

Title: Social Relationships and Online Reviews in Hospitality: A Scoping Review

1) Objective:

To systematically map, categorize and identify gaps in the existing academic and grey literature regarding the role of social relationships in shaping online review behavior and its impact on consumer decision-making within the hospitality industry (hotels, restaurants and other accommodation services) over the past decade (2016–2026).

Specific Mapping Objectives:

- i) To identify and categorize the types of social relationships studied (social influence, social identity, social ties, altruism, parasocial relationships, social support).
- ii) To map the theoretical frameworks used to explain the relationship between social factors and online review behavior.
- iii) To identify methodological approaches used in this field.
- iv) To highlight research gaps for future investigation.

2) Research Question (PCC Format):

Based on the PCC (Population, Concept, Context) framework for scoping reviews:

Element	Definition
Population (P)	Consumers, guests, and reviewers in the hospitality sector
Concept (C)	The role of social relationships in online review behavior (social influence, social identity, social ties, altruism, parasocial relationships, social support)
Context (C)	Hospitality industry (hotels, restaurants, Airbnb, and other accommodation/tourism services)

Primary Scoping Question:

- How have social relationships been conceptualized, theorized, and studied in relation to online review behavior within the hospitality industry over the past decade?

3) Description of Three Approaches:

1. Narrative Literature Review

A narrative literature review, also known as a traditional or descriptive review is the most conventional approach to summarizing existing research on a given topic. This method involves a subjective and often non-systematic collection of literature, where the author selects studies based on their own judgment, expertise, and personal knowledge of the field. The primary purpose of a narrative review is to provide a broad overview, identify key themes, and offer a

general synthesis of what is known about a topic. However, because it lacks a predefined search strategy, explicit inclusion and exclusion criteria and a transparent selection process, the narrative review is highly susceptible to selection bias-the author may inadvertently favor studies that support their own perspective while overlooking contradictory evidence.

2. Systematic Literature Review

A systematic literature review (SLR) represents the gold standard of evidence synthesis, distinguished by its rigorous, transparent, and reproducible methodology. As outlined in the lecture materials, an SLR "attempts to identify, appraise and synthesise all empirical evidence that meets prespecified eligibility criteria to answer a given research question" using "explicit, reproducible methods aimed at minimizing bias, to produce reliable findings and inform decision making". The process begins with a narrowly focused research question, typically framed using the PICO (Population, Intervention, Comparison, Outcome) format. Before the review commences, a detailed protocol is established, clearly defining eligibility criteria, search strategies, and data extraction methods. A comprehensive search is then conducted across multiple databases, with a strong emphasis on identifying all relevant peer-reviewed published studies.

3. Scoping Review

A scoping review, as defined in the lecture materials, is "a type of knowledge synthesis that uses a systematic process to map the evidence on a subject and identify key ideas, theories, sources and knowledge gaps". Unlike the systematic review, which seeks to answer a narrow effectiveness question, the scoping review aims to capture the breadth of literature on a broad topic. It is particularly useful when the research area is complex, emerging, or has not been comprehensively reviewed before. The research question in a scoping review is formulated using the PCC (Population, Concept, Context) framework, which allows for an exploratory and iterative approach. One of the defining features of the scoping review is its inclusion of grey literature-unpublished research such as dissertations, government reports, conference proceedings, and policy documents. This ensures a more complete and unbiased mapping of the available evidence. Critically, scoping reviews do not require formal critical appraisal or risk of bias assessment of the included studies, which significantly reduces the time and methodological complexity compared to a systematic review.

4) Why I Selected a Scoping Review and How It Is Perfect and Relevant to My Objective:

The scoping review is the ideal methodology for this proposal because my objective is to map a broad, fragmented, and emerging field rather than to test a specific hypothesis or measure a precise effect. As outlined in the lecture materials, a scoping review is designed to "map the evidence on a subject and identify key ideas, theories, sources, and knowledge gaps", which directly aligns with my goal of understanding how social relationships have been studied in hospitality online reviews. My research question follows the PCC (Population, Concept, Context) framework recommended for scoping reviews, and my objective emphasizes breadth over depth, which is precisely what scoping reviews are intended to capture. Furthermore, I intend to include grey literature such as dissertations and industry reports, a key feature of scoping

reviews that ensures a more comprehensive and unbiased mapping of the available evidence. Critically, this approach does not require formal risk of bias assessment, making it methodologically appropriate for a mapping exercise where the goal is description and categorization rather than effectiveness evaluation. In contrast, a systematic review would be unsuitable because it demands a narrow PICO question and rigorous quality appraisal, while a narrative review would lack the systematic, transparent, and reproducible process required for a robust mapping exercise. Therefore, the scoping review is not only the most relevant but also the most rigorous and feasible methodology for achieving my stated objective.

5)Theoretical Background:

This scoping review is anchored in three foundational theories that collectively explain the intersection of social relationships and online review behavior in hospitality.

Social Identity Theory (Tajfel & Turner, 1979) posits that individuals derive part of their self-concept from membership in social groups, leading to in-group favoritism and out-group discrimination. In the hospitality review context, this translates to consumers being significantly more persuaded by reviews written by reviewers who share similar demographics, nationality, or cultural background. When a reviewer is perceived as an "in-group" member, their recommendations carry greater trust and credibility, directly influencing booking intentions and attitude change.

Social Proof Theory (Cialdini, 1984) suggests that under conditions of uncertainty, individuals look to the behavior and opinions of others to determine the correct course of action. Within hospitality, online review volume and aggregate star ratings serve as powerful social proof signals. High review counts signal popularity and reliability, while high average ratings indicate quality. This "herd behavior" leads consumers to conform to the collective judgment of past guests, making review volume and valence critical drivers of hotel and restaurant choice.

Parasocial Interaction Theory (Horton & Wohl, 1956) explains the one-sided, illusionary relationships that media consumers develop with media personalities, influencers, and content creators. In the modern hospitality landscape, consumers follow travel and food influencers whose recommendations shape their travel decisions. Parasocial bonds transform anonymous reviews into trusted, relationship-based advice, mediating the effect of influencer characteristics on booking intentions and review credibility.

Together, these three theories provide a comprehensive lens to map how social identity, social conformity, and parasocial relationships shape the generation, consumption, and impact of online reviews within the hospitality industry.