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The Role of Online Customer Reviews and Managerial Feedback in Shaping Travelers' Decisions

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ABSTRACT

This paper presents two experimental studies examining how online customer reviews, specifically positive and negative evaluations of hotel attributes, influence travellers' decision-making processes. In the first study, we investigate how guest evaluations of three types of hotel attributes—cognitive, sensory, and affective—affect booking intentions and the likelihood of recommending the hotel. Our results show that positive reviews of sensory and cognitive attributes significantly enhance both booking intentions and recommendations, while affective attributes have a lesser impact. The second study compares the effectiveness of two types of managerial responses—personalized versus generic—on these decision-making outcomes. Our findings reveal that personalized managerial responses are more impactful than generic ones. Furthermore, when a hotel review contains a mix of positive and negative evaluations across cognitive, sensory, and affective attributes, personalized responses notably improve the perceived attitude toward the hotel and the likelihood of booking, more so than generic responses.

1. Introduction

This section discusses the importance of online customer reviews in influencing travellers' decision-making processes when booking hotels, highlighting the theoretical implications for understanding consumer behaviour and practical applications for hotel management. The core research question examines how evaluations of hotel attributes in online reviews impact booking intentions and recommendation likelihood, with five sub-research questions: the impact of positive evaluations of cognitive attributes on booking intentions, the role of positive evaluations of sensory attributes on recommendation likelihood, the influence of affective attribute evaluations on decision-making, the comparative effectiveness of personalized versus general managerial responses, and the impact of mixed evaluations on managerial response effectiveness. The research employs a quantitative methodology, focusing on independent variables such as cognitive, sensory, and affective evaluations, and dependent variables including booking intentions and recommendation likelihood. The paper follows a structured approach from literature review to methodology, findings, and discussion, providing insights into the interplay between online reviews and hotel management strategies.

2. Literature Review

This section reviews existing research on how online customer reviews of hotel attributes influence traveller decision-making, structured around the five sub-research questions: the impact of cognitive evaluations, sensory evaluations, affective evaluations, managerial response types, and mixed evaluation scenarios. Each subsection reveals critical insights into the dimensions of review

influence, highlighting gaps such as the limited exploration of affective attribute impacts and the need for more nuanced understanding of managerial response effectiveness. The section also proposes hypotheses based on these insights.

2.1 Cognitive Attribute Evaluations' Impact on Booking Intentions

Initial studies focused on the cognitive attributes of hotels in reviews, emphasizing their influence on consumer decision-making. Early work often centred on price and location, overlooking other cognitive factors. Subsequent research expanded to include service quality, yet still lacked comprehensive analysis of all cognitive elements. Recent studies attempt to fill this gap but continue to miss the full range of cognitive influences. Hypothesis 1: Positive evaluations of cognitive attributes in reviews significantly increase booking intentions**.**

2.2 Sensory Attribute Evaluations and Recommendation Likelihood

Research on sensory attributes in reviews initially addressed visual and auditory factors, with limited scope. Mid-term studies broadened to include tactile and olfactory aspects, yet data on their influence remained sparse. Recent research endeavours to cover sensory attributes more comprehensively, though gaps persist in understanding their full impact on recommendations. Hypothesis 2: Positive evaluations of sensory attributes in reviews enhance recommendation likelihood.

2.3 Affective Attribute Evaluations' Influence on Decision-Making

Affective attributes in reviews were initially explored through case studies, offering foundational insights but lacking generalizability. Mid-term research incorporated more diverse affective factors, yet often failed to connect them directly to decision-making outcomes. Recent studies have advanced this understanding but still struggle to capture the complete affective impact. Hypothesis 3: Positive evaluations of affective attributes in reviews positively influence decision-making.

2.4 Personalized vs. General Managerial Responses

Early research on managerial responses in reviews predominantly emphasized general responses, providing initial insights into their utility. Mid-term studies began to explore personalized responses, revealing benefits but lacking extensive comparative analysis. Recent research highlights the superiority of personalized responses but calls for more detailed examinations. Hypothesis 4: Personalized managerial responses are more effective than general responses in enhancing review impact.

2.5 Mixed Evaluations and Managerial Response Effectiveness

Studies on mixed evaluations in reviews initially focused on either positive or negative aspects, with little attention to combined effects. Mid-term research started to consider mixed evaluations, yet comprehensive analysis was limited. Recent efforts aim to address this gap, though further exploration is needed. Hypothesis 5: Personalized managerial responses significantly boost effectiveness in mixed evaluation scenarios.

3. Method

This section outlines the quantitative research methodology employed to test the proposed hypotheses, detailing data collection, variables, and analytical techniques. The approach ensures robust and reliable findings, providing insights into the role of online reviews and managerial responses in hotel decision-making.

3.1 Data

Data were collected through experimental studies measuring the effects of online review evaluations on booking intentions and managerial response effectiveness. Surveys and experimental manipulation of review content were conducted from 2020 to 2023, using a stratified sample of travellers. The sampling method ensured diverse representation across demographics and travel preferences, focusing on reviews with varying cognitive, sensory, and affective evaluations. Sample screening criteria included traveller familiarity with online reviews and recent hotel booking experience. This approach provides a comprehensive dataset for analysing review impacts**.**

3.2 Variables

Independent variables include the types of evaluations (cognitive, sensory, affective) and managerial response types (personalized, general). Dependent variables focus on booking intentions and recommendation likelihood. Control variables such as traveller demographics and previous booking behaviour are considered to isolate the effects of review evaluations and response types. Literature on consumer behaviour and hotel management strategies supports the validity of these variable selection and measurement methods. Regression and ANOVA analyses are used to explore relationships and test hypotheses, focusing on causality and significance.

4. Results

The findings provide a detailed statistical analysis of the effects of online review evaluations and managerial responses on hotel booking decisions. Descriptive statistics establish baseline distributions for independent and dependent variables, while regression and ANOVA analyses validate the hypotheses. Hypothesis 1 confirms the significant impact of positive cognitive evaluations on booking intentions, with statistical evidence of increased consumer likelihood to book. Hypothesis 2 supports the role of sensory evaluations in enhancing recommendations, indicating that sensory details boost consumer engagement. Hypothesis 3 verifies the influence of affective evaluations on decision-making, showing that emotional content significantly affects booking choices. Hypothesis 4 demonstrates the superior effectiveness of personalized managerial responses, with statistical significance in increasing review impact. Finally, Hypothesis 5 highlights the enhanced effectiveness of personalized responses in mixed evaluation scenarios, emphasizing their role in improving consumer attitudes and decision-making. By connecting these findings to the methodology, the results underscore the importance of strategic review management in the hotel industry.

4.1 Positive Cognitive Evaluations' Effect on Booking Intentions

This finding supports Hypothesis 1, demonstrating that positive evaluations of cognitive attributes in reviews significantly increase booking intentions. Analysis of experimental data from 2020 to 2023 reveals that reviews highlighting cognitive aspects, such as service quality and amenities, lead to higher booking likelihood. Key independent variables include cognitive evaluation scores, while dependent variables focus on booking intentions. The empirical significance suggests that positive cognitive content in reviews enhances consumer trust and decision-making confidence. This finding aligns with consumer behaviour theories emphasizing the role of cognitive evaluations in purchase decisions, addressing previous research gaps by providing detailed insights into cognitive influence on hotel bookings.

4.2 Sensory Evaluations' Impact on Recommendation Likelihood

This finding validates Hypothesis 2, indicating that positive sensory evaluations in reviews enhance recommendation likelihood. Experimental analysis shows that reviews featuring appealing sensory details, such as visuals and auditory experiences, significantly boost consumer inclination to recommend. Key independent variables include sensory evaluation scores, while dependent variables focus on recommendation likelihood. The empirical implications suggest that sensory content in reviews engages consumers emotionally, enhancing their overall experience perception.

This finding supports theories on sensory marketing and consumer engagement, addressing gaps in understanding the sensory influence on recommendations.

4.3 Affective Evaluations' Influence on Decision-Making

This finding supports Hypothesis 3, showing that positive affective evaluations in reviews positively influence decision-making. Analysis of experimental data reveals that reviews with strong emotional content significantly affect consumer booking choices. Key independent variables include affective evaluation scores, while dependent variables focus on booking intentions. The empirical significance suggests that affective content in reviews creates emotional connections with consumers, enhancing their decision-making processes. This finding aligns with emotional marketing theories, addressing previous gaps by highlighting the importance of affective evaluations in influencing consumer behaviour.

4.4 Effectiveness of Personalized Managerial Responses

This finding validates Hypothesis 4, demonstrating the superior effectiveness of personalized managerial responses in enhancing review impact. Experimental analysis indicates that personalized responses significantly increase consumer engagement and positive attitudes towards the hotel. Key independent variables include response type (personalized vs. general), while dependent variables focus on review impact metrics. The empirical implications suggest that personalized responses create a sense of individual attention and care, enhancing consumer perceptions of the hotel. This finding supports customer relationship theories, addressing gaps in understanding the comparative effectiveness of managerial response types**.**

4.5 Mixed Evaluations and Response Effectiveness

This finding supports Hypothesis 5, highlighting the enhanced effectiveness of personalized responses in mixed evaluation scenarios. Analysis shows that personalized responses significantly improve consumer attitudes and decision-making in reviews featuring both positive and negative evaluations. Key independent variables include evaluation mix and response type, while dependent variables focus on attitude and decision-making metrics. The empirical significance suggests that personalized responses effectively address consumer concerns and reinforce positive perceptions, enhancing overall review effectiveness. This finding aligns with theories on consumer trust and relationship management, addressing gaps in understanding response strategies for mixed evaluations.

5. Conclusion

This study integrates findings on the influence of online reviews and managerial responses on hotel booking decisions, emphasizing the roles of cognitive, sensory, and affective evaluations in shaping consumer behaviour. The research highlights the superior effectiveness of personalized managerial responses, particularly in mixed evaluation scenarios. Limitations include potential biases in experimental design and the need for more diverse samples. Future research should explore the impact of emerging review platforms and technologies on consumer behaviour, considering different cultural contexts and traveller segments to enhance understanding of review dynamics. By addressing these areas, future studies can provide deeper insights into effective review management strategies for the hospitality industry.

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