

**Social influence in online film reviews**  
Analyzing the role of social features on Letterboxd

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### **ABSTRACT**

Social media keeps transforming market dynamics by allowing consumers to be more present and participative than ever. This is particularly evident when it comes to online review platforms, where users can interact, consult, and share information about any product. The film industry has also witnessed the emergence of online review platforms, where people can post and consult opinions about any film. Letterboxd is an online film review platform that combines film reviewing with different aspects of social networking, by allowing users to rate, review, like, follow, share, and comment on films. This study builds upon existing literature in eWOM, media, and communication disciplines, and explores how online film review outlets like Letterboxd and their social features impact users' film-watching behavior. Furthermore, it relies on existing solid theories to support the presented hypotheses, namely the theory of planned behavior (TPB) and theories on perceived source credibility.

The purpose of this thesis centers on the gap in academic literature regarding the social aspects of online film reviews and their influence on film selection. While previous studies have examined several factors influencing people's film selection, very few seem to account for the impact of social features in the reviews, such as the presence of personal identifying information and social endorsement in the form of 'likes'. This study addresses this gap by answering the following research question: "To what extent do social features of online film reviews influence users' behavioral intentions through perceived source credibility on Letterboxd?"

A 2 x 2 between-subjects experimental design was applied by randomly assigning groups of respondents to one out of four different scenarios. Each group was presented with a set of Letterboxd reviews with two manipulated variables: the presence of PII and the number of 'likes'. Through a survey, respondents were asked about their attitudes towards the displayed reviews, their intention of watching the reviewed film, and how they perceived the reviews' credibility. The collected data provided valuable insights into the effects of these social features on users' perceptions and intentions.

The findings reveal that reviews with the author's username and profile picture are seen as more credible, while anonymous reviews are perceived as less credible. Additionally, reviews with a high number of 'likes' positively influence perceived credibility, as well as users' attitudes and intentions towards watching the film. However, it was found that the presence of PII does not influence film-watching intentions, contrasting with previous findings on eWOM effects.

This study contributes to the current academic discourse by complementing and expanding existing theories within the context of eWOM, particularly online film reviews. This highlights the importance of social features and online interactions in shaping user-brand dynamics.

**KEYWORDS:** *Letterboxd, eWOM, behavioral intentions, attitude, perceived source credibility*

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## 1. Introduction

Social media have distinctly changed markets and consumer-brand relationships since they have enabled the proliferation of online communities in which users can interact, share information, and express their opinions about any product or service (Cheng & Ho, 2015, p. 883). This is also a noticeable reality when it comes to film consumption, as users are now able not only to share their evaluation about any motion picture of their choice but also to access and read evaluations produced by other users from anywhere in the world. Letterboxd is an online film review platform that combines film reviewing with social networking, in which users can rate and review any film while interacting with each other by liking, following, and commenting (Letterboxd, 2024). This originates a network of influences in which electronic word-of-mouth (eWOM) holds significant importance and users' film selection is subject to influence by their peers.

The present study builds upon existing eWOM literature and explores this topic focusing on the constant social and technological changes that are evident in today's media landscape and have a great impact on the way people think, interact, behave, and consume. More specifically, this thesis relies on both contextual and analytical foundations identified in previous studies. It starts by exploring concepts related to eWOM, online film review outlets, and their social features. As online communities become increasingly important to marketing and sales industries, so do the individual opinions that are spread throughout those communities, especially through social media. This often takes the form of online reviews about a product or service, and it is a powerful tool that can dictate consumers' purchasing behavior (Gavilan et al., 2018, p. 54). Thus, online reviews represent a source of information on which consumers often rely when making decisions about a purchase.

This connection between online reviews and purchasing intention tends to be observed in the context of film consumption as well. However, this decision-making process is not so much about purchasing a tangible product – like a household object or a piece of clothing – but about the intention to watch a film, regardless of whether the film is purchased, rented, or accessed in any other way. For this reason, it might be important, to a certain extent, to separate the effect of film reviews from other types of reviews. In this domain, several existing studies explore how online film reviews influence consumers' film selection. Aspects such as valence, volume, authorship, consumer expectations, review consistency, and the film's production nature have been identified as influential factors in consumers' decision-making (Basuroy et al., 2020, p. 70; Duan et al., 2008, p. 1015; Gemser et al., 2007, p. 43; Liu, 2006, p. 74; Tsao, 2014, p. 574). However, to this day, in a world where online community-building and social connections are more relevant than ever, and social features begin to be implemented and largely used by consumers in online review outlets, academic literature lacks investigation into how these social features change the way online film reviews influence consumers' film selection. This thesis intends to do so, by particularly exploring the case of Letterboxd and how users perceive and understand these social features and their effect on film-watching intention.

Previous studies have explored this effect in the context of travel and hospitality online reviews. Some of the most noticeable social features that seem to influence consumers' purchasing intentions are the presence of personal identifying information (PII) in the review (Garg & Pandey, 2020, p. 631; Xie et al., 2011, p. 182) and social endorsement in the form of 'likes' (Chen et al., 2019, p. 236). This study intends to apply these findings to online film reviews and investigate whether these connections remain true in this context.

Moreover, in order to build a consistent and precise theoretical framework, this research relies on Ajzen's (1991, p. 206) theory of planned behavior (TPB) as its primary theoretical lens, through which this study is conducted. The TPB is a well-known model that has been applied in several studies related to sales, marketing, and other consumer-oriented industries. In sum, its main argument indicates that behavior can be predicted by one's intention of performing that behavior (Ajzen, 1991, p. 181). Several studies have found that online reviews have a significant influence on consumer's behavioral intentions. While only a few studies explore the relationship between film reviews and behavioral intentions (Tsao, 2014, p. 575; Zarco, 2015, p. 84), most of these statements have been found in the tourism and hospitality industries, regarding online reviews of hotels or restaurants (Goh et al., 2015, p. 2; Lee et al., 2021, p. 237; Azhar et al., 2022, p. 2).

Furthermore, the theory of planned behavior identifies attitude as one of the main drivers of behavioral intentions (Ajzen, 1991, p. 179). Attitude can be described as whether a person has a positive or negative perception of the behavior in question, therefore relating to a positive or negative attitude accordingly. A positive attitude is thus associated with a higher behavioral intention. According to existing studies in the eWOM domain, several aspects of online reviews may influence consumers' attitudes toward the product or service, like valence (Zarco, 2015, p. 83) or consumers' prior knowledge about the product (Lee & Ro, 2016, p. 6). However, none seem to have investigated the presence of social features in film reviews and their influence on attitude.

Beyond measuring attitudes and intentions toward film selection, this research looks at the perceived source credibility of film reviews as an important influential factor that shapes and drives attitude, which in turn dictates intention. Perceived source credibility is oftentimes identified as one of the main aspects that influence how people are affected by the information they consult online and is frequently used in eWOM and social media studies (Erkan & Evans, 2016, p. 49; Hsu, 2022, p. 378; Verma et al., 2023, p. 1). It has been shown in previous literature that perceived source credibility influences consumers' attitudes toward online reviews (Ayeh et al., 2013, p. 445; Kim et al., 2018, p. 252). However, similarly to what happens with TPB, there is not much investigation about this effect in relation to the social features of the reviews, particularly regarding film reviews. Thus, this study looks at perceived source credibility in relation to the authorship and social endorsement of the reviews, by relating it to the presence of PII and number of 'likes'.

In sum, on one hand, the abundance of existing literature on eWOM - and, in particular, online reviews and their effect on consumer behavior – represents a solid theoretical foundation upon

which this study relies. On the other hand, the lack of investigation regarding the social aspect of online film reviews and their influence on users' film selection creates an opportunity to expand on the existing literature and provide valuable insights that may contribute to academic research. Thus, this study aims to complement the existing findings by looking at the social aspect of Letterboxd's film reviews and how its characteristics influence users' intention to watch a film. This thesis aims to answer the following research question:

*RQ: To what extent do social features of online film reviews influence users' behavioral intentions through perceived source credibility on Letterboxd?*

In order to evaluate how users are influenced by the social features of film reviews and successfully answer the research question, a 2 x 2 between-subject experimental design was conducted. The sample consisted of four groups randomly and equally distributed, and each group responded to one of four conditions assigned. Each condition presented the same set of Letterboxd film reviews, while two variables were manipulated: the presence of PII (username and profile picture) and the number of 'likes' in the reviews. After being presented with the reviews, respondents were asked about their attitude towards the reviewed film and the credibility of the reviews. This allowed for comparison between groups, and a better understanding of the effect of the manipulated social features on users' perceptions and intentions.

### **1.1. Academic relevance**

By diving into the existing literature on eWOM and the influence of online reviews on users' behavior, two important gaps should be highlighted when discussing this study's academic relevance. First, very few studies seem to consider the social features of film reviews. Although it has been found that peer-produced online film reviews affect users' film selection positively, research has yet to be thoroughly conducted regarding the social aspect of film recommendation, considering recent trends in social media and online platforms. Second, studies that do seem to account for those social features are applied to other types of online reviews, especially in the hospitality industry, rather than the film industry. Although these sources are of great importance in building a theoretical foundation for this thesis, they lack a deep understanding of how these social features impact online recommendations in the entertainment industries, in particular film. By looking at the online platform Letterboxd and its social features surrounding film reviewing, this research aims to expand the body of literature regarding this topic, while contributing with an updated understanding of the relationship between user-generated content, online social networking, and cultural consumption, providing valuable insights for scholars in media and communication studies.



## **1.2. Social relevance**

As social media gains an increasingly central role in people's lives and cultural choices, the influence of peer-produced online film reviews on users' behavioral intentions is also becoming more relevant each day. With the relationship between users and the digital space changing at such a rapid pace, and the social aspect of cultural recommendation becoming increasingly influential in consumers' decision-making, this study can contribute with an up-to-date theoretical framework that may be valuable to the development of effective marketing and communication strategies suited to the current state of digital cultural consumption. Furthermore, by focusing on Letterboxd as a growing social media platform that integrates online film reviewing with community building and user interaction, this thesis follows recent trends in the development of new film review platforms and dives into its implications for usage patterns from a consumer perspective.

## **2. Theoretical Framework**

This chapter presents the existing theories that build up the theoretical foundation for this thesis, as well as previous research and findings regarding the topic under study. By doing this, a connection between this and prior studies is established, thus reinforcing its academic relevance. Additionally, this chapter introduces a set of hypotheses that are based on previous empirical findings and, once tested, provide the answer to the central research question.

### **2.1. eWOM and online reviews**

Through social networking and interpersonal communication, people's choices influence and are influenced by others, impacting their consumption behavior such as the food they eat, the places they visit, or the films they watch. Word-of-mouth (WOM) is a widely used term in marketing and advertising as one of the communication tools that have the most impact on consumer behavior. It is described as "informal communications directed at other consumers about the ownership, usage, or characteristics of particular goods and services or their sellers" (Westbrook, 1987, p. 261). This interpersonal process impacts consumer behavior as it successfully persuades consumers towards – or against – a product (Sweeney et al., 2014, p. 351; Van den Bulte & Wuyts, 2009, p. 245). Accordingly, WOM can be positive, encouraging the purchase of a product, or negative, discouraging the choice to purchase (East et al., 2008, p. 215). Sweeney et al. (2014, p. 351) find that positive word-of-mouth messages are significantly more effective than negative word-of-mouth.

Berger (2014, p. 589) argues that WOM serves five key functions that explain the popularity and effectiveness of WOM communications: impression management, emotion regulation, information acquisition, social bonding, and persuading others. Additionally, Berger (2014, p. 600) finds that the communication channel through which the message is transmitted also affects how WOM messages impact the consumer. While oral communication (e.g. face-to-face, phone calls, or voicemails) is more beneficial for social bonding and information acquisition, written and asynchronous communication (e.g. email, texting, or online reviews) facilitates impression management and the message's persuasive effect (Berger, 2014, p. 600).

Electronic word-of-mouth (eWOM) is an extension of WOM, taking place in online spaces (Hennig-Thurau et al., 2004, p. 39). With the rise of new technologies and Web 2.0, eWOM was disseminated through blogs, websites, social media, and other online mediums (Cheung & Thadani, 2012, p. 461). With an increasing number of users exchanging opinions and product information through online communications and user-generated content, eWOM has become increasingly important in marketing and sales strategies. This form of WOM usually occurs in a written format and is publicly available, allowing users to access the messages from anywhere at any time (Hennig-Thurau et al., 2004, p. 39).

eWOM in the form of user-generated reviews has been increasingly adopted by consumers to exchange information about the quality of a product, service, or brand, and has become one of the most trusted sources in purchasing decision-making (Cheng & Ho, 2015, p. 883; Gavilan et al., 2018, p. 54). Online review aggregators are websites where consumers can submit their reviews or ratings for different kinds of products, consult each other's submissions, and interact with them. These aggregators exist for different products and services, such as hotels and traveling (e.g. Expedia and TripAdvisor), restaurants (e.g. Yelp), or entertainment (e.g. IMDB, Rotten Tomatoes, and Letterboxd) (Sharkey et al., 2023, p. 8).

The aggregation of opinions and ratings from other consumers as a source of information is closely associated with social influence, as users use others' opinions and advice to shape their own attitudes and decisions (Gavilan et al., 2018, p. 54). Although social influence is a subject that has been discussed ever since early studies of social psychology (Asch, 1955, p. 1; Asch, 1956, p. 2; Raven, 1964, p. 371), it remains relevant to this day. Moreover, its relevance has been expanded and adjusted to the digital society where online networks, social media, and the blurring of spatial and temporal boundaries have become indispensable. This has been observed in several studies. In the hospitality and travel industry, Book et al. (2018, p. 466) find that the social influence of online traveler reviews has a stronger effect on consumers' evaluations and decision-making than price. In the restaurant domain, several studies explore how exposure to online reviews of restaurants represents a form of social influence and therefore affects consumers' decisions (Kwon et al., 2021, p. 177; Li et al., 2020, p. 1067). More importantly, Baek et al. (2015, p. 290) argue that this is also true in the entertainment landscape, more specifically with film reviews.

The connection between online reviews and social influence is also naturally related to purchasing intention since the influence of eWOM in this context usually regards a product or service that can be purchased by the consumer. Erkan and Evans (2016, p. 51) find this to be true, by arguing that exposure to online reviews on social media affects consumers' purchase intention positively in terms of its quality, information credibility, needs of information, attitude towards information, information usefulness, and information adoption.

## **2.2. Online film reviews**

In the context of film consumption, the relationship between eWOM and purchasing intention tends to apply. It is important, however, to consider all aspects of this relationship, especially how different elements of these reviews can have different effects on consumers' purchasing intentions. eWOM studies typically focus on two aspects of the messages: volume and valence. Valence is defined as the positive or negative weight of eWOM, and it has been shown that the effect of negative eWOM can be significantly stronger than that of positive eWOM (Chiou & Cheng, 2003, p. 58). Tsao (2014, p. 574) finds that the valence of film reviews affects its influence on consumers' decision-

making. Liu (2006, p. 74) examines how the volume and valence of user-generated online film reviews are related to box office revenues, finding that there is a positive relationship between the two and that the volume of online reviews is a more influential factor than valence. Although box office revenue may be a valuable indicator of purchasing intention, the present study focuses on consumers' intentions rather than the action of watching or purchasing a film, thus not considering box office revenues as a variable in this research.

Moreover, the impact of film reviews on viewers' film selection might differ depending on the nature of the film. In a study by Gemser et al. (2007, p. 43), the authors find a distinction between the effect of film reviews on the consumption of mainstream and independent films. While the film selection of art-house film consumers is usually influenced by film reviews, that tends not to be the case for mainstream films, as consumers usually look for other information sources.

Several studies have explored the impact of professional film critics on consumers' decision-making processes (Basuroy et al., 2020, p. 57; Chen et al., 2012, p. 116; Perano et al., 2021, p. 1), and it is widely recognized that reviews by film experts can significantly help reduce uncertainty when making purchasing decisions and serve as indirect advertisement (Perano et al., 2021, p. 2). Joseph and Vickram (2023, p. 240) argue that user-generated film reviews also have a positive impact on consumers' purchase intentions. In this context, Tsao (2014, p. 574) argues that consumer-generated online film reviews are more effective than critic reviews in influencing consumers' film selection. On the contrary, Basuroy et al. (2020, p. 79) find that professional reviews have a greater impact on box office revenues. These conflicting results may be related to the different approaches taken in these studies, especially the different effects of film reviews on consumers' purchasing decisions versus box office revenues, as well as the variables of eWOM under consideration. Variables like valence, volume, consumer expectations, and review consistency mediate the effect of film reviews on people's film selection (Basuroy et al., 2020, p. 70; Duan et al., 2008, p. 1015; Tsao, 2014, p. 575).

Online film review aggregators can be dedicated to displaying only critic reviews (Metacritic), both critic and consumer reviews (Rotten Tomatoes), or only consumer reviews (Letterboxd). This thesis focuses on the latter and explores how peer-generated film reviews influence consumers' film selection. Although there is an extensive body of literature regarding the direct effect of peer reviews on consumers' behavioral intention, very few seem to account for the social features that often accompany film reviews in review aggregators like Letterboxd. Thus, assessing this relation in the context of social media networking may provide valuable insights into how users perceive the credibility of film recommendations by their peers, and how it influences their film selection.

### **2.3. Letterboxd and the social aspect of user reviews**

To this day, Rotten Tomatoes, IMDb, Metacritic, and Letterboxd are some of the most popular online film review aggregators used worldwide. While all of these aggregators offer some of the same

features such as displaying information about a film, its cast and crew, and other details, as well as letting users share their own reviews and ratings about the film, Letterboxd (<https://www.letterboxd.com>) is known for its social features that let film enthusiasts keep a diary of their watched films, save films to watch later, and interact with a vast like-minded community. Its community-driven nature is what distinguishes Letterboxd from other eWOM outlets, creating a specific object of study that has not been investigated in previous media and communication studies.

Letterboxd, existing with the same features both as a website and a mobile app, provides details about any film such as cast, crew, duration, and where to watch it. The most striking feature, however, is how it serves as a global social network that has welcomed and expanded film communities from all over the world. It is an online film review platform with a growing community of users who can rate and review films, follow each other, and like/comment on others' reviews. Its interface and built-in features resemble any other social media platform, while it is exclusively suited to film enthusiasts and can work as a personal diary that others can access and interact with. Although users do not need to create an account on the platform to use it, they need to be registered in order to participate, log film-watching entries, and interact with others.

Kavoura (2014, p. 494) highlights this connection between social media and the creation of online communities by alluding to Anderson's (2006, p. 6) concept of "imagined community": online communication allows users to connect with groups of people with the same interests even if they have never met, creating a sense of belonging to a community. This idea has been linked to other information-centric online community platforms like Goodreads and LibraryThing (Worrall, 2019, p. 742), dedicated to online reviews of books. Information-centric online communities rely on social and emotional connections between users of the same platform, as well as the exchange of information and knowledge (Worrall, 2019, p. 743). The social features present in platforms like Goodreads are similar to those in Letterboxd, which foster a sense of community by allowing users to interact, share, and build social connections. There is little to no existing research that specifically addresses Letterboxd as an online community or highlights its social components. Thus, by looking at the social aspect of Letterboxd and several academic views on the relationship between social bonding and the impact of eWOM, as mentioned earlier, this research aims to explore how the emergent social features in film reviewing platforms can affect the way users are influenced by those reviews.

As an online review aggregator, Letterboxd displays users' reviews usually structured as a textual review accompanied by a numerical rating from one to five stars. Moreover, Letterboxd lets users adjust how reviews are displayed by filtering or changing the sorting criteria. The platform also gives users the option to see, 'like', or comment on each other's reviews. Among all the features that allow social interaction between users within the platform, one of the most evident is how users can identify themselves by creating a profile in which they can share their name/username, photo, location, and other personal identifiers. Xie et al. (2011, p. 182) explore how the presence of online reviewers' personal identifying information (PII) is significantly influential in consumers' attitudes

towards the reviews. The authors find that the presence of PII positively affects how consumers perceive the credibility of the reviews. Furthermore, users with a positive pre-decisional disposition who are exposed to positive reviews tend to show a higher purchasing intention if the reviews include personal identifying information (Xie et al., 2011, p. 182). In a more recent study regarding the presence of personal identifying information in travel-related eWOM, Garg and Pandey (2020, p. 631) argue that PII is indeed a significant moderator of consumers' attitudes towards online reviews. Since the role of PII in online reviews has not been thoroughly investigated in previous literature, especially in the film industry, it is important to assess whether the presence of personal identification in online film reviews affects users' film selection.

Additionally, through an experimental design measuring how social influence affects consumers' music choices, Salganik and Watts (2008, p. 344) argue that consumers who have access to the popularity of a song (in this case, how many times other consumers downloaded it) tend to be influenced by that popularity, ultimately selecting the most popular ones. According to the social impact theory, an individual's attitude, behavior, and decision-making are influenced by others, namely the number of information sources (Latané, 1981, p. 345; Kwahk & Ge, 2012, p. 1816). Ding et al. (2017, p. 83) apply this theory by arguing that social media 'likes' create social impact and influence films' box office performance. Consistently, Chen et al. (2019, p. 236) rely on the signaling theory to explore how signals are used in product recommendations on social media to influence consumers' purchase intentions. The signaling theory has originated from information economics studies and addresses the use of signals in a commercial context to reveal relevant information about the quality of a product, facilitating consumers' decision to purchase that product (Connelly et al., 2011, p. 39). Liu et al. (2022, p. 186) apply this theory to the context of eWOM and social media, arguing that social features can improve the effectiveness of recommendations.

The present study aims to complement the existing literature by looking at the social aspect of peer-produced online film reviews (namely the presence of personal identification and the number of 'likes' in a review), which has become more evident as social media platforms and their core features gain an increasingly influential role in users' decision-making.

## **2.4. Perceived source credibility**

Perceived source credibility indicates the extent to which the receiver understands the message from a sender as truthful and valid (Wu & Wang, 2011, p. 452). It impacts the receiver's attitude toward the message source, and consequently toward the message's meaning (West, 1994, p. 159). Thus, if a source is considered to be credible, the receiver will believe in its message as true. Source credibility is oftentimes considered a determinant of persuasion in decision-making (Wong et al., 2020, p. 718), and it is frequently associated with Sussman and Siegal's (2003, p. 59) information adoption model. This model explains source credibility as one of the main factors that influence how

people are affected by the information they consult online and is recurrently used in eWOM and social media studies (Erkan & Evans, 2016, p. 49; Hsu, 2022, p. 378; Verma et al., 2023, p. 1).

In a study investigating how the perceived credibility of user-generated content (UGC) influences travel consumers' attitudes toward the use of UGC, Ayeh et al. (2013, p. 445) find an existing correlation between the two, arguing that source credibility has a generally positive influence on consumers' attitude and behavioral intentions. Accordingly, Kim et al. (2018, p. 252) state that this positive relationship is true in eWOM communication and online reviews. The present research will measure this influence on Letterboxd reviews to assess how it affects users' attitudes toward the reviewed films. For that purpose, this study relies on Kusumasondjaja et al.'s (2012, p. 191) findings on the influence of perceived credibility of online reviews by using the same five dimensions (accuracy, believability, bias, completeness, and trustworthiness).

However, it is important to understand how credibility is measured and which of its dimensions are the most influential in consumers' decision-making processes. Shan (2016, p. 637) argues that the reviewers' reputation significantly influences credibility evaluation. Yang et al. (2017, p. 975) use six attributes - reviewer location, reviewer level, review helpfulness, review rating, review length, and review photos – to assess how credibility is perceived by consumers, concluding that review rating and helpfulness are the most significant influential factors. Following the findings by Xie et al. (2011, p. 181) regarding the presence of PII in online reviews and considering the social features offered by Letterboxd, this study proposes that the presence of personal identifying information in a film review influences how users perceive the credibility of the review. Considering this relationship, the following hypothesis will be tested:

H<sub>1.1</sub>: Online film reviews with the presence of personal identifying information are perceived as more credible.

Additionally, Borah and Xiao (2018, p. 401) use the concept of social endorsement to explain how the perceived source credibility of a social media post can be influenced by heuristic endorsement cues such as 'likes'. Other studies on social endorsement and its effect on credibility perceptions on social media suggest that users are more likely to agree with and trust a message if it carries a high level of endorsement by others (Metzger & Flanagin, 2013, p. 215). Consistently, when examining the effect of Facebook 'likes' on the perceived credibility of news posts, Luo et al. (2022, p. 188) find that the number of 'likes' in a post is positively related to its credibility. 'Likes' are usually associated with social media texts and represent a form of aggregated user representation, showing endorsement frequency on a certain subject (Walther & Jang, 2012, p. 5). Based on the existing literature, this thesis proposes that the more popular a review is (in this case, measured by how many 'likes' it has), the more credible it is perceived by other users, thus originating the following hypothesis:

H<sub>1.2</sub>: Online film reviews with a higher number of ‘likes’ are perceived as more credible.

Additionally, it is important to assess the relationship between the two variables, the presence of personal identifying information and the number of ‘likes’, and their joint effect on the reviews’ perceived credibility through the following hypothesis:

H<sub>1.3</sub>: Online film reviews with the presence of personal identifying information and a higher number of ‘likes’ are perceived as more credible.

## **2.5. Theory of planned behavior**

### **2.5.1. Behavioral intentions**

Ajzen’s (1991, p. 206) theory of planned behavior (TPB) argues that behavior can be predicted by one’s intention of performing that behavior. As stated by Ajzen (1991), “the stronger the intention to engage in a behavior, the more likely should be its performance” (p. 181). The TPB model has been thoroughly used in areas like sales, marketing, and consumer-oriented industries. Most of these studies exist in the tourism and hospitality context (Goh et al., 2015, p. 2; Lee et al., 2021, p. 237; Azhar et al., 2022, p. 2). In a study regarding tourism destinations, Jalilvand and Samiei (2012, p. 603) find that eWOM has a significant influence on users’ attitudes towards visiting travel destinations, therefore influencing positively their intention to travel. More recently, Tran (2020, p. 9) has found that, indeed, online reviews significantly affect consumers’ intention to purchase.

This is also true within the film consumption market, as several studies have addressed the positive relationship between the valence of film reviews and consumers’ intention to watch films. As stated by Zarco (2015, p. 84), film reviews with a positive valence lead to a positive intention of watching that film, whereas negative reviews do not have a significant effect. However, Tsao (2014, p. 575) finds the opposite, arguing that negative consumer reviews have a stronger impact on users’ film selection than positive reviews. Although the focus of this study is not to assess the influence of review valence, these findings provide relevant insights into existing literature regarding film reviews. More recently, Shieh and Lin (2022, p. 359) have observed the influence of source identification (stranger versus acquaintance) and review content (abstract versus concrete) on film-watching intention, finding that film reviews from acquaintances that contain concrete and detailed content about the film are related to a greater watching intention from users. This goes in line with Xie et al.’s (2011, p. 181) findings regarding the influence of the presence of personal identifying information not only on consumers’ perceived source credibility but also on their purchasing intention.



Given the consistent link found in previous research between perceived source credibility and behavioral intentions (Ayeh, 2013, p. 445; Yoon et al., 1998, p. 169), the present thesis poses the following hypotheses:

H<sub>2.1</sub>: Users' behavioral intentions are positively affected by film reviews with the presence of personal identifying information.

H<sub>2.2</sub>: Users' behavioral intentions are positively affected by film reviews with a higher number of 'likes'.

H<sub>2.3</sub>: Users' behavioral intentions are positively affected by film reviews with the presence of personal identifying information and a higher number of 'likes'.

#### 2.5.2. Attitude

The theory of planned behavior identifies three main drivers of intention: attitudes toward the behavior, subjective norms, and perceived behavioral control (Ajzen, 1991, p. 179). To this day, in the context of eWOM, several studies have found attitude as one of the most significant predictors of behavioral intentions (Pillai et al., 2022, p. 7; Wu & Wang, 2011, p. 460; Zarco, 2015, p. 85), and it is described as the extent to which a person perceives the behavior or the context surrounding the behavior positively or negatively. Its relationship with eWOM – in particular, online reviews - is a common subject in social studies. Zarco (2015, p. 84) states that film reviews have a significant strong influence on attitudes, highlighting the role of valence in this relationship. Lee and Ro (2016, p. 6) explore how online reviews affect consumers' attitude changes, arguing that prior consumption experience of the product or service is an important factor that may affect the impact of the reviews. These findings show that online reviews have a greater impact if the consumers do not have any prior knowledge about the product, and consumers who have prior experience tend to also show greater resistance to opinions from others (Lee & Ro, 2016, p. 6). Furthermore, given the existing studies on the effect of online reviews and perceived source credibility on attitude, the following hypotheses are drawn:

H<sub>3.1</sub>: Users' attitudes toward online film reviews are positively affected by film reviews with the presence of personal identifying information.

H<sub>3.2</sub>: Users' attitudes toward online film reviews are positively affected by film reviews with a higher number of 'likes'.

H<sub>3.3</sub>: Users' attitudes toward online film reviews are positively affected by film reviews with the presence of personal identifying information and a higher number of 'likes'.

H<sub>4</sub>: Perceived source credibility of online film reviews has a positive influence on users' attitudes toward the reviews.

### 2.5.3. Attitude and behavioral intentions

Thus, as argued by the theory of planned behavior (Ajzen, 1991, p. 181), attitude towards the behavior is positively associated with the intention of performing that behavior, which is consequently associated with the behavior itself. This study aims to assess users' behavioral intentions as represented by the intention of watching a film after looking at online reviews. Thus, considering the main principle of TPB regarding attitude as a driver of behavioral intention and the existing studies on peer-produced online film reviews, the fifth hypothesis is formulated as follows:

H<sub>5</sub>: Users' behavioral intentions are positively affected by their attitudes toward film reviews.

## 2.6. Summary

In summary, this section builds a theoretical lens from previous academic studies that provide valuable insights into existing empirical findings, while also providing a foundation and an opportunity to adapt the research to the most current socio-technological developments in the context of eWOM and online review aggregators in the film industry. The social features offered by Letterboxd merge the realms of social media and online reviewing, where different dimensions of social influence and online communities overlap.

While previous findings on eWOM, online review aggregators, and its social features provide insights into the context of this research, theories on perceived source credibility and planned behavior represent a strong theoretical framework on which the present thesis relies. Both theories on perceived source credibility and TPB are frequently used in media and communication studies to explore the relationship between media texts and user behavior and provide a valuable analytical lens that will be the core of this thesis. To sum up, by expanding on the existing literature, the present research explores the influence of Letterboxd's social features on users' perception of source credibility and, in turn, their intention to watch the reviewed films.

As the research model shows (see Figure 1), H<sub>1</sub> tests the effect of the social features of online film reviews on perceived source credibility. These social features are divided into the number of

‘likes’ and the presence of personal identifying information in the review, following previous studies that suggest their significant positive influence on source credibility (Luo et al., 2022, p. 188; Xie et al., 2011, p. 181). More especially, H<sub>1.1</sub> proposes a significant positive influence of the number of ‘likes’ on perceived source credibility, H<sub>1.2</sub> suggests a positive effect of the presence of personal identifying information on perceived source credibility, and H<sub>1.3</sub> tests the joint effect of both number of ‘likes’ and PII on perceived source credibility, thus strengthening the findings.

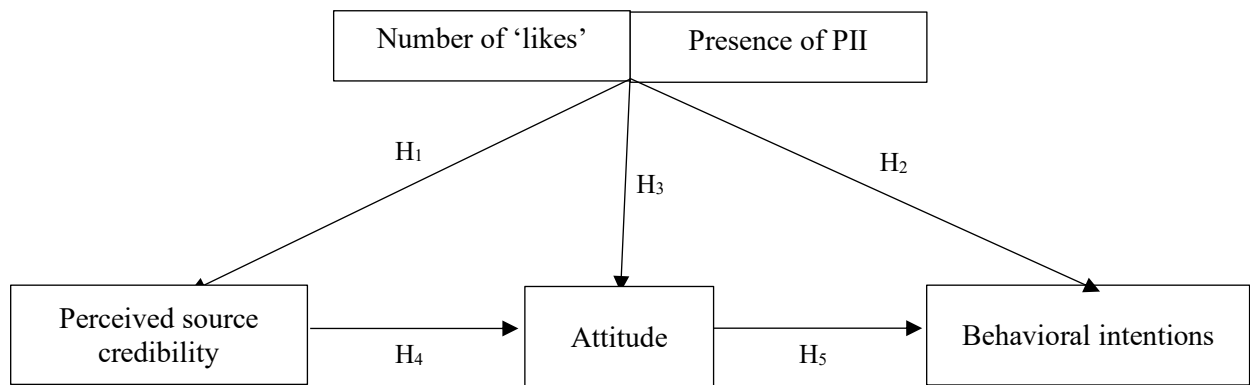
The influence of these social features on users’ behavioral intentions is tested with H<sub>2</sub>, proposing that these features significantly affect users’ film selection, represented by behavioral intentions. Moreover, the effect of these conditions on users’ attitudes towards film reviews is proposed by H<sub>3</sub>, stating that the social features of online film reviews represented by the presence of PII and the number of ‘likes’ influences positively users’ attitudes towards the reviews.

These two hypotheses derive from existing studies on eWOM and its relationship with purchasing intentions and social influence. Thus, this study aims to observe the extent to which social features as part of film eWOM carry a significant influential effect on the users’ attitudes and, in turn, their film-watching intentions. Similarly to H<sub>2</sub>, hypotheses H<sub>3</sub> and H<sub>4</sub> are divided into three sub-hypotheses: H<sub>2.1</sub> proposes that the number of ‘likes’ in a review positively influences behavioral intentions, H<sub>2.2</sub> tests the positive influence of the presence of PII on behavioral intentions, while H<sub>2.3</sub> looks at both dimensions together as having a positive effect on behavioral intentions, and tests whether the effect on behavioral intentions is reinforced when both aspects are significantly positive (presence of PII and a high number of ‘likes’). H<sub>3</sub> follows the same subdivisions but concerns how attitudes are influenced, rather than behavioral intentions.

H<sub>4</sub> poses that the perceived source credibility of online film reviews has a significant influence on users’ attitudes. This influence has been identified by previous literature as positive and is frequently observed in the context of eWOM, online reviews, and consumers’ purchasing intentions. By relying on Kusumasondjaja et al.’s (2012, p. 191) assessment of perceived source credibility, this study looks at accuracy, believability, bias, completeness, and trustworthiness as indicators of source credibility. Thus, it is predicted that when a film review is seen as credible, users will be motivated to watch the film.

Finally, H<sub>5</sub> suggests that attitudes influence behavioral intentions positively, which is in line with Ajzen’s (1991, p. 206) theory of planned behavior.

In conclusion, this model of hypotheses puts together a theoretical framework built from valuable previous findings in eWOM and social media studies. This study relies on those findings to analyze how the blending of online review aggregators and social media features changes the way reviews are perceived by consumers, especially in the film industry.



*Figure 1.* Model of hypotheses

### **3. Method**

This chapter presents the research methods applied in this study to answer the research question. It provides a comprehensive description of the research design, the sampling and data collection methods. Additionally, it describes the characteristics of the sample, as well as an analysis of the used measurements. Finally, it discusses aspects related to this study's validity and reliability, addressing its strengths and limitations.

#### **3.1. Research design**

This study aims to assess the influence of PII and 'likes' on users' perception of credibility and behavioral intention towards a peer-produced film review. Measuring influences between variables within a larger sample is naturally linked with quantitative research methods, which according to Goertzen (2017, p. 12) allows for the use of numerical data to explain phenomena. Thus, this method is the most suitable to assess how eWOM and social features of film reviews influence a broad group of users, by measuring and comparing specific variables. By applying a quantitative experimental design, it is possible to manipulate these variables and observe how subjects respond to them in a controlled environment (Charness et al., 2012, p. 1). Furthermore, a between-subject experimental design was applied, in which each individual is exposed to one out of four scenarios, and "causal estimates are obtained by comparing the behavior of those in one experimental condition with the behavior of those in another" (Charness et al., 2012, p. 1).

Thus, a 2 (presence of PII) x 2 (number of 'likes') between-subject experimental design was conducted as the research method for this study. For this purpose, a set of online film reviews was designed as stimulus materials to examine the proposed hypotheses. The two variables manipulated were the presence of PII and the number of 'likes' in the reviews, creating four scenarios to which subjects were randomly assigned. For the PII condition, reviews were either accompanied by a profile picture and username or had no identification. For the 'likes' condition, reviews presented either a high or low number of 'likes'. The high number of 'likes' consisted of a randomly generated number between 15,000 and 20,000, and the low number involved a random number between 1 and 10. When observing the effect of the number of 'likes' on users' perceived source credibility on Facebook posts, Luo et al. (2022, p. 181) use the same difference between high and low endorsement frequency to improve the chances of detecting the variable's influence on respondents. To maximize the validity of the results, the reviews had the same textual elements with positive valence across all scenarios, while only PII and 'likes' were manipulated. In sum, all aspects of this experiment are the same for all the respondents, except for the manipulated independent variables (presence of PII and number of 'likes' in the reviews). In the end, the set of respondents formed one control group (Condition 1) and three experimental groups (Conditions 2, 3, and 4). Condition 1 had no PII and a low number of 'likes',

Condition 2 had PII and a low number of ‘likes’, Condition 3 had no PII and a high number of ‘likes’, and Condition 4 had PII and a high number of ‘likes’.

To maximize the authenticity of the experimental design, the visual aspect of the reviews was based on Letterboxd’s interface (See Figure 2). The textual content was based on real reviews posted on Letterboxd, while any presentation of personal information was virtually designed for the purpose of this study. According to Tsao (2014, p. 568), useful consumer film reviews must include a plot description, the acting skills of the actors, personal views, and whether the movie is recommended. Therefore, the constructed reviews included these aspects and maintained a similar moderated tone, which controls factors like tone and the number of words from affecting the results (Tsao, 2014, p. 568). The review subject was a virtually constructed film, to ensure that none of the participants had prior information about the film, thus minimizing biased results. The subjects were presented with the name and the genre of the film. The chosen film genre was drama, as it is a generally popular genre among film audiences. The design of the four conditions can be found in Appendix A.

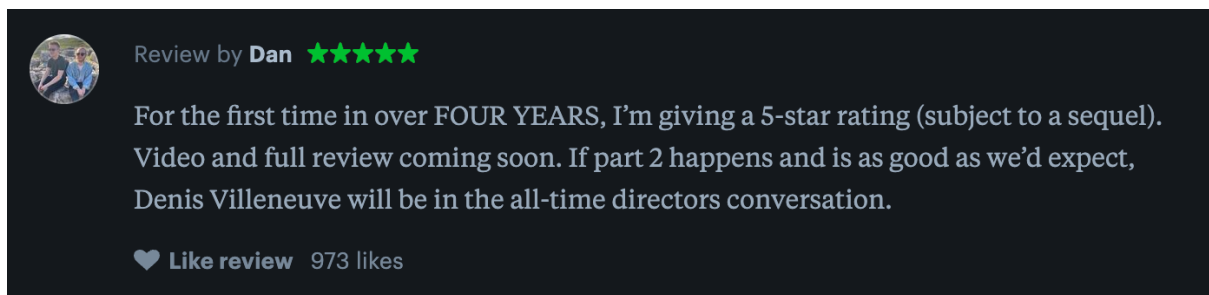


Figure 2. Review on Letterboxd

### 3.2. Survey structure

To collect the data and measure all the mentioned variables, the experiment was built in the form of a survey (see Appendix A). Before starting the data collection, a pre-test was conducted to assess how participants understood the questions asked and to increase the validity and reliability of the research. When conducting the experiment in the data collection phase, participants were asked contextual questions in which control variables and demographics were included, followed by displaying the experiment conditions, measuring the dependent variables, and, lastly, conducting a manipulation check. These measurements were extracted from relevant literature and adapted to the context of this study.

#### 3.2.1. Measurement scales

It is crucial to translate the key concepts of this research into reliable measurable variables, which allows for an in-depth and precise analysis of the relationships under study. It is also important

to mention that the scales used in this study were extracted or adapted from existing, tested scales from previous studies. This ensures the scales' validity and reliability, as their effectiveness has been proven empirically. Three main concepts were operationalized as dependent variables: attitude, behavioral intentions, and perceived source credibility. In the context of this research, behavioral intentions are associated with film selection and the intention of watching a film.

*Attitude.* This study uses adapted elements from three scales applied by Gilly et al. (1998, p. 98), Schivinsky and Dabrowski (2016, p. 212), and Tang et al. (2011, p. 326) to measure the influence film reviews have on users' attitudes towards the reviews: "I would consider watching this film", "This film sounds interesting to me", "I have a pleasant idea of this film", "I associate positive characteristics with this film", "Watching this film would be rewarding". These items were measured on a seven-point Likert scale ranging from 1 (strongly disagree) to 7 (strongly agree). This scale measured participants' attitudes towards the reviewed film ( $M = 3.59$ ,  $SD = .83$ ). Higher scores mean more positive attitudes towards the film reviews.

The 5 items which were Likert-scale based were entered into an exploratory factor analysis using Principal Components extraction with Direct Oblimin rotation based on Eigenvalues ( $> 1.00$ ),  $KMO = .86$ ,  $\chi^2 (N = 130, 10) = 396.68$ ,  $p < .001$ . The resultant model explained 72.2% of the variance in *attitude*. Factor loadings of individual items onto the one factor found are presented in Table 1.1. Furthermore, the factor presents a Cronbach's  $\alpha$  of .90, which means the scale is reliable as expected.

*Table 1.1.* Factor loadings, explained variance and reliability of the one factor found for the scale 'attitude'.

Item	<i>Attitude</i>
I would consider watching this film	.878
I associate positive characteristics with this film	.877
Watching this film would be rewarding	.829
I have a pleasant idea of this film	.828
This film sounds interesting to me	.834
$R^2$	62.2%
Chronbach's $\alpha$	.90
Eigenvalue	3.61

*Behavioral intentions.* Another item was used to measure the respondent's behavioral intention towards watching the film: "Rate how likely it is that you watch this film when it is available to you", measured on a seven-point Likert scale ranging from 1 (extremely unlikely) to 7 (extremely likely).

This scale measures the subjects' intention to watch the reviewed film after looking at the reviews ( $M = 4.55$ ,  $SD = 1.55$ ). High scores mean higher levels of behavioral intention. Because there is only one item measuring behavioral intentions, no exploratory factor analysis was performed.

*Perceived source credibility.* Perceived source credibility was measured through an adapted scale originally developed by West (1994, p. 161) and used by Kusumasondjaja et al. (2012, p. 190), using five dimensions: accuracy, believability, bias, completeness, and trustworthiness. Completeness was replaced by informativeness, as the displayed reviews were not elaborate or long enough to be considered complete. However, after the survey was pre-tested, the item for accuracy was removed from the scale. Through the remaining 4 items, participants were asked the extent to which they found the displayed reviews credible, and each item was measured on a seven-point Likert scale ranging from 1 (strongly disagree) to 7 (strongly agree). The item "I found the film reviews biased" was negatively coded, thus it was reversed using SPSS. Moreover, higher scores mean higher levels of perceived source credibility regarding the reviews.

The 4 items which were Likert-scale based were entered into an exploratory factor analysis using Principal Components extraction with Direct Oblimin rotation based on Eigenvalues ( $> 1.00$ ),  $KMO = .72$ ,  $\chi^2 (N = 130, 6) = 152.95$ ,  $p < .001$ . The resultant model explained 59.2% of the variance in *perceived source credibility*. Factor loadings of individual items onto the one factor found are presented in Table 1.2. Furthermore, the factor presents a Cronbach's  $\alpha$  of .76, which means the scale is reliable as expected.

*Table 1.2.* Factor loadings, explained variance, and reliability of the one factor found for the scale 'perceived source credibility'.

Item	<i>Perceived source credibility</i>
I found the film reviews trustworthy	.885
I found the film reviews believable	.840
I found the film reviews informative	.746
I found the film reviews biased	.569
$R^2$	59.2%
Cronbach's $\alpha$	.76
Eigenvalue	2.37



### 3.2.2. Control variables and demographics

When conducting an experimental design, it is crucial to control other variables that can potentially alter the effects of the reviews on users. Thus, a set of questions was asked before the beginning of the experiment to filter and control the outcome of this research.

First, respondents were presented with a set of items dedicated to collecting general demographic data about them such as age, gender, country of residence, and level of education. According to Hughes et al. (2016, p. 138), collecting demographic information about the participants enables an accurate description of the researched sample and a better understanding of its representation of the population under study. Moreover, it contributes to the study's reliability, as it allows other researchers to replicate the data collection process.

Furthermore, a set of items was presented in order to collect information about the subjects' film-watching habits and use of online film review aggregators in general and Letterboxd in particular. Regarding their film-watching habits, participants were asked how often they watch films and, most importantly, what film genres they watch most frequently. Since the review displayed in the experiment is about a drama film, the latter serves to control the subjects' taste and minimize its influence on the results.

Regarding the use of online film review aggregators, participants were asked what are the factors that usually influence their film selection (recommendations from peers, film trailers, director, cast, general advertising, online reviews, or others), how often they consult online reviews before choosing a film to watch (never, sometimes, about half the time, most of the time, or always), and what platforms they usually use for that purpose. Moreover, regarding the use of Letterboxd, respondents were asked whether they have an active Letterboxd account, how often they used it in the previous six months (from "did not use Letterboxd in the past 6 months" to "more than once a week"), and how often they consult Letterboxd reviews from other users, with answers in the same range.

### 3.2.3. Survey pre-test

Before the distribution of the survey, a pre-test was made to assess whether the survey was clear and comprehensible for the general public. According to Collins (2003, p. 229), survey instruments must be tested before their distribution, to ensure that their purpose is met. Some aspects that must be tested are the survey's design, wording, and whether respondents understand the questions being asked (Collins, 2003, p. 229). This improves the study's validity, as it maximizes the chances that the survey measures what it is intended to measure.

With this in mind, the survey was taken by four respondents from the researcher's network, who evaluated the survey carefully and gave their feedback afterward. From this test, one change was made to the survey design. The small sample that tested the instrument argued that they could not answer whether the displayed reviews were "accurate", as they could only assess accuracy if they had

seen the film in question. The respondents related accuracy to whether the reviews described the film in a truthful way, which in this case cannot be answered by the participants. On that account, the item “I found the film reviews accurate” was removed from the survey design. All the other items and questions were kept, as they received positive feedback from the pre-test sample.

#### 3.2.4. Manipulation check

After presenting the set of film reviews, a manipulation check was conducted to assess whether respondents were aware of the manipulated conditions, by asking whether the review had personal identifying information and how many ‘likes’ it had (less than 10 or more than 10,000). Manipulation checks are commonly used in quantitative studies to detect distracted or inattentive participants and are used to ensure the validity of the results (Morren & Paas, 2020, p. 790). Participants who did not successfully respond to the manipulation check questions were considered invalid responses ( $n = 22$ ), as being aware of the manipulated variables is a crucial requisite for this analysis.

### 3.3. Sampling and data collection

After the pre-test was completed and all adjustments were made, the survey was distributed through several online channels. The target sample consisted of English-speaking people who were over 18 years old and were familiar with Letterboxd. Since the survey was distributed online, participants could be based anywhere in the world, as long as they understood the written English language. These conditions were explicitly presented before the completion of the survey.

Regarding the sampling method, random sampling is usually the most suitable method in quantitative studies that aim to evaluate large samples (Babbie, 2017, p. 199). This implies finding a large sample that precisely represents the population under study and replicates all its relevant characteristics in the same proportions (Babbie, 2017, p. 200). This method allows for the most accurate statistical description of the population. However, in the context of this study, it is logistically not possible to reach all members of the population and give them the same chance to be selected for the sample. To achieve such a great level of representativeness, it would be necessary to have access to the population in its entirety, and randomly extract participants from it. The population under study consists of people who are 18 years or older, speak English, and are familiar with Letterboxd. These criteria form a population that is too large to allow for the selection of a perfectly representative sample.

Thus, in favor of the study’s feasibility, convenience sampling was used by distributing the survey through topic-related online channels and explicitly communicating the characteristics of the target sample when introducing the study. Although it compromises the sample’s representativeness,

the respondents were not randomly selected due to the voluntary nature of the survey. This sampling method was found the most feasible when reaching the desired amount of participants with the pre-specified characteristics. However, it is important to acknowledge the limitations of this method in terms of sample generalization.

After the survey was designed in the online software Qualtrics, it was distributed on several Reddit subforums related to film or broader groups dedicated to the exchange of surveys. Additionally, the survey was posted on Letterboxd's Discord server, as it was an efficient way of reaching the target sample units. The survey was later reposted on some of these channels, as a way of targeting different people at different dates and times. This data collection process occurred between the 8<sup>th</sup> and the 21<sup>st</sup> of April. All respondents participated voluntarily in this study. After choosing to complete the survey, the subjects were randomly assigned to one of the four experimental scenarios, in which each respondent was presented with a set of three film reviews. This random assignment was used to control the undesired influence of external factors such as personality, cultural taste, and cognitive style, thus maximizing the study's internal validity (Park et al., 2007, p. 133). By using Qualtrics, it was possible to ensure an equal distribution of the conditions, with 25.1% of the respondents being assigned to Condition 1, 25.1% to Condition 3, 24.6% to Condition 3, and 25.1% to Condition 4.

Additionally, participants were asked to agree to an informed consent statement placed on the first page of the survey, clarifying the total anonymity and confidentiality of the responses, as well as a description of the study and its voluntary nature. By consenting to this section, participants agreed that they are over 18 years old, they have received true and accurate information about the goals of this research, and they were aware that they could interrupt their participation at any time.

### **3.4. Participants**

In total, 188 people responded to the experiment. From this total, people who did not complete the survey were filtered out ( $n = 36$ ). Most of these participants abandoned the survey after being presented with the random condition. Additionally, 22 responses were removed, as the respondents did not pass the manipulation check. After data cleaning, the final sample consists of 130 respondents.

#### **3.4.1. Demographic background**

In the first section of the survey, respondents were asked about socio-demographic characteristics such as age, gender, country of residence, and level of education. As of age, participants were between 18 and 62 years old ( $M = 27.35$ ,  $SD = 8.24$ ). The majority of the responses were from male participants (64.3%), while the remaining were provided by female (32.6%) and non-

binary (3.1%) participants. Additionally, most respondents reside in the United States (36.9%), followed by Portugal (15.4%) and the Netherlands (11.5%). Regarding the participants' level of education, nearly half of them completed a Bachelor's degree (46.2%), while most of the remaining completed high school (28.5%) or a Master's degree (20.0%).

### 3.4.2. Film-watching consumption habits

Moreover, respondents were asked about their film consumption habits, as well as their familiarity with Letterboxd and other online film review platforms. Most respondents (66.2%) stated that they watched films more than once a week in the previous six months. Regarding the most watched film genres among the sample, drama films are the most viewed, having been selected by 112 participants (86.2%), followed by thriller (80.8%) and sci-fi (68.5%). These results align with the choice of using a drama film for this experiment. As it is a genre liked by most subjects, this contributes to reducing biased results that different tastes among the sample could cause. Thus, this bias is minimized because a large percentage of participants have the same taste regarding drama films.

Additionally, director (83.8%) and recommendations from peers (82.3%) are the factors that most influence participants' film selection, followed by online reviews (70%). 59 respondents sometimes consult online film reviews before their film selection (45.4%), while only seven claim to always consult reviews beforehand (5.4%). The most used online film review platform is Letterboxd, used by 116 participants (89.2%), followed by IMDb (39.2%) and Rotten Tomatoes (34.6%). However, the high frequency associated with Letterboxd may have been caused by how the survey was distributed, as well as its pre-requisites. Because respondents had to be familiar with Letterboxd to participate in this experiment, it is more likely that people who participated also use Letterboxd actively. Accordingly, 117 respondents (90%) affirm to have an active account on Letterboxd.

Finally, respondents were asked about the frequency of their Letterboxd activity. Most participants (71.1%) used Letterboxd in the previous six months, whereas only seven participants (5.5%) did not use Letterboxd. Most participants (59.7%) also consulted Letterboxd reviews from other users in the previous 6 months, while a minority of ten respondents (7.8%) did not consult others' reviews.

Overall, this description of the sample indicates that most participants are familiar with online review aggregators – in particular, Letterboxd – and consulting reviews from other users. This may contribute to a more accurate assessment of the influence of the social features of these reviews on users' intentions since most respondents are already familiar with these features and have frequent contact with them.

### **3.5. Validity and reliability**

By relying on a quantitative experimental research design, this study's methodology provides the opportunity to easily control and manipulate variables and survey items, while observing the participants' responses in a controlled environment. However, it is crucial to carefully consider all the factors that can compromise the study's validity and reliability.

First, this study uses measurement scales that rely on previous research and thus have demonstrated validity and reliability. The incorporation of existing literature on eWOM, social influence, and online reviews ensures the necessary theoretical alignment between what has been observed before and what this thesis aims to achieve. Additionally, randomization was assured in the survey creation process, by randomly assigning respondents to the different experiment conditions through Qualtrics. According to Slack and Draugalis (2001), randomization is an important procedure that ensures the internal validity of the results, and it is "the best method available to produce study groups that are equivalent with respect to known and unknown variables" (p. 2177). The use of an experimental design enhances the study's validity by allowing for the direct comparison between different experimental conditions. Moreover, the use of control variables and manipulation checks during the experiment contribute to the integrity and validity of the responses. On the other hand, the sampling method used to ensure the feasibility of this study might compromise its validity to some extent. It is important to acknowledge that using convenience sampling may lead to results that are less representative of the population under study, which can threaten the study's ideal level of validity.

As for reliability, some aspects of this study contribute to its reliability and further replicability. First, the use of a controlled experimental design and randomly assigned conditions reduces biased results and contributes to a consistent data collection process, thus maximizing the study's reliability. Second, both the research design and the operationalization of the concepts under study are clearly defined, which allows other researchers to replicate the study accurately. Overall, the consistency and transparency in the research design process ensure that this study can easily be replicated in further research, maximizing its reliability.

## 4. Results

In this chapter, the analyses conducted to test the hypotheses are reported, providing the findings of this study and, consequently, the answer to the research question.

First, the effect of *PII* and *number of 'likes'* on perceived source credibility was examined. The mediation of *gender* as covariate in this relationship was tested, due to the uneven distribution of the statistics in the sample. Thus, a two-way analysis of covariance (ANCOVA) was performed. This method is frequently used to examine the individual and joint effects of two independent variables on one dependent variable, while controlling for additional variables, thus reducing potential bias in the results (Pallant, 2020, p. 316). Then, this process was repeated for *behavioral intentions* and *attitude* as dependent variables.

Because *number of 'likes'* and *PII* did not exist as variables in SPSS, they were computed as new variables for statistical analysis. Thus, *number of 'likes'* was organized into two categories (high or low). A high number of 'likes' is associated with Conditions 3 and 4, and a low score is associated with Conditions 1 and 2. *PII* was also organized into two categories expressing whether it was present in the review (yes or no). Present *PII* is associated with Conditions 2 and 4, and absent *PII* is associated with Conditions 1 and 3.

Lastly, in order to assess the relationship between *perceived source credibility* and *attitude*, as well as between *behavioral intentions* and *attitude*, two multiple regression analyses were conducted. The first had *attitude* as dependent variable and *perceived source credibility* as predictor, while the second had *behavioral intentions* as dependent variable and *attitude* as predictor, thus testing  $H_4$  and  $H_5$  respectively. According to Pallant (2020, p. 153), regression analyses are useful not only to understand the correlation between variables, but also the extent to which a set of variables can help predict a particular result.

### 4.1. Perceived source credibility

A two-way between-groups analysis of covariance was conducted to assess the individual and joint effects of *number of 'likes'* and *PII* on *perceived source credibility*, as well as the mediation of *gender*. Thus, the independent variables were the number of 'likes' and the presence of *PII*, the dependent variable was perceived source credibility, and the covariate was gender. The effect of the covariate *gender* was not significant,  $F(1, 124) = 1.12, p = .293$ , partial  $\eta^2 = .01$ , suggesting that males and females do not respond differently to the manipulations. Furthermore, the main effect of *PII* on credibility was significant with a weak effect,  $F(1, 124) = 4.33, p = .040$ , partial  $\eta^2 = .03$ , accepting  $H_{1.1}$ . The main effect of *number of 'likes'* on credibility was also statistically significant with a weak effect,  $F(1, 124) = 3.95, p = .049$ , partial  $\eta^2 = .03$ , accepting  $H_{1.2}$ . The interaction effect between *number of 'likes'* and *PII* was not significant,  $F(1, 124) = .79, p = .377$ , partial  $\eta^2 = .01$ .

Thus,  $H_{1.3}$  is rejected. These results suggest that reviews with a higher number of ‘likes’ are perceived as more credible ( $M = 3.89$ ,  $SD = .10$ ), while those with less ‘likes’ are perceived as less credible ( $M = 3.60$ ,  $SD = .10$ ). Moreover, the reviews showing PII were perceived as more credible ( $M = 3.89$ ,  $SD = .10$ ), while those that did not have PII were perceived as less credible ( $M = 3.59$ ,  $SD = .10$ ).

#### 4.2. Behavioral intentions

A two-way between-groups analysis of covariance was conducted to assess the individual and joint effects of *number of ‘likes’* and *PII* on *behavioral intentions*, as well as the mediation of *gender*. Thus, the independent variables were the number of ‘likes’ and the presence of PII, the dependent variable was behavioral intentions, and the covariate was gender. The effect of the covariate *gender* was not significant,  $F(1, 124) = 3.73$ ,  $p = .056$ , partial  $\eta^2 = .03$ , suggesting that males and females do not respond differently to the manipulations. The main effect of *PII* on *behavioral intentions* was not statistically significant,  $F(1, 124) = .81$ ,  $p = .370$ , partial  $\eta^2 = .01$ , rejecting  $H_{2.1}$ . However, the main effect of *number of ‘likes’* on *behavioral intentions* was statistically significant with a weak effect,  $F(1, 124) = 4.82$ ,  $p = .030$ , partial  $\eta^2 = .04$ , accepting  $H_{2.2}$ . The interaction effect between *number of ‘likes’* and *PII* was not significant,  $F(1, 124) = .70$ ,  $p = .404$ , partial  $\eta^2 = .01$ . Thus,  $H_{2.3}$  is rejected. These results suggest that reviews with a higher number of ‘likes’ are associated with higher levels of behavioral intentions ( $M = 4.83$ ,  $SD = .19$ ), while those with less ‘likes’ are associated with lower levels of behavioral intentions ( $M = 4.25$ ,  $SD = .19$ ). On the other hand, the presence of PII in the reviews cannot be associated with higher levels of behavioral intentions, since the effect is not significant.

#### 4.3. Attitude

A two-way between-groups analysis of covariance was conducted to assess the individual and joint effects of *number of ‘likes’* and *PII* on *attitude*, as well as the mediation of *gender*. Thus, the independent variables were the number of ‘likes’ and the presence of PII, the dependent variable was attitude, and the covariate was gender. The effect of the covariate *gender* was not significant,  $F(1, 124) = 2.55$ ,  $p = .113$ , partial  $\eta^2 = .02$ , suggesting that males and females do not respond differently to the manipulations. The main effect of *PII* on *attitude* was not statistically significant,  $F(1, 124) = 1.30$ ,  $p = .256$ , partial  $\eta^2 = .01$ , rejecting  $H_{3.1}$ . However, the main effect of *number of ‘likes’* on *attitude* was statistically significant with a moderate effect,  $F(1, 124) = 9.62$ ,  $p = .002$ , partial  $\eta^2 = .07$ , accepting  $H_{3.2}$ . The interaction effect between *number of ‘likes’* and *PII* was not significant,  $F(1, 124) = .30$ ,  $p = .588$ , partial  $\eta^2 = .00$ . Thus,  $H_{3.3}$  is rejected. These results suggest that reviews with a higher number of ‘likes’ are associated with a more positive attitude towards them ( $M = 3.81$ ,  $SD = .10$ ), while those with less ‘likes’ are associated with a less positive attitude ( $M = 3.37$ ,  $SD = .10$ ). On

the other hand, the presence of PII in the reviews cannot be associated with higher levels of attitude, since the effect is not significant. The overall mean scores for all analyses of variance can be found in Table 2.1.

*Table 2.1.* Significant effects of number of ‘likes’ and PII on credibility, behavioral intentions and attitude

	<b>Credibility</b>	<b>Behavioral intentions</b>	<b>Attitude</b>	<b>N</b>
Number of 'likes'				
High	3.89 (.10)	4.83 (.19)	3.81 (.10)	63
Low	3.60 (.10)	4.25 (.19)	3.37 (.10)	66
PII				
Present	3.89 (.10)			65
Not present	3.59 (.10)			64

*Note.* Mean scores; standard error between parentheses. All models controlled for gender.

#### 4.4. Perceived source credibility versus attitude

A multiple linear regression analysis was conducted with *attitude* as dependent variable and *perceived source credibility* as predictor. First, the assumptions of multiple regression analysis – multicollinearity, outliers, normality, linearity, homoscedasticity, and independence of residuals - were checked from the test output provided by SPSS. The model was found to be significant,  $F(1, 128) = 49.46, p < .001$ . The regression model is thus useful for predicting users’ attitude towards film reviews. 27.9% of the differences in attitude can be predicted based on perceived source credibility ( $R^2 = .28$ ). Perceived source credibility has a significant positive correlation with attitude,  $b^* = .53, t = 7.03, p < .001$ , 95% CI [0.38, 0.68]. Thus,  $H_4$  is accepted. Table 2.2 presents an overview of the regression analysis outcome.

*Table 2.2.* Regression model for predicting attitude

	<b><i>b</i>*</b>
Perceived source credibility	.53
$R^2$	.28

*Note.* Significance level:  $p < .001$ .

#### 4.5. Attitude versus behavioral intentions

A multiple linear regression analysis was conducted with *behavioral intentions* as dependent variable and *attitude* as predictor. First, the assumptions of multiple regression analysis –



multicollinearity, outliers, normality, linearity, homoscedasticity, and independence of residuals - were checked from the test output provided by SPSS. The model was found to be significant,  $F(1, 128) = 107.09, p < .001$ . The regression model is thus useful for predicting users' intention to watch the reviewed film. 45.6% of the differences in behavioral intentions can be predicted based on attitude ( $R^2 = .46$ ). Attitude has a significant positive correlation with attitude,  $b^* = .68, t = 10.35, p < .001$ , 95% CI [1.02, 1.50]. Thus,  $H_5$  is accepted. Table 2.3 presents an overview of the regression analysis outcome.

*Table 2.3.* Regression model for predicting behavioral intentions

	<i>b</i> *
Attitude	.68
$R^2$	.46

*Note.* Significance level:  $p < .001$ .

#### 4.6. Outcomes of hypotheses testing

In order to examine the previously presented hypotheses, three two-way analyses of covariance and two correlation tests were conducted. Table 2.4 presents an overview of the analysis outcome.

*Table 2.4.* Outcomes of hypotheses testing

Hypothesis	Outcome
H1.1: Online film reviews with the presence of personal identifying information are perceived as more credible.	Accepted
H1.2: Online film reviews with a higher number of 'likes' are perceived as more credible.	Accepted
H1.3: Online film reviews with the presence of personal identifying information and a higher number of 'likes' are perceived as more credible.	Rejected
H2.1: Users' behavioral intentions are positively affected by film reviews with the presence of personal identifying information.	Rejected

H2.2: Users' behavioral intentions are positively affected by film reviews with a higher number of 'likes'.	Accepted
H2.3: Users' behavioral intentions are positively affected by film reviews with the presence of personal identifying information and a higher number of 'likes'.	Rejected
H3.1: Users' attitudes toward online film reviews are positively affected by film reviews with the presence of personal identifying information.	Rejected
H3.2: Users' attitudes toward online film reviews are positively affected by film reviews with a higher number of 'likes'.	Accepted
H3.3: Users' attitudes toward online film reviews are positively affected by film reviews with the presence of personal identifying information and a higher number of 'likes'.	Rejected
H4: Perceived source credibility of online film reviews has a positive influence on users' attitudes toward the reviews.	Accepted
H5: Users' behavioral intentions are positively affected by their attitudes toward film reviews.	Accepted

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## 5. Conclusion

This chapter discusses the findings of this study in light of the theoretical framework that guided this thesis. First, the theoretical implications of the findings are critically discussed, and the answer to the central research question is provided and examined in detail. Next, the societal implications are discussed, as well as how these findings contribute to the current social climate, especially in matters regarding new digital media and communication. Moreover, the strengths and limitations of this study are examined, by taking a critical look at the research process as a whole, in theory and in practice. The last section provides an overall conclusion and a brief answer to the research question.

### 5.1. Discussion

This thesis aimed to examine the influence of social features in online film reviews on users' film-watching intention through perceived source credibility. In particular, it looked at the presence of personal identifying information and 'likes' in the reviews, and how these features affected users' perceptions. Through a 2 x 2 between-subjects experimental study in the form of a survey, participants were presented a set of Letterboxd film reviews with manipulated variables according to each of the four conditions, and were asked about their assessment of the reviews.

After analyzing the responses, 6 out of 11 hypotheses were supported, as seen in Table 2.3. These results provide insights into the influence of online film reviews' social features on users' perceptions and intentions. This section discusses these results alongside previous theoretical findings, thus providing a solid answer to the research question.

First, the influence of these social features on users' perception of credibility was examined. It was found that online film reviews that include the author's personal identifying information – in this case, profile picture and username - are perceived as more credible. This aligns with previous statements on the role of PII on consumers' perception of credibility in online reviews (Garg & Pandey, 2020, p. 631; Xie et al., 2011, p. 182). The presence of PII is thus associated with more believable, unbiased, complete, and trustworthy reviews, which in turn makes them more credible. These findings demonstrate that not only the content of the reviews is important for users' assessment, but also the identified authorship of those reviews, highlighting the state of the current digital landscape in which anonymity does not matter as much as creating truthful connections. Additionally, it was found that the number of 'likes' in a review also positively influences users' perception of credibility. This finding shows that Letterboxd reviews with a higher number of 'likes' by other users are perceived as more credible, corroborating existing theories such as the social impact theory (Latané, 1981, p. 345; Kwahk & Ge, 2012, p. 1816) and the signaling theory (Connelly et al., 2011, p. 39). Moreover, it aligns with previous findings on how social endorsement cues – in this case, in the

form of ‘likes’ – influence users’ decision-making and message credibility (Borah & Xiao, 2018, p. 401; Luo et al., 2022, p. 188). This finding reflects how social influence acts in these environments, and how popularity can define one’s perceptions to such a great extent. Additionally, the analysis looked for the joint influence of both PII and number of ‘likes’ on perceived source credibility, as it could contribute to a more accurate description of each individual effect, but the interaction was not found. This means that the influences of both features are independent from each other. Most of the previous findings on perceived source credibility in online reviews exist only in studies regarding reviews in the travel and hospitality industries. Thus, these findings are particularly interesting as they fill a gap in the literature by stating that this relationship also applies to film reviews.

Second, the influence of social features on users’ watching intention was also examined. Similarly to the findings regarding perceived source credibility, the effect of PII does not influence the effect of number of ‘likes’ on users’ behavioral intentions and vice-versa, which allowed for the individual influences of both factors to be assessed independently. This assessment was mainly guided by Ajzen’s (1991, p. 206) theory of planned behavior, and originated two main conclusions. First, it was found that the presence of PII does not influence users’ intention of watching the film being reviewed. Although it does have an influence on how users trust the review, it does not influence their film selection, contrary to what has been stated in previous studies (Xie et al., 2011, p. 181). On the other hand, it was found that the number of ‘likes’ in the reviews does influence these intentions, as users show a greater intention of watching the film when the reviews have a high amount of ‘likes’ from others. As it was observed with perceived source credibility, this result was expected, as it aligns with previous findings on the relationship between social endorsement and purchasing intentions in online environments. This can also be linked to the social impact and signaling theories (Connelly et al., 2011, p. 39; Latané, 1981, p. 345; Kwahk & Ge, 2012, p. 1816).

The same results were found regarding the effect of social features on users’ attitudes toward the reviews. Whereas the presence of PII does not influence attitudes, the number of ‘likes’ in the reviews does have an observable effect. Since behavioral intentions and attitude closely relate to each other according to the theory of planned behavior (Ajzen, 1991, p. 179), it is not surprising that social features have similar effects on both of them. Since the TPB argues that attitude drives intention, if one is influenced by the amount of ‘likes’ a review has, it is only natural that the other is also influenced.

Lastly, this study examines the direct relationship between perceived source credibility and attitude, as well as between attitude and behavioral intentions. Understanding these relationships strengthens the overall argument made in this thesis regarding the role of social features of online film reviews in users’ perceptions, attitudes, and behaviors. The results align with what has been previously found in social studies. First, as Ayeh et al. (2013, p. 445) and Kim et al. (2018, p. 252) state, a more credible source is associated with more positive attitudes from the consumer. This was an expected result, as it is a common finding among existing academic literature. Finally, as the theory

of planned behavior argues (Ajzen, 1991, p. 179), attitude is related to behavioral intentions, as more positive attitudes are associated with a higher intention to perform a behavior. In this context, users with more positive attitudes towards the film reviews they consult have a higher intention of watching the reviewed film.

Overall, from these results, it is possible to argue that social features affect users' perceptions and attitudes toward film reviews. However, it is clear that different kinds of social features have different effects. While social endorsement in the form of 'likes' influences both the reviews' credibility and users' film-watching intention, source identification only influences credibility. Further research could be dedicated to understanding this difference between types of social features, and how each of them has different effects on how people use online film review aggregators.

From a theoretical perspective, these findings provide valuable insights into how existing theories on eWOM, social influence, and online reviews apply to the film industry, and how online film reviews can have a great impact on users' film-watching behavior. Academic work regarding social features in online film reviews is rather scarce, so this study expands the scope of literature in this discipline, therefore contributing to a richer academic portfolio in communication and media studies.

## **5.2. Societal implications**

These findings not only have implications for the academic field, particularly in media and communication studies but also offer valuable insights into the current social landscape, especially in the digital sphere. As of today, the consumption of media and the way people use and interact with online content has been under significant changes. Online platforms, in particular those centered around user-generated content, play a crucial role in defining opinions and behaviors. This study turns to the film industry to examine how this user-generated content, specifically in the form of online reviews, impacts users' perceptions and behaviors in a context where social media and online communities are central and indispensable.

The role of personal identifying information in affecting users' trust in the reviews reflects the growing importance of authenticity and transparency in online interactions. In an environment where anonymity is frequent and trivial, users seem to be increasingly more connected with content that provides a sense of familiarity and personal connection. As users start to gravitate towards more authentic interactions, platforms may need to consider adjusting their offer of social features, to keep up with user demands. Moreover, the influence of the number of 'likes' on users' perceived credibility, attitudes, and intentions, reflects the importance of social validation in the current digital landscape. The concept of social impact is thus reinforced, as individuals look for others' validation to guide their own behavior. Film review aggregators such as Letterboxd should take this into consideration, as these dynamics can lead to a reinforcement of already popular viewpoints, which can contribute to a

homogenization of opinions. Naturally, this can benefit films that have already reached large audiences, while neglecting those less popular.

Overall, these findings have practical implications for platforms based on user-generated content, as understanding the importance of social features can contribute to a more efficient platform design. Features that highlight users' identification and facilitate social endorsement and interaction can improve users' trust and engagement. However, platforms should also consider the ethical implications of this implementation, such as matters related to privacy protection. Thus, effective platform design should promote authenticity and transparency while also encouraging the display of different viewpoints and protecting users' right to privacy.

### **5.3. Limitations**

Even though this study provides valuable insights into the impact of social features in online film reviews, acknowledging its limitations is crucial to accurately contextualize the findings, ensuring academic transparency and guiding future research.

First, while the experimental nature of this study has several benefits and helps measure the intended variables under a controlled environment, it may not fully reflect the complexity of real social media interactions on a day-to-day basis. User behavior can be influenced by a large number of factors and characteristics of an online review besides PII and 'likes', such as the quality and depth of the review itself, the overall reputation of the author or the platform, and the presence of other features like comments or reactions. Another limitation regards the nature of the reviews, which were artificially designed and do not correspond to a real film. Aspects such as the name of the film, profile pictures, or the name of the users may affect how the reviews are perceived. Additionally, other factors external to the reviews can play a role in users' perceptions, such as prior knowledge about the film. In the present study, it was not possible to control for all these variables and simulate a fully realistic scenario, taking all these factors into account. Future research could consider a more complex research design that accounts for the sophisticated nature of consulting online reviews, or perhaps complementing this design with a qualitative approach in order to gain an in-depth understanding of how these factors may or may not change users' perceptions.

Moreover, because a survey was used as the data collection instrument, this study relied on self-reported behavior from users, which can lead to results that are not fully truthful as participants may not accurately report their perceptions and intentions. Although surveys are instruments that help reach the target audience effectively and at a large scale, this can compromise the validity and reliability of the study. Future research could incorporate more sophisticated measures like tracking users' watching behavior after being exposed to reviews.

Another limitation that should be addressed is the sample size. Although it was within the parameters specified for this particular research, it may not fully represent the broader population

under study. Because the survey was distributed in only a few different online channels, the findings may not fully represent how different groups respond to social features in online film reviews, thus compromising the generalizability of the results. Additionally, selecting participants through a convenience sampling method might also compromise the representativeness of the sample. As mentioned in earlier chapters, random sampling is the ideal method to apply in quantitative research, as it ensures an equal distribution of respondents in the sample. However, such method compromised the feasibility of this study. It is important to acknowledge the drawbacks of that decision, as the employed sampling method may lead to self-selection bias. Future research should consider to expand the sample size, in order to ensure a larger and more diverse representation of the population. For example, stratified sampling techniques could ensure equal representation across different demographic groups.

## 5.4. Conclusion

This study aimed to answer the research question:

*RQ: To what extent do social features of online film reviews influence users' behavioral intentions through perceived source credibility on Letterboxd?*

To answer this question, a 2 x 2 between-subject experimental design was conducted using a set of Letterboxd film reviews with manipulated social features and examining the responses to each condition.

Overall, the results show that social features play an important role in influencing users' behavioral intentions and perceived source credibility. However, it is important to highlight that this answer has several nuances that must be considered and closely examined. First, the concept of social features has been broken down into PII and number of 'likes', and each of them showed slightly different results. While PII enhances perceived source credibility, it does not necessarily influence film-watching intentions. On the other hand, the number of 'likes' in online film reviews not only positively influences credibility but also affects users' intentions to watch the reviewed films. Thus, it can be argued that both dimensions of social features are relevant and influence user dynamics in online environments, even if in different ways. By identifying the individual and combined effects of both dimensions, this study provides a comprehensive understanding of how social features are of great importance in today's social media landscape, especially in platforms dedicated to user-generated online reviews.

Moreover, this research contributes to the academic discourse by validating and expanding on existing theories in eWOM, social media, and communication studies. It argues that most of the relationships often observed in the travel and hospitality industries regarding the influence of online

reviews can also be observed in online film reviews, thus enriching the current theoretical landscape in media and communication studies. Additionally, its societal implications guide media and communication practitioners in efficiently designing online platforms that respond to the current user demands regarding social interaction, by prioritizing authenticity, transparency, and social validation aspects, while ensuring ethical practices.

In conclusion, this study can guide future research in examining how users respond to the latest changes in social media environments, namely the implementation of different social features. As user-generated content gains greater value every day, it is important to look into its implications in consumer-oriented industries and how it can benefit users, professionals, and brands.



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## Appendix A. Survey structure

Welcome!

Thank you for your participation in this survey.

I am a Media and Creative Industries student at Erasmus University Rotterdam, and I am currently conducting my Master's Thesis research. In general terms, the questions on this survey will be related to your film and media consumption habits and your use of film review outlets.

To participate in this survey you must be 18 years or older, be familiar with Letterboxd, and understand the written English language. This survey will take approximately 5-10 minutes to complete. All the answers collected from this survey are completely anonymous and will only be used for the purpose of this study. Your participation is voluntary and you are free to interrupt the survey at any time. Please read the instructions carefully. There are no right or wrong answers. Any response is welcome and can provide valuable insights.

If you have questions about your rights as a participant or are dissatisfied at any time with any aspect of this study, you may contact me – anonymously, if you wish – via [635259mc@eur.nl](mailto:635259mc@eur.nl).

Q1 Please select one of the following:

- ☐ I agree to each of the statements above and I consent my participation in this research.
- ☐ I withdraw from participating in this research.

Q2 Are you familiar with Letterboxd?

- ☐ Yes
- ☐ No

Q3 What is your age in years?

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Q4 What gender identity best describes you?

- ☐ Male
- ☐ Female
- ☐ Non-binary / third gender
- ☐ Other: \_\_\_\_\_

Q5 What is currently your country of residence?

▼ Afghanistan (1) ... Zimbabwe (1357)

Q6 What is the highest level of education that you finished?

- ☐ Less than a high school diploma
- ☐ High school graduate or equivalent
- ☐ Bachelor's degree
- ☐ Master's degree
- ☐ PhD or higher

Q7 How often did you watch a film in the past 6 months?

- ☐ More than once a week
- ☐ Once a week
- ☐ 2/3 times a month
- ☐ Once a month
- ☐ A few times
- ☐ Did not watch any film in the past 6 months

Q8 Which film genres do you like watching? You can select multiple answers.

- ☐ Action
- ☐ Drama
- ☐ Horror
- ☐ Thriller
- ☐ Sci-fi
- ☐ Romance
- ☐ Western
- ☐ Fantasy
- ☐ Documentary
- ☐ Animation
- ☐ Musical
- ☐ Other: \_\_\_\_\_

Q9 Please think about what factors usually influence your film selection. Select the option(s) that best represent your situation.

- ☐ Recommendations from peers (friends, family, etc.)
- ☐ Film trailer
- ☐ Cast
- ☐ Director
- ☐ General advertising
- ☐ Online reviews
- ☐ Other: \_\_\_\_\_

Q10 How often do you consult online film reviews before choosing a film to watch?

- ☐ Never
- ☐ Sometimes
- ☐ About half the time
- ☐ Most of the time
- ☐ Always

Q11 Which online film review platforms do you use?

- ☐ IMDb
- ☐ Letterboxd
- ☐ Rotten Tomatoes
- ☐ Metacritic
- ☐ Other: \_\_\_\_\_

Q12 Do you currently have an active account on Letterboxd?

- ☐ Yes
- ☐ No

Q13 How often did you use Letterboxd in the past 6 months?

- ☐ More than once a week
- ☐ Once a week
- ☐ 2/3 times a month
- ☐ Once a month
- ☐ A few times
- ☐ Did not use Letterboxd in the past 6 months

Q14 How often did you consult Letterboxd reviews from other users in the past 6 months?

- ☐ More than once a week
  - ☐ Once a week
  - ☐ 2/3 times a month
  - ☐ Once a month
  - ☐ A few times
  - ☐ Did not consult Letterboxd reviews from other users in the past 6 months
-

You are now seeing a set of Letterboxd user reviews. Then, you will be asked a few questions about your assessment of the reviews. Please read the reviews carefully.

Name of the film: Free Falling

Genre: Drama

### Condition (Randomly Assigned)

Caught this last night and it's still on my mind. Such a beautifully crafted film with top-notch acting and a storyline that keeps you guessing. Definitely worth the watch!

♥ Like review 2 likes


This was so much better than I was expecting, I was only watching it for the cast but can we talk about how gorgeous this film looks??

♥ Like review 5 likes

Beautifully shot and scored, and with an ending that perplexes in a way that I haven't seen before. For me it's a 10 out of 10, very special film!

♥ Like review 1 like


### Condition 1



Review by **Josh**

Caught this last night and it's still on my mind. Such a beautifully crafted film with top-notch acting and a storyline that keeps you guessing. Definitely worth the watch!


♥ Like review 2 likes



Review by **Sarah**

This was so much better than I was expecting, I was only watching it for the cast but can we talk about how gorgeous this film looks??

♥ Like review 5 likes



Review by **Emma**

Beautifully shot and scored, and with an ending that perplexes in a way that I haven't seen before. For me it's a 10 out of 10, very special film!

♥ Like review 1 like

### Condition 2

Caught this last night and it's still on my mind. Such a beautifully crafted film with top-notch acting and a storyline that keeps you guessing. Definitely worth the watch!

♥ Like review 19,807 likes

This was so much better than I was expecting, I was only watching it for the cast but can we talk about how gorgeous this film looks??

♥ Like review 15,790 likes

Beautifully shot and scored, and with an ending that perplexes in a way that I haven't seen before. For me it's a 10 out of 10, very special film!

♥ Like review 16,929 likes

### Condition 3



Review by **Josh**

Caught this last night and it's still on my mind. Such a beautifully crafted film with top-notch acting and a storyline that keeps you guessing. Definitely worth the watch!

♥ Like review 19,807 likes



Review by **Sarah**

This was so much better than I was expecting, I was only watching it for the cast but can we talk about how gorgeous this film looks??

♥ Like review 15,790 likes



Review by **Emma**

Beautifully shot and scored, and with an ending that perplexes in a way that I haven't seen before. For me it's a 10 out of 10, very special film!

♥ Like review 16,929 likes

### Condition 4

The following questions are related to your attitude towards the film mentioned in the reviews.

Q15 Please indicate to what extent you agree with the following statements, based on the reviews you saw:

	Strongly disagree	Somewhat disagree	Neither agree nor disagree	Somewhat agree	Strongly agree
I would consider watching this film	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
This film sounds interesting to me	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
I have a pleasant idea of this film	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
I associate positive characteristics with this film	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
Watching this film would be rewarding	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>

Q16 Please indicate how likely it is that you watch this film when it is available to you

- ☐ Extremely unlikely
- ☐ Moderately unlikely
- ☐ Slightly unlikely
- ☐ Neither likely nor unlikely
- ☐ Slightly likely
- ☐ Moderately likely
- ☐ Extremely likely

The following questions are related to the credibility of the reviews.

Q17 Please indicate to what extent you agree with the following statements:

	Strongly disagree	Somewhat disagree	Neither agree nor disagree	Somewhat agree	Strongly agree
I found the film reviews believable	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
I found the film reviews biased	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
I found the film reviews informative	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
I found the film reviews trustworthy	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>

---

Thank you for your answers! The last two questions are about details of the reviews shown to you.

Q18 Did the reviews have personal identifying information from the user (profile photo and username)?

- ☐ Yes
- ☐ No
- ☐ I don't remember

Q19 How many 'likes' did each of the reviews have?

- ☐ Less than 10
- ☐ More than 10,000
- ☐ I don't remember

Thank you for completing this survey and participating in this research! If you have any questions, comments, or complaints, you may contact me ([635259mc@eur.nl](mailto:635259mc@eur.nl)) or my supervisor Prof. Dr. Marc Verboord ([verboord@eshcc.eur.nl](mailto:verboord@eshcc.eur.nl)).

Warm regards,  
Mariana Seixas