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Online Response Management: Hotelier Perspectives from a South African Tourist Destination

Abstract. The aim of the study was to understand how hotels in Cape Town manage their online reputation when responding to guests' online reviews and how online response management systems are used for this purpose. This exploratory study is based on qualitative data about seven 4-star accommodation establishments located within Cape Town Central City. Because of COVID-19 restrictions, the data were collected during online interviews and by email. The results indicate that the hotels were aware of how negative and positive online reviews could impact the hotel's reputation and were able to use ORM systems to monitor and respond to online reviews in order to maintain good reputation. The authors also propose extending the existing review response framework by the inclusion of positive response actions.

Keywords: online response management, hotel star ratings, ORM systems, COVID-19

1. Introduction

While most enterprises have a tangible offering, intangible offerings in the tourism industry rely on perceived brand image and reputation (Chen & Tabari, 2017). Horwath HTL (2016) notes that accommodation is one of the main factors that determine customer satisfaction in the travel and tourism industries. Within the last decade, tourism companies have started to make increasing use of modern channels of communication, such as websites and mobile applications, for the purpose of customer engagement and interaction (Mugica & Berne, 2020). Web-based

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technologies provide tourists with new and convenient ways of obtaining travel information and trip planning (Mendes-Filho et al., 2018), which is used to reduce uncertainty about tourism products (Pee, 2016). Large amounts of information about travel destinations, travel amenities, and hotels are also generated in the process of two-way communication via online review sites (Williady, Wardhani & Kim, 2022). Since the travel and tourism sector relies heavily on information (Ernst & Dolnicar, 2018), it is important to understand how online reviews affect consumer behaviour.

Online reviews have proven to be a valuable source of information about customer attitudes, routines, and behaviours (Lui et al., 2018). They are also known to boost consumer knowledge and scrutiny of the hospitality sector (Williady, Wardhani & Kim, 2022). The way in which electronic word-of-mouth (ewom) is shared has altered marketing strategies employed in the hospitality industry (Sherif, 2018). Online reviews posted by tourists are usually based on traveller experiences and opinions, and may include recommendations (Dissanayake & Malkanthie, 2018).

By making an effort to understand customers and responding to their complaint's, hotels can engage in a two-way communication with their guests about their offerings (Camaide, 2013). Most brands within the tourism and hospitality industries maintain a social media presence to monitor and influence online interactions (Benjamin, Kriss & Egelman, 2016). Although it takes additional resources to track online reviews and respond to them, hotels are motivated to respond as quickly as possible to make sure that negative statements do not reach the broader community on social media (Lovering, 2017). Also, an establishment's online reputation can also be damaged by false reviews (Dellarocas, 2013). This is why a quick reaction on the part of the establishment can reduce negative and potentially erroneous conclusions and enhance positive perceptions (Sparks & Bradley, 2017, p. 1). While it is impossible for hotels to control all information published about them online (Raas, 2015), hotel marketers and managers try to constantly monitor online reviews and comments to identify legitimate issues that need to be addressed, new customers' demands and shifts in behaviour in an effort to improve business performance and customers' overall satisfaction (Oliveira et al., 2019).

Users of online review sites have a better chance of reaching a wider audience because their posts often remain visible for longer periods of time (Chen & Tabari, 2017). Tourists and hotel guests post online reviews as a form of "post behavioural engagement to indicate their level of satisfaction and inform others about their hotel experience" (Sherif, 2018). Hotels can use social media to better understand the needs of their guests and interact with them directly (Kang, 2011). Begwani and

Pal (2015) add that by connecting with customers via social media, hotels can grow their "digital footprints". Hence, every response to an online review should be used to maintain the brand image of an establishment or organisation (Yazdanifard & Yee, 2014). This important task is now facilitated by online response management systems (ORMs), which are a recent example of disruptive innovation in the hospitality industry (Lui et al., 2018). According to Bi et al. (2019), since large numbers of reviews can be posted in a short period of time, an efficient data extraction method is necessary. According to Galati & Galati (2019), tailored marketing campaigns on social media can be more effective if online reviews are used to track shifts in customer preferences or even segment markets according to their geographical location. Response management is particularly required if a review is negative, emotional, and characterised by customer expectation of improvement (Xu, 2020). Slivar and Bayer (2017) conclude that many hoteliers, especially branded hotels, have already realised this necessity.

Thus, the development and implementation of a correct online response strategy is important to mitigate the impact of negative reviews but also to use positive reviews for improving the establishment's reputation (Mate, Trupp & Pratt, 2019). Studies have focused on developing frameworks to assist in analysing online response strategies (Mate, Trupp & Pratt, 2019). The response process involves evaluation and response actions. During the evaluation process, various approaches are used to investigate a given matter/issue. The aim of the following study is to assess the use of online response management systems in the Cape Town Metropole, which is a major South African tourism destination.

2. The Hospitality Industry in South Africa

The history of hospitality in South Africa dates back to the 1800s when Swiss and German hoteliers travelled to the country, promoting various hotel standards which can still be seen today (Flanders Investment and Trade, 2018). During the iconic South African election period in 1994, South Africa saw an increase in the number of international tourists, which led to the construction of a number of 5-star hotels (Flanders Investment and Trade, 2018). Nowadays, business customers demand high-quality hotel services (Maric et al., 2015). In an effort to gain competitive advantage, South Africa's tourism and hospitality industry attached a lot of attention to quality assurance (du Plessis & Saayman, 2010). In 2000, the Tourism Grading Council of South Africa (TGCSA) established its globally accredited quality assurance body for tourism products in South Africa (TGCSA, 2019).

The TGCSA assesses various establishments against a set of criteria and awards star ratings based on available services and facilities (WCG, 2021). The accreditation and grading system were developed for various types of accommodation establishments in South Africa, including "(Hotel, Apartment Hotel, Boutique Hotel, Small Hotel), Guest Accommodation (Bed, Breakfasts, Country Houses, Guest Houses), Self-Catering Accommodation (Exclusive, Shared), Game Lodge, Nature Lodge, Backpackers, Hostels, Caravan, Camping Sites and Venues" (du Plessis & Saayman, 2010). The TGCSA (2019) defines a hotel as an establishment that "provides formal accommodation with full or limited service to the travelling public". Another turning point in the South African hospitality industry in the early 2000s was the formulation of policies to stimulate growth (Olowoyo, Ramaila & Mavuru, 2021), which was particularly evident in 2010, when the industry had to provide affordable and suitable accommodation to visitors arriving in connection with the FIFA World Cup (PricewaterhouseCoopers [PwC].).

According to Airbnb (2018), although guests are discovering places across the country, Cape Town remains the most popular destination in South Africa. The International Congress and Conventions Association (ICCA) chose Cape Town as the best business tourism city in Africa in 2018 (PwC, 2018). South African hotels are the most developed sub-sector of the accommodation industry in Africa: there are more hotels in Cape Town than in other provinces of South Africa (Musavengane & Steyn, 2013). According to Banoobhai-Anwar and Keating (2016), Cape Town is regarded as the most "alluring and diverse tourist city in the country to visit". The oldest and second largest city in South Africa, it attracts international tourists with its Mediterranean climate, urban landscapes, and well-developed infrastructure (World Tourism Cities Federation, n.d.). There are around 4,000 tourism-related businesses in the city, including 2,742 guest accommodations of various types, 389 dining establishments, and 424 tourist attractions (WTCF, n.d.). Voted as one of the top tourist destinations in the world, Cape Town offers accommodation options ranging from budget to 5-star luxury hotels (Cape Town Tourism, 2019). In 2019, there were 3,321 businesses operating within the city's central business district (CBD), 169 of which were accommodation and travel related establishments (CCID, 2018). There are 24 large hotel complexes in Cape Town Central City, situated within walking distance from the Cape Town International Convention Centre (CTICC) and the V&A Waterfront. The accommodation and travel sector remains strong (with boutique hotels featuring prominently and Airbnb becoming a feature) followed closely by the information communication technologies (ICT) and telecoms business sector (CCID, 2018).

3. Online Response Management (ORM) as a Tool for Handling Online Reviews (OLR)

Nowadays, faced with a very dynamic, complex, and competitive business environment, characterised by changing customer preferences and the emergence of new technologies, enterprises have to constantly rebuild and reinvent themselves (Toumi, Tussyadiah & Steinmetz, 2021). They are increasingly reliant on sophisticated technological solutions to survive, compete, develop, and grow (Ilic & Nikolic, 2018). The hotel industry was an early adopter of digital technologies, such as computer reservation systems (CRSs), global distribution systems (GDSs), and the Internet (Zeqiri, Dahmani & Youssef, 2020). The tourism sector was among the first sectors to employ information and communication technology (ICT) (Garzotto et al., 2004). One category of ICT that has proved particularly useful in the tourism sector and hospitality industry are customer relationship management (CRM) systems and online review sites (Zamil, 2011), which are gaining popularity as a result of the stronger focus on customer engagement, social listening and monitoring, which can be managed through online platforms (Yasiukovich & Haddara, 2021).

An online review system is an IT-based customer service system (Lui et al., 2018). Online review systems, particularly for high-involvement products, are frequently used by consumers to analyse the quality of commodities and services before making a purchase decision (Gou et al., 2016). When developing an efficient online review system, one has to be aware of how customers' interactions with the system could change their views and behaviour (Gou et al., 2016). Ratings and reviews have become more accessible, ubiquitous, and important with the development of the Internet, e-commerce, and online platforms (The Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development [OECD], 2020). The capacity of operators to reply to guest reviews is crucial. According to Lui et al. (2018), there is not enough research regarding this critical feature of current online review systems.

Nowadays, tourism is increasingly relying on smart technologies, such as smartphone travel apps; smart hotels, on the use of IT and digital marketing strategies, such as online booking systems, and smart guides (Otowicz, Macedo & Biz, 2022). Third-party service providers are increasingly being used by businesses to manage consumer rating and the review process (OECD, 2020). Hotels have created online apps featuring electronic forms for complaints and reviews to enable direct communication with visitors (Assimakopoulos et al., 2014). More than 83% of all online reservations are influenced by social media, and 49% of customers will not consider reserving a hotel without first consulting reviews (TrustYou, 2013). While online reviews have such a positive and considerable influence on hotel booking decisions, they should be managed as a strategic communication channel (Hafeez et

al., 2019). There are now various technologies for managing the hotel's digital reputation more effectively and efficiently (Chamelian, n.d.). The three main functions of ORM system include monitoring reviews, interacting with customers (responding to and participating in social media communication) and measuring the influence of these activities on reputation and branding (Jones, Temperley & Lima, 2009).

Table 1: Online review sites and online response management systems

Online travel review sites	Online response management systems
Trip Advisor	TrustYou
Booking.com	Revinate
Trivago.com	ReviewPro
Expedia.com	For-sight

Source: Author's construct

3.1 Motivations for Using ORMs in the Hotel Industry

In 2016, Rose and Blodgett (2016) found that there had been few studies regarding the effectiveness of responses to online reviews by hotel marketers. In fact, hoteliers have been criticised for not investing sufficiently in ORM (ReviewPro, 2019). Most existing studies have focused on customers' perceptions of hotels, although Xie, Zhang and Zhang (2014) investigated the business value of online consumer reviews and management response to hotel performance.

Online reviews have changed the way people make decisions in the hospitality sector, making information on 'experience products' like hotel stays accessible to anybody with access to the Internet (Park & Allen, 2013). Thanks to online reviews, the decision-making process is based on consumer perceptions rather than information provided by accommodation establishments. Such reviews reach a larger target audience and remain visible online for an extended period of time. Acknowledging customer concerns and reacting to them online has become a vital activity for the hospitality industry (Chen & Tabari, 2017). According to Sheng, Nah & Siau (2005), most establishments rely on online responses as an intervention strategy to protect or enhance the financial performance of hotels and develop a sustainable competitive advantage.

Trevino and Castano (2013) discusses three basic ways in which online responses can be handled:

■ denying: hotel management disagrees with a dissatisfied customer over service failure and claims that the customer is lying.

- accepting: management acknowledges and explains the issue that has generated consumer concern but does not promise to make adjustments in the future.
- changing response: hotel management sincerely apologises and promises that the service will be improved in the future (Trevino & Castano, 2013).

The efficacy of the response is also influenced by the timing and type of preventive actions taken (Ciasullo, Montera & Palumbo, 2020). Online reviews together with responses represent a meaningful discussion between a business and customers, allowing future customers to assess the usefulness of an online review from both the perspective of the company as well as its customers (Anggani & Suherlan, 2020).

3.2. Review Response Framework

Managerial replies are responses provided directly by the hotel management in response to online client feedback (Mate, Trupp & Pratt, 2019). A managerial response strategy should focus on two main aspects: positive opinions and concerns or criticisms (Ye, Law & Gu, 2009). While having an effective online response strategy is particularly important when it comes to mitigating the impact of negative reviews, it also helps to take full advantage of positive reviews to improve the business's reputation (Mate, Trupp & Pratt, 2019). Several research papers have focused on developing frameworks to assist in analysing online response strategies (Mate, Trupp & Pratt, 2019).

The integrated framework shown in Figure 1 addresses Coombs (1999) accommodative and defensive response strategies to initiate various response actions. No action and no response are categorised outside of the response action section. Sparks (2001) focuses on a defensive strategy under response action. The response dimension includes both the defensive and accommodative approach. Customer satisfaction is measured not just in terms of response time and volume, but also in terms of response quality and efficacy (valence) (Ciasullo, Montera & Palumbo, 2020). The framework represents a flow from response to no response and the impact it will have on the reputation of a business (Mate, Trupp & Pratt, 2019). According to Sparks and Bradley (2017), consequences of not acknowledging online negative reviews can include a potentially bad reputation (image), low satisfactory reviews, and decreased brand loyalty. By integrating previous frameworks, businesses are able to develop suitable online response strategies specifically designed for them (Mat, Trupp & Pratt, 2019). The model in Figure 1 only takes into account negative customer reviews. However, as already mentioned (Ye, Law & Gu, 2009), it

makes sense to develop managerial response strategies that in addition to handling concerns or criticisms, also address positive opinions.
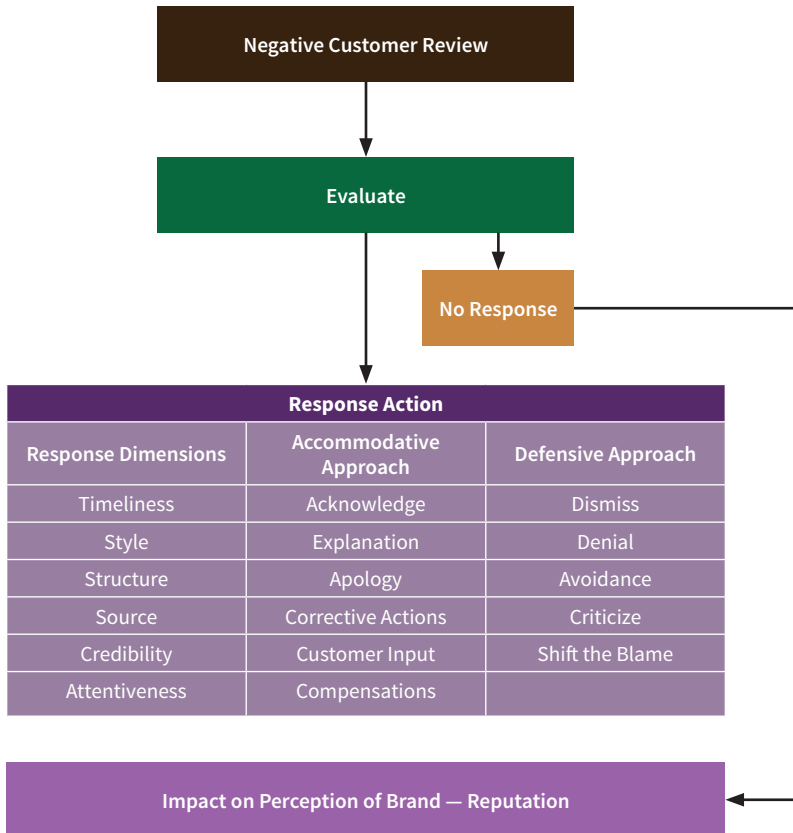
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┌─────────────────────────────┐
│   Negative Customer Review   │
└─────────────────────────────┘
              ↓
┌─────────────────────────────┐
│          Evaluate           │
└─────────────────────────────┘
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                 ┌──────────────┐
                 │ No Response  │
                 └──────────────┘
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Response Action		
Response Dimensions	Accommodative Approach	Defensive Approach
Timeliness	Acknowledge	Dismiss
Style	Explanation	Denial
Structure	Apology	Avoidance
Source	Corrective Actions	Criticize
Credibility	Customer Input	Shift the Blame
Attentiveness	Compensations	

Impact on Perception of Brand — Reputation

Figure 1: An integrated framework for analysing response strategies
Source: Mate, Trupp & Pratt (2019)

4. Research Method

The following study is based on qualitative, exploratory data collected during online and face-to-face interviews which 7 respondents employed by 4-star hotels located in Cape Town Central City. The sample included general managers, reservation managers, marketing managers, and their assistants. The survey population for this study included 3- to 5-star hotels located in Cape Town Central City (4 precincts within the yellow dotted lines in Figure 2), which are accredited by the Tourism Grading Council of South Africa (TGCSA).
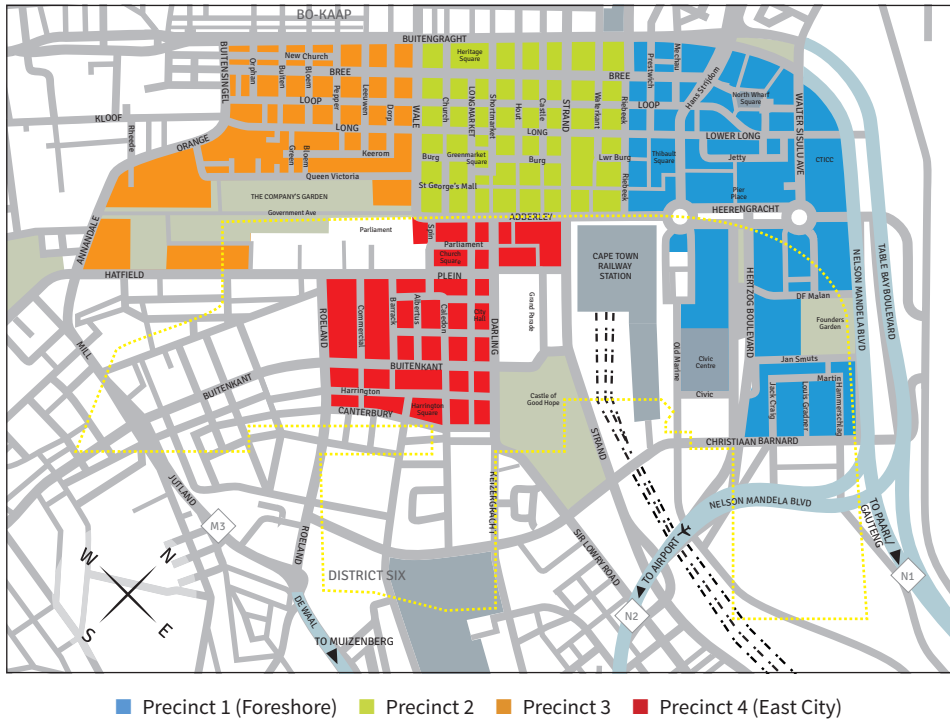
Figure 2: Map of Cape Town Central City
Source: CCID (2018)

The original plan was to select respondents from the population of 22 hotels located within the CBD, but as a result of the COVID-19 pandemic, most of these establishments were either under new management or were permanently shut down. In order to continue the study, a decision was made to include hotels located outside of the CBD area but within the administrative borders of Cape Town.

5. Results

3 respondents were general managers, whose tasks included marketing related roles and being involved in managing online reviews. The rest of the sample included a group marketing manager, marketing assistant, rooms division manager, and marketing coordinator.

Specialisation within an hotel organisational structure boosts the effectiveness with which the organisation manages and supplies its services (Rutherford & Fallon, 2007). However, to make sure that a hotel runs smoothly, employees in dif-

ferent departments need to be able to handle different tasks and depend on one another (CareerTrend, 2018). Table 2 presents roles and responsibilities exercised by each interviewee.

Table 2: Interviewees' roles and responsibilities

Interviewee	Interviewee's title/position	Interviewee's roles and responsibilities	Hotel category and rooms
# 1	group marketing manager	the website and online matters, as well as marketing, i.e., third-party sites' content, influences, social media pages, websites, Google analytics page search, and reputation management.	hotel, 96 rooms
# 2	general manager	for the hotel, for online management, reviews; we're constantly observing clients' behaviour.	hotel, 222 rooms
# 3	marketing assistant	I have access to guest reviews, because I collect them, and I work with the brand manager.	apartment hotel, 35 rooms
# 4	rooms division manager	Front office management, overseeing operations, in-house, monitoring and responding to online reviews, act in the absence of the general manager as well.	hotel, 340 rooms
# 5	marketing co-ordinator	I oversee anything to do with brand and communications, social media, websites, press release, printed media, anything that has to do with media, the hotel group, conference centre, and the restaurant.	hotel, 125 rooms
# 6	general manager	I'm responsible for the whole operation of the hotel.	boutique hotel, 20 rooms
# 7	general manager/ deputy manager	I manage all department heads who report to me, which includes the Food and Beverage manager, maintenance manager. Part of my daily tasks is to answer online reviews. I have to make sure the hotel is profitable.	hotel, 150 rooms

Source: Author's construct

5.1. Information about the Hotels Analysed in the Study

The 7 establishments in the sample included four hotels, two boutique hotels, and one apartment hotel. Three of them were members of international hotel chains, two were members of a local hotel chain and two were locally owned. In 2019, the TGCSA reviewed its criteria for classifying accommodation establishments in South Africa (TGCSA, 2019), introducing three new categories: smaller hotels, boutique hotels, and aparthotels (apartment hotels). To qualify as a *hotel* an establishment must have at least 80 rooms and should be capable of providing guests with a certain range of services, such as 24/7 on-site contact representative, daily service of rooms (housekeeping), bathroom facilities must be en-suite and, where applicable, indicate if any meals and beverages are provided (TGCSA, 2019). A *boutique hotel* should have a reception space, a dining area, and exclusive rooms (TGCSA, 2019). In addition, according to Rogerson (2010), it should provide special "experiential qualities with strong emphasis placed upon the production of high levels of design,

ambience, and offerings of personalised service" (p. 425) and "small properties which are primarily operated by individuals or companies with a small collection" (p. 438). Finally, an *apartment hotel* should have at least 10 rooms and offer services like a hotel, such as a 24/7 on-site representative, housekeeping and bathroom en-suites. Each room must be equipped with a dining area and a kitchen/kitchenette (in more than 60% of the rooms) (TGCSA, 2019).

As already mentioned, all participating establishments were 4-star hotels. The TGCSA awards from 1 to 5 stars depending on the overall standard and the range of facilities available to hotel guests Travelground (2009). To earn 4- to 5-star, all hotel rooms should feature a work area with a desk and bathrooms should be equipped with complete bathroom amenities, including a shower cap, conditioner, shower gel, body lotion, and vanity set, in addition to 3-star facilities. A 4-star hotel should also offer room service for at least 18 hours per day (TGCSA, 2019).

5.2. Online Review Management Systems Used by the Hotels

As can be seen in Table 3, the interviewees used three ORM systems: Revinate (one hotel); ReviewPro (two hotels), and GuestRevu (two hotels). Two hotels did not employ any such system and relied on other tools to review online reviews. Generally, it can be concluded that teach online review management system was used as a tool for collecting online reviews about a particular hotel on various external websites:

Table 3: Benefits of the ORM systems

ORM system	Features	Used by
Revinate	▶ bespoke marketing tool ▶ links with hotels internal systems ▶ rich analytical tool	(Interviewee 1) hotel, 96 rooms
ReviewPro	▶ a variety of integrated options not offered by ▶ Revinate, e.g. GRI (Global Review Index) ▶ internal system integration ▶ collates universal guest preferences	(Interviewee 2) hotel, 222 rooms and (Interviewee 4) hotel, 340 rooms
GuestRevu	▶ serves different hotels that are members of one hotel chain ▶ offers visual data representation ▶ enables competitor analysis	(Interviewee 3) apartment hotel, 35 rooms and (Interviewee 7) hotel, 150 rooms

Source: Author's construct

ORM systems make it easier for hotels to monitor and manage reviews on various sites and to which engage with the online community by responding to com-

ments, suggestions and complaints (Kim & Kim, 2022). Above all, ORM systems increase hotels' effectiveness in creating, managing, and maintaining their online reputation (Karlsson & Strom, 2020).

The choice of an ORM system depends on its ability to monitor and analyse feedback, respond to customer feedback, and integrate data from third-party sites to improve hotel performance (De Pelsmacker, van Tillburg & Holthof, 2018). Presented below are various benefits offered by each ORM systems, as listed by four interviewees (1, 2, 3, 4 and 7).

One unique feature of Revinate is its ability to link to internal systems used by hotels, such as CRM and property management systems (PMS), which enables seamless integration of reporting (1834 Hotels, 2020). Thanks to its analytic functions, Revinate is a top-rated marketing tool.

ReviewPro offers a universal guests' preference feature, which enables the front desk to record guest details and preferences, which are then shared with all hotels within the hotel chain. While much of ReviewPro's functionality is similar to that of Revinate, it has one unique feature, namely GRI (Global Review Index), which is available exclusively to ReviewPro clients. GRI is used to benchmark a single hotel or a collection of hotels, compare performance amongst establishments or against rival hotels, and monitor a hotel's performance over time. Thousands of hotels worldwide use the GRI as a benchmark for reputation management efforts and to set quality objectives as well as optimise online pricing and distribution strategies (PwC, 2016).

GuestRevu was valued for its convenience as regards data presentation and for its competitor analysis feature. Other systems like Revinate, such as Guest Joy, GuestRevu, TrustYou, are used to monitor external sites for reviews and to set benchmark rankings against competitors (Stringham & Gerdes, 2021). The goal of benchmarking is to create and carry out action plans that will reduce or close the gap between internal operations and competition (Pavlova, 2020).

5.3. Reasons for not Using ORM Systems

Two hotels (interviewees 5 and 6) did not use any ORM systems and preferred to monitor review sites and social media on their own. Interviewee 5 said their hotel managed online reviews directly via online travel agencies (OTAS), such as TripAdvisor, Booking.com, Hotels.com, other apps like Dineplan and Google Reviews as well as social media accounts. When asked for reasons why their hotel preferred this solution, the interviewee mentioned "direct responses and convenience".

According to interviewee 6, the main reason for not using an ORM system was its cost, which was too high for a boutique hotel. Small-budget hotels generally prefer

to rely on the most efficient and affordable communication channels (Dinçer, Dinçer & Avunduk, 2016), which are nowadays enabled by a low-cost access to the Internet.

5.4. Effects of Covid-19 on Online Reviews and Hotels Future Bookings

The COVID-19 pandemic was accompanied by a number of measures such as lock-downs, social distancing, home orders, travel bans and restrictions (Gautam et al., 2022). Many hospitality establishments were temporarily closed (Gautam, 2021) while others had to deal with booking cancellations. According to Statistics South Africa (StatsSA) (2020), the hospitality sector contributed R130.1 billion to the country's GDP in 2018 and supported 4.5% of total employment. As a consequence of the pandemic, 36% of tourism and hospitality businesses reported a complete loss of revenue in October 2020, 88% reported that accommodation occupancy in October 2020 was down by more than 50% compared to October 2019, and 38% reported no occupancy at all. 92% of tourism-related businesses, including the hospitality sector, reportedly declines in revenues by at least 50% compared to October 2019 (South Africa, 2021). Live stream conferencing and remote working became very popular throughout the pandemic (Shapoval et al., 2020).

Hotels struggled to switch from a "hospitality approach" to social distancing regulations:

> it's the hardest thing for us … hospitality, it's friendliness, it's handshakes; so how do you run a business where COVID-19 protocols are the opposite of that? (Interviewee 1).

There was also a concern that the pandemic could increase the likelihood of negative reviews: under sanitary restrictions service hotels had to go an extra mile to maintain the same perceived levels of quality.

Analysis of online reviews written during the pandemic made hotels aware of a shift in customer expectations as a result of declining disposable incomes:

> [What] I picked up when I got their online reviews is that people are still wanting value for money even though they're paying much, much, much less than before (Interviewee 2).

According to Interviewee 5, guests were more active online during the pandemic and paid much attention to negative reviews. However, Interviewee 7 said that not much changed during the pandemic in terms of the amount and types of online reviews about their hotel.

6. Discussion

Nowadays, many hotel use web applications containing electronic forms for complaints and comments to enable direct exchange of information with guests (Assimakopoulos et al., 2014). Some interviewees indicated that they did not make use of any ORM systems and preferred to respond directly via online websites, booking platforms, and social media. Meng et al. (2018) emphasises the importance of online reviews, and says it is imperative that hotel managers reply to online reviews, either through ORM systems or directly through booking sites. Overall, the sampled hotels were aware that in order to manage their online presence, they had to engage through ORM systems or social media.

Response Priority		

Positive Customer		Negative Customer

Acknowledge		Evaluate

No Response		No Response

Response Action		
Response Dimensions	Accommodative Approach	Defensive Approach
Timeliness	Acknowledge	Dismiss
Style	Explanation	Denial
Structure	Apology	Avoidance
Source	Corrective Actions	Criticize
Credibility	Customer Input	Shift the Blame
Attentiveness	Compensations	

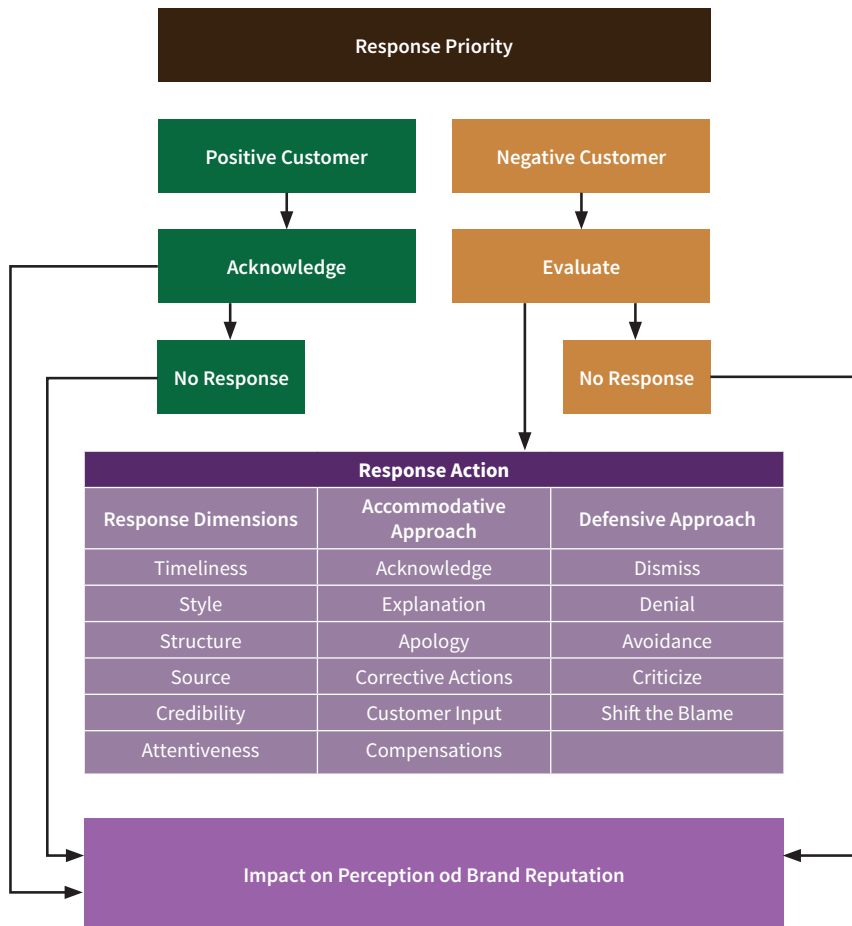| Impact on Perception od Brand Reputation |
|---|

Figure 3: Recommended framework for analysing response strategies
Source: based on Mate, Trupp & Pratt (2019)

However, 5 out of 7 hotels found it beneficial to use ORM systems integrated with their CRM and PMS systems. This meant that information extracted externally could be integrated internally for hotel customer relations management to improve service. In other words, preferences of a guest staying at one hotel would be shared with other hotels in the chain. In addition to helping hotels increase their overall performance, this kind of guest preferences profiling is used to determine which service features are important to guests (Kamalpour et al., 2017). Interviewees who made use of ORM systems particularly valued features such as data representation and competitor analysis. Another advantage offered by the online-management systems are notifications/alerts, which remind hotel employees to check online reviews as soon as they are posted. Notifications are sent by email to a smartphone or computer. The hotels that did not use ORM system had to frequently or regularly check social media or online review websites directly. Regardless of whether they used ORM systems or not, all the hotels in the sample tried to ensure that guests were aware of their online presence.

Lastly, the interviewees were afraid that insufficient interactions on their part would negatively impact their reputation and online reviews. During the pandemic, hotels paid special attention to their safety measures to reassure prospective guests (Kim & Han, 2022). According to Yu, Seo & Hyun (2021), many people's habits and motivations have changed as a result of the pandemic, which had an effect on the purchasing behaviour regarding tourism related offerings. Though the pandemic caused a fall in bookings, the hotels in the sample used their convenient location in the CBD as a competitive advantage to attract guests.

7. Theoretical Contributions

According to Ciasullo, Montera & Palumbo (2020), there is an increasing need to understand review management from an operational point of view, and study how hotel managers handle online reviews by means of online systems and web-based tools.

The study described above showed that online reviews can assist marketing departments to improve customer relationships (CRM) online. By implementing an appropriate response framework in the strategic marketing plan, hotels are able to actively manage both positive and negative online reviews.

This is why the authors of the study recommend a response strategy that includes both kinds of reviews (Figure 3). While responding to negative reviews is definitely more complex and may require various kinds of actions, positive reviews should also be acknowledged in a timely manner. According to Noort and Wil-

lemsen (2012), by promptly addressing online complaints hotels are more likely to appease disgruntled guests and prevent potential follow-up angry comments from other customers. Timely responses to reviews, be that negative or positive, can boost customer satisfaction, loyalty, and positive ewom. According to the interviewees, if a negative online review is dealt with correctly, it could result in a positive outcome for the guest.

8. Conclusions and Limitations of the Study

All hotels analysed in the study made an effort to maintain their online reputation by managing online reviews. They also used their strengths as competitive advantages to secure future bookings. Online reviews created an opportunity for managers to engage with the online community.

The main limitation of the study is that, due to the pandemic, the final sample included only seven 4-star hotels located within the Cape Town. Given the sample size and its composition, the findings may not be representative of the population of 3–5 star hotels in Cape Town. Only 3 interviewees participated in the initial data collection stages, the remaining 4 interviewees responded to follow up emails as a result of work shortages/hotel closures during the COVID-19 pandemic.

9. Future Research

Future research could focus on how hotels develop and update their response management plans. Data should be collected from establishments in other parts of Cape Town and the rest of the Western Cape province (and possibly other provinces) to assess the use of online response management. A comparative study could also be conducted between hotels that do and those that do not use ORM systems.

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Zarządzanie odpowiedziami na opinie publikowane w internecie z perspektywy hoteli z południowoafrykańskiego ośrodka turystycznego

Streszczenie. Celem badania przedstawionego w artykule było poznanie, jak hotele w Kapsztadzie zarządzają swoją reputacją w internecie, odpowiadając na recenzje publikowane przez gości, oraz w jaki sposób wykorzystują do tego celu systemy informatyczne przeznaczone do zarządzania opiniami. Badanie opiera się na danych jakościowych dotyczących siedmiu czterogwiazdkowych obiektów noclegowych zlokalizowanych w centrum Kapsztadu. Ze względu na ograniczenia związane z pandemią dane zostały zebrane podczas wywiadów przeprowadzonych przez internet lub za pośrednictwem poczty elektronicznej. Wyniki wskazują, że badane hotele są świadome tego, iż negatywne i pozytywne recenzje publikowane w internecie mogą wpłynąć na reputację hotelu, i większość z nich korzysta z systemów informatycznych do monitorowania i odpowiedniego reagowania na recenzje w trosce o zachowanie dobrej reputacji. Autorki proponują rozszerzenie istniejącego schematu reagowania na recenzje poprzez uwzględnienie odpowiedzi na pozytywne opinie.

Słowa kluczowe: zarządzanie odpowiedziami na opinie publikowane w internecie, oceny gwiazdkowe hoteli, COVID-19