



# Meeting planners' online reviews of destination hotels: A twofold content analysis approach

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## HIGHLIGHTS

- This study investigated qualitative and quantitative aspects of meeting planners' online reviews of destination hotels.
- Eight key concepts were identified; the frequency of concepts differed by destination and meeting planner type.
- Text characteristics and quantitative online review dimensions were partially related to behavioral intentions.
- Planners commented more on hotel-related areas in positive reviews, while meeting-related issues were mentioned more in negative reviews.
- Positive and negative online hotel review categories were presented for hoteliers and meeting destination marketers.

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## ABSTRACT

This study employed a combined approach of automated and manual content analysis to provide an understanding of online meeting planners' reviews. The dual analysis with 696 online reviews of 173 hotels located in multiple destinations identified both quantitative and qualitative aspects of text data. Identified themes, text characteristics, online review dimensions, positive and negative areas, and newly emerged attributes provide practical implications for hoteliers and meeting destination marketers. The proposed framework offers insights to understand and respond to meeting planners' online reviews, as well as the basis for hotel evaluation criteria. Overall results expand our understanding of meeting planners' destination hotel experience and fill gaps in our knowledge of online guest reviews by differentiating those of meeting planners from those of general travelers.

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## 1. Introduction

The emergence of online user-generated content reviews over the last decade has revolutionized the travel decision-making process. Travelers increasingly depend on online guest reviews to make their accommodation purchase decision (UNWTO, 2014). Currently, more than 200 million reviews appear across numerous travel-related review sites (UNWTO, 2014). Online reviews play an important role in reducing the uncertainty and the amount of information that must be processed to make a decision (Sparks & Browning, 2011). Furthermore, as online guest review exposure is ubiquitous and the influence of online reviews is increasing, online reputation management has become important for hoteliers in the

creation of services and marketing activities (Park & Allen, 2013).

Online hotel reviews have received considerable attention from academic researchers (Schuckert, Liu, & Law, 2015). Recent studies have shown that online guest-generated reviews affect other customers' online hotel reviews and ratings (Sridhar & Srinivasan, 2012), attitudes toward a hotel (Vermeulen & Seegers, 2009; Xie, Miao, Kuo, & Lee, 2011), booking decisions (Sparks & Browning, 2011; Toh, Dekay, & Raven, 2011; Ye, Law, & Gu, 2009), and hotel revenue performance (Anderson, 2012; Philips, Barnes, Zigan, & Schegg, 2017; Zhang & Mao, 2012). Practices for developing online responses and recovery strategies from a hotel reputation management perspective are also increasingly discussed (Baka, 2016; Park & Allen, 2013; Sparks, So, & Bradley, 2016).

The majority of studies has investigated online hotel reviews from a mega review site, TripAdvisor (Baka, 2016; Banerjee & Chua, 2016), and accordingly the studies examine a limited number of topics and lack multiple data sources. Furthermore, most studies

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examined general customer online hotel reviews (e.g., Banerjee & Chua, 2016; Crotts, Mason, & Davis, 2009; Filieri & Mcleay, 2014; Levy, Duan, & Boo, 2013; Melian-Gonzalez, Bulchand-Gidumal, & Lopez-Valcarcel, 2013; Philips et al., 2017; Sridhar & Srinivasan, 2012; Vermeulen & Seegers, 2009). Relatively little discussion exists of online reviews by important tourism and hotel industry customer groups, such as meeting industry professionals who provide meeting services for business travelers, including site selection and guestroom reservations.

Meeting groups are an important revenue contributor to the hotel industry. In the business sector, more than \$565 billion is spent on meetings and events globally, with \$103 billion specifically on hotels (Frost & Sullivan, 2013). In the lodging industry, about 40% of guests are business travelers, accounting for more room nights than leisure travelers, spending more than \$280 billion in 2014 (American Hotel & Lodging Association, 2015). Hotels are booking more than 4400 room nights per year on average that are directly related to organized meetings and events (Frost & Sullivan, 2013). It is clear that meetings provide stable economic value for hotels. As the number of business travelers attending meetings has been increasing since 2010 (UNWTO, 2015), specific information on meeting planners' hotel experience, post-event satisfaction, and evaluation is essential.

Meeting planners' destination image regarding overall impression and favorable/unfavorable evaluations provides insights into meeting site selection (Baloglu & Love, 2005; Oppermann, 1996). Convention site selection studies have revealed that hotel accommodations are considered an important factor by meeting planners (Crouch & Louviere, 2004; Go & Zang, 1997) and association directors (Chen, 2006), along with other factors such as the convention venue/meeting facility, site environment, and local support. However, comparatively little attention has been directed toward understanding meeting planners' needs, satisfaction, and behavior regarding meeting venue selection at a destination. Furthermore, online and offline reviews written by meeting planners have been neglected in academic research.

Accordingly, the purpose of the study is to explore meeting planners' online reviews to understand their hotel experience at a destination and examine the elements that comprise their review. Further objectives include identifying review characteristics, categorizing key concepts, and providing useful categories for evaluating meeting planners' online reviews. The findings will broaden the scope and discussion of online guest reviews in general and improve our understanding of meeting planners' perceptions and attitudes toward a destination. In addition, these efforts will offer insights to improve the buyer-seller relationship between meeting planners and destination hotels.

## 2. Literature review

### 2.1. Online hotel reviews

Consumers use online reviews to search for information and evaluate alternatives to reduce risks (Mudambi & Schuff, 2010). It is clear that online reviews have meaningful effects on hotel guests, specifically on behavioral intentions and decision-making processes (Sridhar & Srinivasan, 2012; Verma, 2010; Zhou et al., 2014). Using 7499 consumers' online ratings of 114 hotels, Sridhar and Srinivasan (2012) found that other consumers' online reviews and ratings moderated the effects of positive and negative features of the hotel experience. Sparks and Browning (2011) showed that a positively framed set of reviews with ratings resulted in significantly higher levels of booking intention.

Researchers have engaged in increasingly substantial discussion regarding online reputation management. For example, studies

have examined hotels' response/recovery strategies for online guest reviews regarding satisfaction/dissatisfaction (Levy et al., 2013; Min, Lim, & Magnini, 2015). This phenomenon emerged in particular for negative reviews because the impact is greater than for positive reviews (Sparks & Browning, 2011; Sridhar & Srinivasan, 2012; Xie et al., 2011). Studies have also suggested that online reviews can be used for service recovery (Baka, 2016; Levy et al., 2013; Melian-Gonzalez et al., 2013; Min et al., 2015). Levy et al. (2013) argued that managements' response can turn negative guest reviews into positive change when handled appropriately. Collectively, the majority of research regarding online guest reviews has approached the topic from a marketing or management perspective.

Another area of research concerns online guest review outcomes that influence financial performance. Various measures of hotel performance, such as room sales volume (Ye et al., 2009), average daily room rate (Zhang & Mao, 2012), and revenue per available room (RevPAR) (Anderson, 2012; Phillips et al., 2017), have been studied. For example, Anderson (2012) argued that a 1% gain in guest review scores resulted in an average 0.96% (up to a 1.42%) gain in RevPAR and that the impact was stronger for a midscale property than for a luxury hotel. Phillips et al. (2017) identified a number of hotel attributes that predict occupancy rates and RevPAR (rooms, building, Internet, ambiance, and grounds), indicating that a positive hotel experience voiced through social media has the greatest impact on hotel demand and subsequent RevPAR. Overall, previous findings imply that online reputation is eventually connected to hotel revenue and should not be underestimated. Online review research is still emerging and multiple issues need further research.

### 2.2. Content analysis of online hotel reviews

Online consumer reviews can be categorized as qualitative (e.g., written description) and quantitative (e.g., rating or grade) evaluations (Kostyra, Reiner, Martin, & Daniel, 2015). A number of quantitative online guest review studies has offered meaningful results by examining the number of reviews per hotel, total number of hotels reviewed, hotel ratings, and review scores. For example, using 423 hotels that had between 101 and 200 reviews on TripAdvisor, Melian-Gonzalez et al. (2013) found that as the number of hotel reviews increased, the ratings became more positive.

A combination of qualitative and quantitative methods for analyzing online reviews is another research approach. This allows for the development of a complaint typology or classification of satisfied/dissatisfied hotel attributes associated with quantitative data (Levy et al., 2013; Li, Ye, & Law, 2013; Zhou, Ye, Pearce, & Wu, 2014). Examining TripAdvisor review rating patterns for independent and chain hotels across four regions (America, Asia-Pacific, Europe, and Middle East-Africa), Banerjee and Chua (2016) showed that rating patterns and complaint issues varied across traveler profiles. Specifically, business travelers appeared to complain mostly about staff service at independent hotels in the Asia-Pacific region (Banerjee & Chua, 2016).

Regarding satisfaction and dissatisfaction with hotel attributes, O'Connor (2010) identified the 25 most common themes by analyzing TripAdvisor reviews from 100 hotels in London. Reviewers frequently mentioned hotel location, room size, staff service, cleanliness, breakfast, and in-room facilities. Room size was the most commonly mentioned theme for both satisfied and dissatisfied customers.

Overall, the factors affecting traveler satisfaction were hotel-related attributes: *transportation convenience, food and beverage management, convenience to tourist destinations, and value for money* (Li et al., 2013); *room, hotel, food, value for money, location,*

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