

Evaluating Hotels' Managerial Responses to Online Reviews

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Extensive Summary

With the widespread use of the Internet and social media and the ease of mobile applications, more and more consumers are sharing their experiences through online services. Online Reviews (OR), considered as part of an electronic mouth-to-mouth, have profound effects on both consumers and businesses (Niu and Fan, 2018). It is known that the responses to online reviews are as important as online reviews. It seems that the rates of response to online reviews are very rare until recently (Sparks, Perkins and Buckley, 2013). Considering Li, Cui, and Peng (2017) tremendous influences on the decisions of travelers and thus their impact on sales (Xie, Kwok, and Wang, 2017), hotels are now actively responding to online reviews. However, this may not apply to all hotels. Therefore, research question of this study is whether hotels in Turkey respond to online reviews.

The fact that online review websites offer the opportunity to respond to ORs to businesses is seen as a great opportunity to show respect for consumers and build trust among businesses (Lu et al., 2012). Therefore, online review, which is shared in travel review websites, is perceived as impartial and reliable because it reduces the possibility of regrets that may arise in relation to a decision (Duverger, 2013). As Sigala, Christou and Gretzel (2012) point out, consumers are shaping their marketing activities together with the hotel managers through online reviews. For this reason, the responses are seen as one of the elements that can shape the decisions of the consumers. Accordingly, the main purpose of this study is to examine whether hotel enterprises respond to comments based on the types (city / coast) and classes (5/4/3 stars).

The data used in the research consisted of online reviews of three, four and five-star hotels operating in Istanbul and Antalya in Tripadvisor, a travel review site, using content analysis techniques from qualitative research approaches and having at least a minimum of a hundred online reviews. For this reason, all hotels are listed within the

criteria specified in the travel review site, and the last hundred comments and reviews of these businesses have been reviewed between January and April 2014.

In general, significant differences were found between stars of hotels of Istanbul and Antalya hotels, whether or not to respond to online reviews. Accordingly, the vast majority of online reviews are not responded by hotels.

When the answers are analyzed, it is seen that five-star hotels respond more to online reviews than four and three-star hotels and four-star hotels respond more than three-star hotels. It is also seen that hotel management managers respond more to positive online reviews. The vast majority of responses are based on answers given to very good and excellent online reviews. This shows that managers are more concerned with positive online reviews.

However, responding to negative reviews as well as positive online reviews will help avoid potential consumers' attention and create a favorable situation for hotels. The suggestions made in the light of the results of this research can be listed as follows:

- Suggestions and complaints made by consumers via online reviews regarding hotels should be considered as an important opportunity to increase the quality of service. Hotels should respond to both positive and negative comments (Rose and Blodgett, 2016) in detail.
- Responses to online reviews should not be in the form of a single template, like copy and paste. Instead, it should be ensured that it is written in a personalized style, based on an online review written by the consumer, which is only written in that review, and consists of concrete elements.