finally. Go to the Piazza del Pantheon, buy an ice cream and sit on the steps of the fountain and watch the world go by. It's my favourite thing to do while in Roma and you never know, you may bump into me there doing just that...

I hope this will be useful to you. Enjoy Roma, you will remember it all your life.

“Rome and Naples for the last time” Traveler rating: 2

I've just returned from a cruise around the Mediterrean, and before departing Rome my partner and I spent three days there. This was my third visit to Rome, and sadly I feel it certainly may be my last. We again went with open minds and not high expectations at all. We know it's very old and historic with so much history to take in. However, it is in a sad state of affairs. On the cruise, the ship stopped in Naples as well and have to say we'll never go back to that place again either. Italy seems to be suffering the world recession in a very bad way. I know it's an old country, and has much history to offer but the place is filthy. Naples is the dirtiest city that I've ever been to and I've traveled to over 75 countries including many so called third world countries. We did take a tour

around the Amalfi Coast on land and by a boat ride around the area. This was a very pleasant experience. The small towns there were bustling, picturesque, fun and quaint and were an exception to much of Southern Italy. The corruption this country suffers from shows in every way. If it weren't for tourism I think the place would most certainly collapse. Sadly, in Rome there are many stores that are closed down for good. And those that are apparently still in business weren't open even by eleven in the morning or by noon. Why is this? Have the Italians just given up? It was sad to see. Many locals seem to walk the streets all dressed up in nice clothes but with no place to go. Just hanging out and talking with one another. For the third time, Trevi Fountain was not working. It was under repair. The Piazza del Popolo was a filthy area as was almost every area we visited. All of this was very sad to see. I'm only writing this review for those that may be considering their first big trip abroad and are considering Italy. I feel that for the less experienced travelers this would leave a very bad taste and feeling with them about travel and I don't want this to happen as I feel that travel is the best experience one can have in learning about the planet we live on and the people that we share it with. Travel well and smart. Have fun and just take my opinion in consideration with all others. My most recent experience was not indicative of Turkey, France, Switzerland and Greece; with the exception of Athens which was much like Rome. Very sad. OK, that's my time on the soap box for now.

“Rome in August” Traveler rating: 5

Having booked our August 2011 trip to Rome, I subsequently read that August was the worst time of the year to visit the eternal city. This was due to the heat (up to 38 deg C.), far too many tourists, and by contrast not so many Romans there as all the Rome residents tend to escape the capital for a holiday at that time. Meaning that many businesses, including restaurants and bars will be closed for a few weeks. At least that is what I read anyway. The message seemed to be 'don't visit Rome in August'.

Well. For those of you planning on visiting Rome in August, please don't be put off by these reports. Yes. There may be better times of year to visit, but August 2011 (for us) was great. And I would certainly go again in August.

Although it was hot, it never reached higher than 32 deg. Yes. This is more than hot enough to walk around in, but certainly not unbearable. And I had just travelled from the cool UK (only about 18 deg. C.) so I certainly was not complaining.

There were indeed many tourists there but I suspect that this is the case virtually all year round. Rome has so many things to see so it is bound to attract lots of tourists. However with a bit of forward planning you can keep the 'queuing time' to a minimum.

As for lots of establishments closing. Well, not that I noticed. There was one restaurant near our hotel that was closed but for all I know that might have been closed due to it having gone out of business. There was also a small shop near the hotel that was closed too. But that was about it as far as I saw.

I am sure that it is true that many Romans do go on holiday in August, but with so many tourists in Rome at this time of year, establishments are hardly likely to close totally (if at all) as the tourist industry provides such a lot of income.

All the attractions, e.g. the Colosseum, Roman Forum, Vatican, St. Peters Basilica, Sistine Chapel, The Pantheon, etc are all open as normal.

As I say, August is hot - but not unbearable - and, don't worry, virtually every restaurant, bar, cafe is open so there are plenty of places to get that cool drink along the way when you are walking. Not to mention the numerous water fountains where you can get nice cool fresh drinking water to quench your thirst too.

Anyway. What I am trying to say is although some might say that there are better times of year than August to visit Rome (a matter of opinion I guess), August 2011 was a great time for us when we visited, and given the chance I would certainly visit the Eternal City in August again.

Brilliant!

“Rome in review” Traveler rating: 4

My family and I just spent 5 days in Rome. Very busy place, crowded, heavy traffic. My take: Try to travel with one bag each. Have a few euros each to start. (Visa/Mastrcrd debit/credit rule, not Amex.) Take train/bus from airport, then maybe taxi to hotel. In Rome, city trains are fairly easy way to go but get maps that show you how bus stops relate to train stops. Get a Roma Pass. We got disoriented a few times and just took a taxi, about \$20 US. Keep number for Radio Taxi with you. Have a cell phone, maybe yours (check) or you can buy one (TIM store). Bus drivers are, well, truly insane, (check out the shaved head and racing sunglasses). Sit down or hold on! (Wear a money belt !!! Be wary of Good Samaritans!!!) Food/service was always very good. Best values are AWAY from tourist areas. Ask. If you want ice, better bring it with you from the US.

No glasses of water (bottled only), no butter for bread either. Just order what you want and don't worry about their first course, second course stuff. Tipping doesn't seem to be common. Our hotels (bring plug adapters/Italian AC is an open the window!) were always clean, staff friendly and helpful. Most everybody else acts like they were called in to work on their day off. Judging from the lines, museums, etc., they must be making money beyond belief but they need to call Disney for an attitude adjustment. Don't drive in Rome. Capucino is wonderful (always pay first at eateries, and sitting down can cost more). Wine is served chilled, pasta is more al dente, gelato is great. The art and culture is spectacular. Learn some Italian. Grazie! Arivederci! Prego!

“Rome, City of beauty, treasures, Wealth, Poverty & increasing social problems” Traveler rating: 2

Once you have visited all of the Historical sites, it is worthwhile moving around the city suburbs, (not all that safe) to see the contrast between the wealth of the Vatican and other parts of the city and society and the abject poverty of the homeless. This is being exacerbated by the number of refugees from Libya, Sudan, Syria, and other African nations, coming into the area on a daily basis in their hundreds. If able to communicate with a local you will readily be informed that the aggression, attitude and resentment of some locals in respect of visitors is due to the inability of the city to cope with the overcrowding, some 6 million per year to Rome alone. Early in the morning, south of Trastevere, hundreds of homeless sleep on the railway platforms. There are beggars on virtually every street. Worthwhile going for the history and there many nice local people we met however, be warned, there are also many areas and situations that the traveller needs to be aware of. In areas such as Trevi Fountain etc tourists are approached with a free rose or flower. Do not touch it. At the very least you will pay a few moments later a few euros but you are also being marked for a pickpocket or handbag snatch. At all times be on the alert with your valuables. We did a few train trips. From Fiumicino on the Leonardo Express is ok. Cost is 14 Euros to Rome Termini. The seaport of Civitavecchia is some distance from Rome but the cost is only 4.5 Euros. If you are going to a cruise or coming from a Cruise with luggage DO NOT go on the railway. We came off a early April 2011 cruise, Taxi to Rome was 120 Euros from Civitavecchia and as it was only a 10 minute walk to the station we thought it would be a good saving. As this train service has no provision for luggage, we had our luggage around us. This was ok early in the trip as there was plenty of room. However, soon the train became crowded, with some of the locals becoming very aggressive manhandling our luggage around the carriage. It is well worth prearranging a Transfer from Civitavecchia. By comparison to Naples, Amalfi, Sorrento, Tuscany, Venice, In my view, Rome is a city in social turmoil.

I would not care to revisit Rome. I must say, that the residents who were open and candid with me, has provided me with an insight into the Social fabric of Rome.

“Stylish and Mad” - Traveler rating: 5

Rome is an amazing city and my partner and I enjoyed our 5 day stay there - I don't think we would have wanted to have spent any less time there as there is so much to see.

We were looking forward to trying out our pigeon Italian, but there wasn't much opportunity. Just about everyone you will come across in restaurants and shops speak Italian and they would rather converse in English if it hurries you along as they are so keen to get a commercial transaction over and done with. Everyone is very business like and the one thing that stands out about Rome is how absolutely frenetic it is. Busier than New York even.

Traffic is absolute chaos. I wouldn't suggest driving in Rome unless you're prepared to take your life in your hands. The quote unquote "parking" in Rome is hilarious. Cars parked on footpaths and pedestrian crossings and double parked - and the police are worst of them all!

My tips: \* Try to to in Autumn or Spring. We went in September and it was still unbelievably warm but tolearable. I think I would have spent a lot of time crying in frustration if I had gone in summer when it would be scorching hot. The heat is hard to deal with when you're in crowded tourist traps. \* Book an apartment (through somewhere like [www.airbnb.com](http://www.airbnb.com)) or a hotel with a kitchen so that you can prepare some of your own meals. Food in Rome is ridiculously expensive and not always great. The raw produce in Italy is heaven and I highly recommend going to a supermarket and buying some tomatoes, bread and a bucket of fresh mozzarella and maybe some parma ham and melon so that you can make your own breakfasts. Or even some passata and pasta for your own dinners. \* Go to the colosseum and the palisades - they are both brilliant. Try to be there as soon as it opens so that you can avoid the worst of the crowds. Seeing the silhouette of the colosseum as the sun is rising in a memory that you'll have forever. \* Take the metro or go by foot. Taxi drivers are super grumpy. \* The Vatican is the highlight of Rome without a doubt. Worth paying for a tour guide and spending a decent amount of time here.

## Italian

“Caput mundi” - Traveler rating: 5

Roma è una città incantevole e molto comoda. Foro imperiale, Colosseo, la Domus Aurea( per chi é stato fortunato in vederla), Le Terme e il Circo Massimo, il teatro Marcello, la Fontana di Trevi, il Pantheon e Piazza Navona, oltre che Castel Sant’angelo e il Vaticano sono tranquillamente visitabile a piede, con un bel paio di scarpe comode. E' possibile passare due o tre giorni camminando per le viuzze di Roma, scoprendo le meraviglie di questa città senza tempo. Dal Vaticano, la sera, si può arrivare a Trastevere per mangiare un bel piatto di rigatoni con la paiata di abbacchio( per chi piace, è chiaro) o un panino con la porchetta d’Ariccia( ottimo), non lasciati di assaggiare anche il gelato in via Arenula( quello alla Nutella é favoloso) e fare un giro per le osterie dietro il Colosseo e via San Giovanni in Laterano . Per i musei, consiglio la Roma Pass, con 25 euro è possibile entrare nella maggior parte dei musei più conosciuti, da accesso anche ai mezzi pubblici, anche se come ho detto, è una città da farsi a piedi.

“La città più bella del mondo” - Traveler rating: 5

Chi ama l’arte, le antichità e la storia non può certo non andare a Roma. É la città ideale anche per una vacanza romantica.

Inutile dire che é una delle città più belle al mondo. Per quantità di monumenti, chiese, fontane, musei e arte in generale non ha eguali al mondo. Per una visita completa una settimana é a mala pena sufficiente, senza contare che anche i dintorni della città offrono molti siti di interesse (Tivoli, Tarquinia, Cerveteri, I castelli, Ostia, etc).

Purtroppo però non si può dire che sia economica. Ristoranti e alberghi in generale sono più cari che la media europea (solo Parigi é Londra sono altrettanto care), e nelle zone turistiche la qualità dei ristoranti e/o il servizio a volte lasciano un pó desiderare.

La città é in generale abbastanza sicura, anche se nelle aree sovraffollate di turisti non mancano ladri e borseggiatori. Però ponendo la dovuta attenzione (...) niente di estremamente pericoloso.

Mi raccomando, dopo una giornata in giro per monumenti non fatevi mancare una tranquilla cena a Trastevere ;)

“Roma città eterna.” - Traveler rating: 4

Viaggio di 3 giorni a Roma- venerdì sabato e domenica, famiglia di 4 persone, due figli di 11 e 14 anni, in generale non lamentosi. L'Hotel (Ritz) non era vicino al centro storico, quindi l'utilizzo di mezzi pubblici è stato massiccio.....ma perfetto. Utilissimi si sono rivelati i pulman scoperti che fanno il giro turistico della parte cittadina da visitare. Puoi salire e scendere alle fermate, esattamente come un mezzo pubblico, ma dedicato alla storia ed ai monumenti, quindi ottimizzato sui circuiti di interesse generale, senza perdite di tempo. Abbiamo usato l'operatore Roma Cristiana, con un nuovissimo servizio, Carta Omnia, (doveva uscire il 1° di marzo ma noi siamo stati lì il 18 19 e 20 febbraio 2011 e la nostra agenzia ce l'ha fornita con il pacchetto). Questa carta del costo di circa 50€ dà diritto a diversi ingressi, tipo Colosseo, Museo vaticano, fori imperiali senza coda, che non è poco, e puoi usare tutti, dico tutti, i mezzi pubblici, senza limitazioni. Mini vacanza molto bella, che, anche grazie a tutti i servizi, municipali e privati, ti fanno vedere una grandissima parte di Roma in poco tempo. Metropolitana lercia, trenino di collegamento dall'albergo in condizioni spregevoli (lo chiamavamo il water con le ruote) e 3 euro al giorno a testa di tassa di soggiorno (totali ben 36 euro pagati all'albergo con tanto di ricevuta) sono le note dolenti della gita.

“Roma. Città Eterna ed Infinita” - Traveler rating: 5

Sei giorni a Roma, ma non basterebbero sei mesi per godere di tutte le sue meraviglie. Da qualunque parte volgi lo sguardo c'è qualcosa da vedere e da ammirare. Immensa, bellissima, straordinaria e forse non ci sono abbastanza aggettivi per riuscire a definire compiutamente la meraviglia offerta da una città senza pari al mondo. Ogni via, piazza, angolo ha una sua ineguagliabile caratteristica, un pezzo di storia da raccontare, una leggenda da godere. L'abbiamo girata in lungo ed in largo cercando di visitare più monumenti e musei possibili ma non si smetterebbe mai. Roma non è solo il Vaticano perchè quello che è fuori dalle Mura Leonine è di una inesauribile ricchezza. Roma va visitata almeno una volta nella vita e chi può deve tornarci più volte per godere ogni volta di una parte delle sue ricchezze. Peccato che i musei chiudano presto e che la folla a volta non permette di poter apprezzare appieno le opere e i monumenti. E, come succede in tutte le città turistiche, i furbi che di professione fanno gli scuoiatori di turisti abbondano, per cui state attenti ai bar dove vi sedete, agli alberghi dove andate a dormire e i ristoranti dove andate a mangiare. E non comprate pacottiglia che vi fanno passare per ricordi da portare a casa perchè è tutta cianfrusaglia. Meglio una buona guida del monumento o del museo che visitate.



“Stupenda, ma servono almeno 5 giorni!” - Traveler rating: 4

Roma è una città magica, splendida, ti giri e c'è qualcosa da vedere e per cui rimanere a bocca aperta. ogni giorno c'è qualche manifestazione, evento, concerto, partita sportiva. io ci sono andata per vedere il sei nazioni.. magnifico. unico intralcio di questa meravigliosa città, è l'atac, la società di trasporti pubblici. inefficiente. mal organizzata, non funzionante. anche se ci sono applicazioni per iphone, non sono molto utili, isto che poi l'atac fa quello che vuole e spesso i mezzi non passano o addirittura non si fermano. un vero peccato per i turisti, che perdono tempo a riconrere i mezzi. Atac a parte, in due giorni ho provato a fare un tour de force per il Vaticano e San Pietro (da fare assolutamente), trastevere, campo dei fiori, piazza di spagna, piazza del popolo, fori imperiali, colosseo, san giovanni in laterano. oltre al Flaminio per il rugby. Voglio tornarci, ma per dedicarci piu tempo! Munitevi di scarpe comode e tanta pazienza!

“roma caput mundi?.....qualche anno fa forse....” - Traveler rating: 2

Culturalmente è una città splendida....c'è poco da dire. Nessun posto al mondo esprime con così tanta forza il corso della storia come questa splendida città. Ma.....per un turista questa città offre poco: i trasporti (metro, bus, taxi) lasciano molto a desiderare. Solo due linee di metro!!!!!! Nei ristoranti, pizzerie c'è sempre il furbo che vuole rifilare una "sola" perchè vede un turista. I monumenti hanno una gestione veramente scadente, personale ridotto, orari balordi, prezzo dei biglietti non in linea con le altre capitali mondiali. La gente è molto cordiale e l'accento romano mette allegria. Comunque almeno una volta nella vita questa città va visitata ed un week-end non basta di certo per apprezzarla...

“roma e Trastevere” - Traveler rating: 5

Mi presento... mi chiamo Benedetta e sono di Padova. Era da tempo che pensavo di tornare a Roma. E così, ho deciso di passare il week end in questa meravigliosa città! Devo ringraziare Ryanair che permette di viaggiare in Italia e all'estero a prezzi veramente stracciati... Con 10/15 euro raggiungi molte città europee! Venerdì 28 gennaio ho preso l'aereo e, una volta giunta nella capitale, ho subito cercato un posto dove poter pernottare. Ho scelto Trastevere. Questa zona è ottima, infatti permette di girare sempre a piedi e di non perdere troppo tempo con i mezzi pubblici che sono

sempre affollatissimi. Il B & B dove ho alloggiato è una piccola struttura di recente costruzione in via Vicolo del Cinque (pienissima di ristoranti), che aveva tutto l'occorrente: bollitore, riscaldamento, televisione, ecc. Il quartiere per me è bello e molto affascinante. Si possono anche fare delle bellissime passeggiate lungo il Tevere. L'unico inconveniente è stato sabato notte...fino alle 02.00/03.00 c'è stato parecchio rumore, che era comunque sopportabile. Fortunatamente prima di partire avevo già prenotato l'ingresso ai Musei vaticani... consiglio a tutti di farlo per evitare le lunghissime file che ci sono tutti i giorni.. VOTO 10 A ROMA...BELLISSIMA!!!!

“roma ed il fascino romano” - Traveler rating: 5

Roma è una città stupenda che ancora rende partecipi del passato e della cultura romana. Ovviamente le tappe turistiche obbligate sono il circo massimo, l'altare della pace, il colosseo, villa borghese, fontana di trevi, piazza di spagna....insomma i classici punti, ma non mancate di girare la città anche senza una metà precisa perchè sa regalare emozioni forti in molti angoli che magari non sono contemplati dalle guide turistiche. Ultimamente la città è un pò più sporca rispetto al passato, ciò non toglie che rimanga una delle più belle al mondo e il pensiero che un'opera come il colosseo sia ancora lì a testimoniare la maestosità della civiltà romana rende indispensabile una visita almeno una volta nella vita

“tra smog e monumenti” - Traveler rating: 4

vivere la città' restando affascinati della sua grandezza per chi ha la fortuna di visitarla in almeno cinque giorni...uno dei pittoreschi mercati da vedere si trova in piazza campo dei fiori..agli appassionati di arte consiglio i musei vaticani e san Pietro:ci si guarda intorno con stupore appena si arriva nella piazza che avvolge la basilica,il colonnato del Bernini,la cupola progettata da Michelangelo,la cappella Sistina.....percorrendo poi a piedi via della Conciliazione si arriva a Castel Sant'Angelo dove dalla terrazza il panorama non è niente male...andiamo poi a piazza di Spagna con la famosa scalinata che si scende come in una sfilata di moda...fontana di trevi come nel film La dolce vita....piazza Navona e piazza del popolo....da non scordare il monumentale Colosseo e l'altare della patria...in piazza Cinquecento di fronte alla stazione Termini ci sono i bus di color rosso scoperti che in circa due ore e mezzo attraversano le principali attrazioni....la cucina è fantastica come pure il panorama unica pecca lo smog e il troppo traffico...buon viaggio nella città' eterna anche ai non romantici...

## German

“Immer eine Reise wert!” - Traveler rating: 5

Ungefähr dreissigmal war ich jetzt schon dort, und es wird trotzdem niemals langweilig. Und wie sich die Ewige Stadt im Lauf der Zeit verändert hat! Als ich Rom vor 36 Jahren zum allererstenmal gesehen habe, war es zwar extrem spannend, aber auch ziemlich schmutzig, sehr laut und ein Nährboden für Kleinkriminelle (Handtaschenraub!). Inzwischen hat sich das drastisch gewandelt: Laut und ein bisschen chaotisch ist es zwar immer noch, aber sonst - Respekt!!! Und noch etwas: All jene, die nicht Italienisch sprechen, werden sich freuen, denn sie können sich inzwischen problemlos auf Englisch verständigen. Insgesamt gibt es in Rom auch nach Dutzenden Besuchen noch Neues zu entdecken, das Essen ist immer noch ausgezeichnet und überhaupt - nirgendwo sonst gehen Alt und Neu eine so gelungene Symbiose ein wie in dieser Stadt...

“Jeder sollte Rom sehen” - Traveler rating: 5

Ankunft Mitte Februar, ca.16 Grad, Aufenthalt 5 Nächte im Hotel Best Western-ArtDeco - das Hotel ist super. Nun zu Rom selbst, es ist bewundernswert wie Rom funktioniert, viele Leute-viele Autos-noch mehr Roller-alles bewegt sich mit einer Ruhe und Gelassenheit durch die Stadt. Mit Schulenglisch und ein paar Wörtern italienisch überhaupt kein Problem diese Stadt zu erobern. Es kommt eine Gastfreundschaft zu Tage die für uns, für eine Großstadt, unglaublich war. Wartezeiten für Besichtigungen hatten wir keine. Empfehlenswert der Rom Pass - kostet 25 Euro für drei Tage. Die Sehenswürdigkeiten sind ja bekannt - vielleicht ein Hinweis - die Pyramide. Eine 35m hohe, aus weißen Marmor erbaute Pyramide, gegenüber der gleichnamigen U-Bahnstation. Wer die vatikanischen Gärten sehen möchte, übers Internet rechtzeitig von Zuhause anmelden.[http://mv.vatican.va/6\\_DE/pages/MV\\_Home.html](http://mv.vatican.va/6_DE/pages/MV_Home.html).

Fazit: Waren nicht das letztemal in Rom

“ROMA; CAPUT MUNDI” - Traveler rating: 5

ROM - die Hauptstadt der Welt ! Selbst wenn dieser römische Maßstab nicht mehr stimmen mag, so hat die 'EWIGE STADT' doch eine ungeheure Anziehungskraft. Unzählige Baudenkmäler aus den unterschiedlichsten Epochen wetten um die Gunst

der Touristen und der Verliebten in dieses einmalige urbane Kulturspektakel. Unzählige Male bin ich bereits auf meiner 'Lieblingsstrecke' von der Spanischen Treppe , entlang am Pantheon (mein Lieblingsbauwerk in Rom) und der Piazza Navona und der Engelsburg bis zum Vatikan gegangen. Langeweile kommt auf diesem Durchschreiten der Stadt nie auf. Besuchen Sie Rom zu den unterschiedlichsten Jahreszeiten und zu den unterschiedlichsten Tag- und Nachtzeiten. Vielleicht ist das beleuchtete Rom am schönsten; die Magie dieser Stadt kommt dann voll zur Geltung. Kaum eine Stadt dieser Erde vermittelt eine so starke Intensität der Gefühle; eine Verzauberung der ganz besonderen Art

“Rom ein einziger Favorit” - Traveler rating: 5

Wer eine Mischung aus historischen Stätten, mediterranem Flair, guten Shoppingmöglichkeiten und perfektem Essen mag, sollte unbedingt Rom besuchen. Für den Vatikan und das angeschlossene Museum sollte man mindestens einen Tag einplanen. Sehenswert ist der gesamte Petersdom (kein Eintritt); für den Kuppelbesuch zahlt man 5-7 EUR. Bei schönem Wetter unbedingt Sehenswert. Die Eintrittskarten für die vatikanischen Museen sollte man vorher im Internet buchen (15,00 EUR). Mittwochs findet eine Audienz des Papstes um 11 Uhr auf dem Petersplatz statt. Auch wenn man nicht gläubig ist, sicherlich sehr interessant. Colosseum und Forum Rom. kosten auch 15,00 EUR. Wer antike Stätten mag, sollte dieses Geld investieren. Man sollte überall auf seine Wertsachen aufpassen. In Rom gibt es besonders lange Finger. Ideal ist das nh Hotel in Rom i.d.N. vom Vatikan. Rom kann man wunderbar zu Fuss durchqueren; die Metro kostet je Fahrstrecke 1,00 EUR und ist eine ideale Ergänzung.

“Rom ist eine Reise wert” - Traveler rating: 4

Rom ist auf jeden Fall eine Reise wert. Man erreicht Rom wohl am besten mit dem Flugzeug. Vom Flughafen Fiumicino aus gibt es vier Möglichkeiten, ins Stadtzentrum zu gelangen: Per Taxi (rund 50 EUR, je nach Verkehrsfluss Staugefahr), per Shuttle Bus (fährt unterhalb der Bahnstation am Flughafen ab), per Leonardo-Expresszug (fährt alle 30 Minuten und benötigt rund 30 Minuten bis Roma Termini, keine Zwischenhalte, 14 EUR pro Person) oder per Nahverkehrszug (verkehrt teilweise alle 15 Minuten, sonst alle 30, ca. 8 EUR, hält an allen Stationen, verkehrt allerdings nicht über Roma Termini).

Wer von Rom aus mit Überlandbussen weiterreisen möchte, der kann vom Flughafen aus mit dem oben erwähnten Nahverkehrszug bis Roma Tiburtina fahren. Dort gibt es einen grossen Busbahnhof, von dem aus man zu fast allen Destinationen fahren kann.

Rom ist weder eine moderne, noch eine saubere noch eine besonders gut gepflegte Stadt. Aber gerade das macht ihren Charme aus und der wundervolle blaue Himmel, den es hier häufig zu sehen gibt, der hilft schnell über alle kleinen Unbillen dieser Stadt hinweg.

Rom ist voller Sehenswürdigkeiten, so dass man einige Tage einplanen sollte, um genügend Zeit zu haben. Aber auch ein Kurztrip ist empfehlenswert.

“Roma eine traumhafte Altstadt” - Traveler rating: 5

Hallo zusammen, das Hotel Radisson Blue liegt direkt am Hauptbahnhof also ziemlich zentral gelegen. Das Hotel ist sehr groß und relativ neu... In einem sehr modernen Stil wenn man die Umgebung vergleicht... Der Service im Hotel ist einmalig, sehr freundliches Personal, typisch für Italiener.. Das Essen im Hotel war für italienische Verhältnisse richtig gut, dafür dass Italiener normalerweise nicht frühstücken. Das Zimmer war schön groß, mit Balkon und Aussicht zum Pool, das Bad war sehr sauber und auch das Bett war einwandfrei. IM Hotel selbst kann man während der Wintermonate den Pool leider nicht nutzen. Von dem Hotel aus kann man mit der Metro sofort zu allen bekannten Sehenswürdigkeiten gelangen.. Besonders schön, die alte Römerstadt und das Kolosseum. Alles in allem ein sehr angenehmer Aufenthalt in Rom.

“Roma è per sempre” - Traveler rating: 5

Non si può che tornare di nuovo a Roma. E' una città stupenda, questo lo sanno tutti, ma non sono mai abbastanza le lodi spese per decantare la bellezza della città eterna. Sicuramente i mesi più caldi non sono troppo indicati per visitarla, la miglior cosa è recarvisi a primavera inoltrata. La vicinanza del mare qui si fa sentire e il clima non è mai troppo freddo, anche se a volte il vento si fa sentire. Per quel che c'è da vedere ci si potrebbe trasferire per 5 anni e forse non basterebbero per vedere tutto quel che c'è da vedere. Consigliabile una pianificazione precedente alla partenza, per non rischiare di perdersi nella grandezza della città. Sconsigliati tutti i ristoranti turistici che spesso sono dozzinali e cari. Munitevi di biglietto giornaliero o di abbonamento settimanale per i

mezzi pubblici e cercatevi un albergo, una pensione, o un B&B nicht troppo fuori dal centro, perché raggiungerlo a notte inoltrata potrebbe essere un problema. Buona visita!!

“Wenn Steine sprechen könnten...” - Traveler rating: 5

Auch beim 3. Besuch in Rom habe ich immer noch neue Dinge gesehen, gehört, gelernt. Selbst 3 Tage lang von einer Sehenswürdigkeit zur anderen zu laufen hat wieder nicht gerreicht - angefangen von den vatikanischen Museen, der sixtinischen Kapelle, dem Petersdom und etliche Kirchen, Basilika etc...über das Forum Romanum, Kolosseum etc. etc...dazu die leckere italienische Küche in einer Hosteria in den SEitenstrassen der Piazza Navona...einfach schön. Man sollte definitiv auch ein wenig Zeit einplanen, um eine Tour zu den Katakomben ausserhalb Roms zu machen. Den Roma Pass kann man gleich am Flughafen besorgen und vielerorts den Eintritt vergünstigt bekommen (bzw. einigen Schlangen ausweichen)...es sei denn, man ist gerade zur Kulturwoche da, in der viele Einrichtungen umsonst besucht werden können - offensichtlich nimmt man dafür dann noch sehr viel längere Wartezeiten in Kauf.

“Wohl eine der sehenswertesten Städte Europas” - Traveler rating: 4

Vorne weg, für einen Besuch Roms sollte man mindestens zwei Tage kalkulieren. Zu empfehlen ist sich ein Tagesticket für Metro und Busse zu besorgen, da diese zum einem sehr günstig sind und Rom für seine chaotischen Verkehrsverhältnisse bekannt ist und man es vermeiden sollte mit eigenem Auto unterwegs zu sein. Schwierig dürfte es auch sein in der Innenstadt einen Parkplatz zu finden.

Die Liste der Sehenswürdigkeiten ist unendlich. Gesehen haben sollte man das Colosseum, Circus, Forum Romanicum, Trevi Brunnen, die spanische Treppe und die Haupteinkaufsstrasse, welche unweit des Piazza Venezia beginnt.

Die wichtigen Sehenswürdigkeiten liegen recht zentral und mit einem Spaziergang kann man diese auch an einem Tag erreichen oder man nutzt die Metro. An fast jeder Sehenswürdigkeit findet sich eine Station.

An den Sehenswürdigkeiten ist oft großer Andrang. Da in Rom natürliche sehr viele Touristen unterwegs sind.

Im Hochsommer wird es in der Stadt schon mal sehr heiss, was es dann etwas beschwerlich macht die vielen Sehenswürdigkeiten zu besuchen

“hier fängt Italien an” - Traveler rating: 5

Rom ist für mich kulturell kaum zu überbieten. Nirgendwo sonst gibt es in einer Stadt dermaßen viele verschiedene Sehenswürdigkeiten. Hinter dieser Stadt steckt einfach dermaßen viel Geschichte. Die Kehrseite der Medaille ist allerdings, dass bei allen Attraktionen endlos lange Schlangen sind, die man kaum umgehen kann. Zudem ist es in der warmen Jahreszeit oft sehr heiß in Rom. Außerdem wird man oftmals auf Touristenfallen wie Taschendiebe, zu Hohe Taxitarife und schlechtes überteuertes Essen treffen, was sich kaum vermeiden lässt. Es empfiehlt sich ein Ticket für den Touristenbus zu nehmen, um günstig und schnell von Attraktion zu Attraktion zu kommen. Forum Romanum, Colosseum, Trevi Brunnen und spanische Treppe sind nur einige Pflichtsehenswürdigkeiten. Auch nicht verpassen sollte man ein Fußballspiel im Olympiastadion. Die Stimmung ist einfach nur großartig. Hotels sind in Rom leider oftmals unter europäischem Durchschnitt. Das Preisniveau ist nicht extrem überteuert, wie etwa in Barcelona. Für mich ist Rom eine der schönsten Städte der Welt.

“schoenste stadt europas - bella roma” - Traveler rating: 5

fuer mich die schoenste stadt europas: rom. ich verbrachte ein wochenende in rom, bella roma :) es ist einfach wunderbar, wenn man diese historische stadt zu fuss entdecken kann und soll. man wandert ueber plaetze und bei jedem schritt zieht die geschichte dieser stadt an einem vorbei. wohnen? gut es gibt die gegend um den bahnhof "termini" gegend ist nicht die beste, jedoch preislich guenstig. es gibt die gegend im zentrum, ist sehr teuer und touristen werden richtig schoen ausgenommen. man sollte restaurants um das colosseum oder anderen wichtigen sehenswuerigkeiten meiden, da kann ein bier schnell an die 6-7 euro kosten. in der altstadt gibt es wunderschoeene restaurants die zu mittag spezielle menues zur auswahl haben, also vorspeise, hauptspeise und getraenk um 10-12 euro. gutes essen !! bei sehenswuerigkeiten muss man mit langeren anstellzeiten rechnen. keine kurzen hosen im vatican! u bahn ist guenstig fuer eine zeitkarte 75 std braucht man 1 euro. am besten einen rundfahrt mit einem doppeldecker bus machen, dann sieht man alles am besten! rom ich war hier und komme wieder (hab ja auch die muenze in den trevi brunnen geworfen) achja unbedingt ausschau halten wo die kleinen cafes sind oder lebensmittelgeschaefte die sind sehr guenstig ( 1 espresso 0,70 euro) gibts fast nicht aber wahr. gute paninis oder sandwiches an den strassenecken, also keine touristen restaurants waehlen.achja vom flughafen in die stadt kommt man mit dem leonardo da vinci express zug oder per taxi ( oneway 40 euro fixpreis ) ansonsten ROM bella roma ich komm wieder !!!