

Impact of Online Reviews on Hotel Booking Decision: A Qualitative Study

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Abstract

The study looks into the high effect of online customer reviews on hotel room booking decisions. The research uses qualitative methods by doing interviews on the related that are consumed or use of digital reviews and hotel management to conclude the effect of internet reviews on consumer preferences or choices. The survey sought to identify what information consumers are looking for when they shop for hotel bookings, and it was clear that genuine and informative reviews have a major impact on booking choices. The report examines how confident customers are in online reviews and shows the levels of skepticism and the methods to tell if a review is real or fake. Social proof in reviews and hotel reviews plays an important role in travel and booking decisions. This study has implications for both hotel operators, underscoring the need for a deliberate approach to managing online reputation and engaging with customer reviews, and online travel agencies. The suggested response means that the key to positively impacting booking decisions and increasing guest satisfaction is to engage with reviews, using them as an ongoing tool for improvement and ensuring online representations match the real guest experience. Research has given us insight as to how customers are changing in the era of digital media, especially in travel and tourism, focusing on the hotel businesses and the elves the web is giving their customers.

Keywords: Online Review, Decision Making, Guest Satisfaction, Consumer Preferences

Introduction

Online reviews influencing hotel booking choices is a composite question. Internet reviews greatly influence today's travelers. The impact of Internet reviews on hotel amenities is a complex inquiry. Lien, Wen, Huang, and Wu (2015) studied the impact of quality, perceived value, trust, and corporate image on customers' intention to book in their study. In their investigation, Agag and El-Masry (2016) agreed that a habit is

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an important moderator that governs the relationship between commitment, trust and an inclination to book hotels. Mahdzar, Baharum, Sahib, Fadzil, Kamal, and Hamidi (2022) delved into social influence, The ability to trust online booking has a beneficial effect on the degree of consumer satisfaction (Ding, Qing-ran, Rehman, & Zeeshan, 2022), but the volume of negative reviews impacts visitors greater their peers' positive review. The positive response to an online hotel review is greater when guests see natives' pictures posted by other users (An & Ozturk, 2022; Viglia, Minazzi, & Buhalis, 2016).

Research Objectives

1. To determine the impact of online reviews on the buying decisions of consumers in the context of choosing a hotel
2. To identify and analyze the approach used by the hotels to handle and manage online reviews, and the psychological practices of the online relationship
3. To find out the impact of online reviews on customer's buying decision process

Scope and Limitations

The effects of internet reviews on the hospitality sector are the primary subject of this research. It includes a survey of several kinds of hotels, from cheap motels to five-star resorts. Online review platforms' effects on customer behavior and decision-making are the primary foci of the study. This study does have some limitations. There is a significant drawback to user-generated material, which is its inherent prejudice. Not all visitors' experiences or the hotel's quality will be reflected in online reviews. The ever-changing algorithms that control various internet platforms also affect how prominent and important certain evaluations seem. Lastly, the developments in online advertising and customer behavior after COVID-19 have had a big influence on the hotel sector, although the study may not completely reflect these changes.

Literature Review

The Role of Online Reviews in Consumer Decision Making

There are a lot of moving parts in the intricate process that determine the impact of internet reviews on consumers' final decisions. Roozen and Raedts (2021) similarly showed the "important ubiquity of online review sites in the retail sector", particularly the impact of reviews on both consumer and seller behavior. It has been found that

online user evaluations significantly impact product sales because they educate and advocate buying choices (Park, Lee, & Han, 2007).

It is not only because customers' brand selection will be influenced by reviews more positively than other information sources also study by Xu, Liu, Ren, and Forrest (2023) proved how online reviews are beyond persuasive in surely customer perception agrees.

Al-Mughairi, Bhaskar, and Alazri (2021) highlighted how product and customer characteristics could moderate the connection between online word-of-mouth and purchase decisions. According to Filieri, McLeay, Tsui, and Lin (2018), this highlights the coordination between one's personal preferences and societal impact on decision-making. Furthermore, review self-efficacy or consumers' skepticism plays a role in the decision-making process, as Ahmad and Guzmán (2021) remarked, evidencing the psychological aspects that are part of consumers' response to online reviews. The impact of online feedback on customer attitudes has been underlined by Chen, Kou, and Peng (2018). These reviews are capable of changing consumers' perceptions, preferences, and therefore, their purchasing decisions. Fahrozi, Rahmawati, Muldani, and Saddam (2022) further add to the multi-dimensional character of the impact of online reviews on consumer buying behavior by showing us that trust affects online customer reviews, in turn affecting the impact on online purchase considerations directly and indirectly (Fahrozi, Rahmawati, Muldani, & Saddam, 2022). Putri, Syam, Mustari, Dinar, Said, and Jufri (2022) successfully demonstrate that online consumer reviews positively and significantly impact online purchase decisions (Putri, Syam, Mustari, Dinar, Said, & Jufri, 2022).

Impact of Internet Reviews on the Hospitality Industry

Internet reviews and their influence on the hotel industry have been studied a lot. According to the empirical study of Danish, Hafeez, Ali, Shahid, and Nadeem (2019), internet reviews, positive or negative, do not impact consumer intentions of booking hotel accommodations online. Another study by Torres, Singh, and Robertson-Ring (2015), researched the impact of the hotel's average rating and count of reviews on the value of online transactions. Xiao, Li, Zhang, Yue, and Wan (2021) in their research showed that in recent times, online hospitality reviews have greatly affected the travel and accommodation selections of clients. A research conducted by Ding, Qing-ran, Rehman, and Zeeshan (2022), where they elaborate on how customer comments on the websites can affect the booking preferences of customers.

Another study in 2021 found when there is positive or negative valence of online reviews, they have significant impact on the guest's hotel booking intention (Arsawan, Koval, Suryantini, & Polyezhayev, 2021). Additionally, while online reviews may not always be accurate, many customers use them to gather a larger range of reviews as a reference to assist their purchase decisions (Xu, Liu, Ren, & Forrest, 2023). Xu, Liu, Ren, and Forrest (2023) highlight the significance of online reviews in customer's purchase decisions. Kang, Sun, Liang, and Mao (2022) research underpins their role as heuristic attributes that stall the production of purchase intention and purchase decision. The same is seen in Lim, Zahari, and Abidin (2022) study, where volume and trust dimensions in online reviews are seen to have an impact on online hotel booking intention. Also, Capatina and Schin (2017) imply that consumers' online reviews and rating sentiment analysis significantly influence their decision to make hotel reservations demonstrating the weight of review mood on customer behavior, Ciftci, Berezina, Cavusoglu, and Cobanoglu (2020) pointed out the interplay of cost and online reviews of the hotel in influencing the customer choices and customers he urges to make a hotel booking. Chowdhury and Deshpande (2020) revealed the role of online review sites in the hotel business when they explained that online reviews play a significant role in guests' decision-making while reserving rooms (Chowdhury & Deshpande, 2020). Kwak (2016) mentioned how previous studies have measured online hotel reviews' usefulness. It is important to note the customer trust and effects of ratings on hotel booking choices are handful to know and discuss. Danish, Hafeez, Ali, Shahid, and Nadeem (2019) study focuses on how consumers perceive the realism, positivity, negativity, and review volume of hotels and then decide to book a room in Pakistan. How internet reviews are making consumers trust and book it is focused on. This study will come to know the validity and effectiveness of information provided on evaluations in the hotel sector has strangely backed up how customers are reacting to review sites for hotels differently depending on the information source, the kind of hotel, and deceptive pictures (Capatina & Schin, 2017).

Reputation Management in Hotels

Given the importance of managing reputation in the hospitality industry, this research is vital because it deals with the perceived benefits of online reputation management for hotel managers As mentioned by Proserpio and Zervas (2017), investigated how hotel management response was able to impact customer reviews which revealed ways to better online reputation management; so this research is timely study on hotels handling of Ewoms. CEO of online reputation management firm, Reputation.com

mentioned that “ORM effectiveness has only recently been measured” (Alrawadieh & Dinçer, 2019). Consequently, ORM became critically important following the emergence of UGC websites and their massive impact on the industry.

Capatina and Schin (2017) also conducted to emphasized the importance of practicing online reputation management to facing the business as a result of showing the relationship to how it further adds to the contribution towards hotel branding and provides a voice for consumers via social media, which gives an insight on the significance of research into how Online Reputation could propel the hotel branding and Consumer agency. Likewise, Anggani and Suherlan (2020) concentrate on the effects of internet reviews on hotel bookings and how a well-managed internet reputation should be able to help hotels stay ahead of their competitors.

Levy, Duan, and Boo (2012) carried out a study on the subject looking into the factors of Washington, DC, hotel industry’s negative one-star reviews responses, this rigorous research are so useful in giving a greater insight into how hotels are dealing with the internet reviews and how that may have an impact towards their online reputation as such. Furthermore, regarding the author Kwak (2016) had looked into more angles on the investigation into what makes online hotel reviews useful and thus proving approval to the importance of composing a management response, which gives more information in the reviews, and hence making it more useful with additional information. This research is relevant because it talks about how hotel managers have to deal with tactics on how to spiff up their hotels internet reputation by commenting on feedback from the users. The use of performance of hotel results answering user responses to feedback for another year (2019), a consequence is how performance is possible to evaluate user comment on the hotel's answer, measuring the metrics include: how quickly you access to this point, also for making you out as well, then you made what was welcomed, but not long enough as will be. For that, Perez-Aranda, Vallespin, and Molinillo (2019) highlighted that online hotels management for you, is becoming popular among guests as well, and it benefits manager competent. This research result is important because the influence has the power wielded hotel managers to their internet own appearance so this is a once benefit. The discussion section has identified that the effect on guest's perception Alrawadieh and Dinçer (2019) for this year, pointed out that hotel managers have to respond to their bad internet comment. The typical keeper, to have a good start of a bad, even though it is a clear fact that customer’s service would impression to guests, compete with the impression for your hotel and to extend your business. This research

result is important because discussion for two will have the impact how to guests review, and/or or to communicate with the manager response.

Research Design

The study employs mainly qualitative, but supplemented with quantitative information. Qualitative methods are used to investigate attitudes, actions, and experiences. For a thorough understanding of how (and if) internet reviews play a role in guests' choices my main source is interviews with hotel owners and guests.

To get interviewees for this research, project used a common sampling method called purposive sampling. The hotel managers who were interviewed for this research came from a diverse range of sizes of companies, from small mom and pop shops to large global chains. This allows for a general understanding of how different types of hotels, respond to and are affected by online reviews. Consumers: Individuals who have booked a hotel online in the past with the help of online reviews are considered. The sample will be diverse on purpose; meaning that I will try to get a wide range of ages, both genders, and a wide range of travel experience.

Data Collection

Interviewing in data collecting is a free-flowing, open-ended method of gathering as much information as possible. Interview questions are open-ended questions which means that respondents are free to fully discuss and explore what may take place within that topic. While conducting interviews it is gathering desirable information for the project. The interviewing process used three techniques to gather information from respondents, they were phone conversation, video conferencing, and in-person conversation.

Data Analysis

Theme analysis was used to analyze and make sense of the qualitative data gathered from the interviewees. This approach is good when you are trying to identify, analyze, and report patterns (themes) within the data. It allows you to give a more detailed and intricate explanation of the data and gives you a versatile method for analyzing qualitative data.

Response from a Hotel Manager

Influence of Online Reviews & Management Strategies

We rely heavily on online reviews for our company. For many prospective customers, they are the first initial contact with the hotel. Reviews that praise our employees for their service and the well-being of the rooms tend to increase reservations, as we've seen. We respond to reviews by communicating with consumers, whom we thank for good remarks and who we quickly address for bad ones. Being open and honest is important to us, as is demonstrates that we're dedicated to fixing problems.

A Customer's Reaction

Reviews' Impact on the Experience

I recently opted for a boutique hotel rather than a popular chain, mostly due to the excellent reviews it had online. The rave reviews about the one-of-a-kind furnishings and helpful staff stuck out to me. The reviews influenced me because they described an experience rather than just a place to stay.

A Hotel Manager's and a Customer's Reaction

Reviews on Elements the hotel's manager is credible. In our opinion, a thorough and fair assessment is what makes it trustworthy. Various parts of the visitor's experience, both positive and negative, are highlighted. These evaluations are more reliable for prospective visitors and provide us with useful information.

As a Consumer: I put more stock in evaluations that go into depth about things like the room's cleanliness and the breakfast's quality. Extremely good or negative reviews make me suspicious since they don't seem real.

Thematic Analysis of Interview Responses

From the viewpoints of both hotel owners and guests, a thematic examination of the interviewees' comments shows several important topics that illustrate the influence of internet reviews on reservation choices.

Theme 1: Importance of Online Reviews in Decision Making

From the vantage point of the hotel manager, internet evaluations are a vital point of contact with prospective customers. They are aware that good ratings may greatly increase reservations. From the customer's point of view, they stress the importance

of Internet reviews while making reservations. Reviews that are both detailed and unusual tend to affect their decision.

Theme 2: Credibility and Trustworthiness of Reviews

From the vantage point of the hotel manager, thorough and fair evaluations are credible. In their opinion, prospective visitors are more likely to believe and act upon these evaluations. From the point of view of the consumer, evaluations that are detailed and precise are more likely to be trusted. Reviews that seem excessively favorable or negative without sufficient context tend to raise suspicion.

Theme 3: Response and Management of Online Reviews

One important tactic, according to hotel managers, is to actively participate in internet reviews. As part of this, be sure you respond quickly to both positive and negative remarks from visitors. One method to develop trust and openly fix problems is to be transparent when dealing with them.

Theme 4: The Interplay of Reviews with Other Factors

Online reviews can have some sway with consumers, but they are only one factor among many, including location and price. Incorporating reviews with these aspects allows consumers to make a well-rounded selection.

Theme 5: Impact of Negative Reviews

From the viewpoint of the hotel manager, negative reviews appear to have a real effect on reservations. In order to prevent such problems in the future, managers stress the significance of publicly and privately discussing such evaluations and acting on comments. The theme analysis demonstrates that online reviews serve a significant but complex function in the hotel industry. In addition to providing valuable input, reviews play a crucial role in the reputation and advertising techniques used by hotel managers.

Analysis of Consumer Behavior

The purpose of the study was to learn more about consumer behavior and the role internet reviews play when consumers are making hotel bookings. For example, how do consumers actually use these reviews in their decision-making processes? The study used thematic and qualitative interviews to analyze the information.

Key Findings

- Consumers do not rely solely on reviews to make hotel selections. Reviews are considered in correlation to other important factors like price, location, and hotel amenities. Reviews' reliability is weighed against individual preferences and needs.
- The study found that negative reviews can affect consumers, especially when those reviews are more detailed and also more explicit. This response could prevent future guests from booking at a certain hotel.
- The idea of social evidence plays a significant role when people are making decisions. If there are a lot of good reviews, it could cause people to jump on the bandwagon and make reservations since everyone else does as well. Another kind of social verification that may supplement written evaluations is user-generated content, such as images and experiences posted by other visitors. Review credibility and depth of coverage are crucial since they have such a profound impact on customers' purchasing decisions. Reviews are only one of the aspects that go into the decision-making process. This highlights the significance of hotels actively maintaining their online standing across many platforms, engaging with consumers authentically, and emphasizing particular positives in marketing campaigns to preserve a favorable image.

Hotel Strategies and Consumer Responses

As the identification of the systematic relationships among specifications to find the strength of the relationship, it was necessary to perform independent sample tests. The scale of online reviews will affect customer booking decisions. Active reviews engagement: One of the key strategies used by hotels is to actively engage with online reviews by promptly responding to both positive and negative feedback. Concerning positive reviews, when hotels acknowledge favorable reviews they reiterate the positive experiences encouraging similar feedback from future guests. Concerning negative reviews, a sensitive and swift response can limit any potential damage. Active review management has a profound effect on the customer decision-making process as potential guests often examine how the hotel responds to criticism.

This will not only make for a higher volume of reviews which can increase visibility and credibility, but it will also allow the more recent reviewers to report on the state of the hotel when the memory of the experience is still fresh. Along with the positive correlation with making a booking, it is also true to say that the more recent reviews

there have been, the more accurate condition of the hotel will be represented. Using Reviews to improve service: Many hotels use comments from digital reviews as a way to improve their operation and offerings.

The Interplay of Trust and Credibility

In order to understand how consumers, notice and react to fake reviews as opposed to real reviews. This is especially important in sectors such as the hospitality sector where personal experience and opinion is considered far more and therefore has a larger impact over other sectors.

When a guest gives a genuine review they usually have very specific details of that experience. Customers are more likely to trust reviews that talk about a particular experience from their hotel stay such as how clean their room was, how good the food tasted or how nice the customer service was. If the review is very vague and over generic it is more likely to be unauthentic. Such kind of reviews are found mostly on the internet. Verified reviews and Approved reviews are two most common examples of first users' reviews.

Verified reviews are those reviews that have been confirmed by the Yelp.com validation system that the review is posted first time to the specific website by the specific user who leaves their email on Yelp.com. In other such the first user who posts a product/service review on the web is a verified review.

Approved reviews are another type of first user's reviews, which are company-approved reviews. Only these reviews are available on the company website, and are called first user's reviews as consumers have no access to the company's extracurricular resources." Also, the hotel's response to reviews can affect the expected creditability of the reviews. By receiving a timely, professional, and appropriate response, all that initial skepticism toward the reviews has been deterred.

Consumer Reactions to Different Types of Reviews

They are both reading reviews which are predominantly stimulating but any serious surveys, either positive or negative, may well persuade their whole booking judgments. Beneficial critiques discuss stronger than a thousand terms connected with wisdom in addition negative ratings certainly not hinder some potential sources of revenue. Unique sorts of social networks the same as Twitter and Facebook offer your requirements their sources associated with info a lot like raving and ranting about an

up-to-scratch holiday job joined all of your company Williamsburg operation together with a troublesome bed'a-1 Brussels hotel, splendid positive readers are potent.

Reaction to Fabricated Reviews

A consumer's suspicion that reviews are made up can be detrimental to the trust they have in the hotel. If the reviews are obviously too good and exaggerating too much or if it is not giving enough specific information can make people think the review is made up. If it became known that reviews were being made up, then they may lose the trust not only in the hotel but the review platform as a whole.

Conclusion

The research explores the impacts of online reviews on the decision making hotel booking. The major findings from the research reveal that online reviews play a significant role in guiding the decision-making in tourism industry.

Consumers rely heavily on detailed and authentic reviews—reviewers taking the time to outline their experiences, whether good or bad. Specifics about less than satisfactory cleanliness, service quality, and amenities could be the determining factor in whether someone books a room there. Reviews that are thought to be genuine and unbiased hold more weight than generalized, scathing reviews.

Travelers take the importance of online reviews into consideration when making decisions about hotel properties. However, reviews are not the only factor used, Negative reviews, especially more detailed ones, can be a strong deterrent. The context of such reviews and whether it's met with a professional response out of the hotel is also so critical. Some take things at face value, whereas others are very wary of what can appear to be 'fake reviews.

The high volume of positive reviews under the hotel will become a bandwagon effect for the bookers. Other than reviews, B&B also deploys user-generated content such as photos and experiences, to enhance the reliability of the reviews. Hotels employ various strategies to manage online reviews such as proactive engagement, showcasing positive reviews in marketing material, and using feedback for product and service improvement. These strategies are not only capable of helping maintain a positive online reputation but also in influencing potential guests booking decisions directly.

Implications for the Hospitality Industry

These findings offer good insights for hoteliers who are interested in really understanding the implications of online reviews and are effective in allowing hoteliers to manage their hotel's online reputation as well as actively engaging with reviews written by customers. Hoteliers should respond with empathy and a can-do attitude instead of becoming defensive to guests' negative reviews. Hoteliers should also thank guests for their positive reviews. When responding to reviews, authenticity and transparency is important. This will build trust with a potential guest and help neutralize the impact of the negative review. Consider reviews as a great chance for improvement.

By making changes based on guests' feedback, hoteliers can generate more positive reviews leading to more satisfied customers. The more recent reviews you have, the more accurate representation of the hotel. It is important not only to monitor their online reputation on comprehensive platforms but also the broader Internet for hoteliers to ensure to monitor their online reputation on all review platforms rather than just a significant few as this will give you a wider range of guest feedback and also ensure that all reviews are consistent throughout the web.

However, with the rise of review sites, the management of potential guests' expectations is a task that hotels will need to address: "Social proof is a psychological and social phenomenon where people assume the actions of others (in this case reviews) to reflect the correct behavior for a given situation (Kim, Kim, & Park, 2017). Hotels that are good at storing (and using) guest feedback will find a continuous stream of positive content that they can use in their marketing materials. A client-focused culture and feedback loops significantly improve the quality and attitude of reviewers.

Recommendations

Because online review platforms and digital marketing are highly dynamic, there are several areas worth further consideration and research that can provide novel insights and strategies for the hospitality sector.

Since technology has such a large impact on our lives it would be beneficial to study how technology can also impact reviews with hotel bookings. Comparing review sites that have been around forever like Tripadvisor or one that isn't so well known or the general person like Instagram or Tick-Tock, see the difference in consumer hotel border decisions. See how videos compare to the traditional written opinion people

are used to reading, and just viewing the pictures or videos can change someone's perspective on the hotel or even the city and they still choose to stay at that hotel or a different hotel or completely cancel the trip. Lastly, just because so many people are becoming more aware of influencers, it would be interesting to see how they change the hospitality industry just by posting pictures at a hotel to let their followers know that they stayed there and whether or not they recommend others to do the same.

Additionally, as AI and machine learning continue to advance, there could be potential for these technologies to revolutionize the way hotels analyze and respond to online reviews. Another trend is using data from online reviews to tailor marketing efforts to individual customers. Potentially fruitful research would examine how personalization strategies based on review data can enhance guest experiences and increase booking rates.

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