Routledge
Taylor & Francis Group

Check for updates

The manager's dilemma: a conceptualization of online review manipulation strategies

Stefan Gössling[a,b]*, C. Michael Hall[a,c] and Ann-Christin Andersson[a]

[a]School of Business and Economics, Linnaeus University, 39182 Kalmar, Sweden; [b]Western Norway Research Institute, Research Centre for Sustainable Tourism, Box 163, 6851 Sogndal, Norway; [c]Department of Management, College of Business & Economics, University of Canterbury, Private Bag 4800, Christchurch 8140, New Zealand

Online evaluations are one of the most important innovations in tourism in recent years, often combining a review/rating (business-specific evaluation) and a ranking (inter-business comparison). As online reputation determines economic success, tourism managers may be tempted to manipulate online content. This paper presents the results from a qualitative study involving 20 hotel managers in southern Sweden, and their perspectives on manipulation. Results confirm that there exists a wide range of review manipulation strategies, many of which are difficult to control. Even though only few managers appear to systematically manipulate, online evaluations represent a significant challenge for businesses, as they introduce direct competition and foster consumer judgement cultures. It is postulated that managers will increasingly find themselves in a Prisoner's dilemma, representing a situation where engaging in manipulation is the most rational choice in an increasingly competitive market situation.

Keywords: collaboration; consumption; management; accommodation sector; online reputation; online reviews

Introduction

Online evaluations are now ubiquitous in tourism, including accommodation, restaurants, attractions, or destinations, and are considered one of the most significant innovations in tourism over the past decade (Gretzel, 2006; Xiang & Gretzel, 2010; Zhang, Ye, Law, & Li, 2010). The availability of online reviews, ratings, and rankings of tourism businesses has various implications, as ratings appear to increasingly inspire prospective guests to research different aspects of their holiday and to base their decision-making on the opinions of fellow travellers (Ayeh, 2015; Sparks, Perkins, & Buckley, 2011; Xiang & Gretzel, 2010). Online reviews influence consumer perceptions and choices, and also affect price setting in businesses, inter-business and inter-destination competition, service innovation and host motivation, and economic distribution patterns (Chaves, Gomes, & Pedron, 2012; Gössling & Lane, 2015; Jalilvand & Samiei, 2012; Noroozi & Fotouhi, 2010; Yacouel & Fleischer, 2012; Zhang et al., 2010). To maintain positive online reputation is consequently increasingly important. As an example, a study of hotels in Paris and London suggested that a 1% increase in online customer review ratings increased sales per room by more than 2.5% (Öğüt & Onur Taş, 2012; see also Yacouel & Fleischer, 2012).

---

*Corresponding author. Email: stefan.gossling@ism.lu.se

Yet, as they compete over reputation, not all businesses can be rated or ranked highest, or collect the best online reviews. When businesses feel that their customer base is threatened by online evaluations or when they seek to expand their customer base, response strategies to control customer opinion have to be developed (Zhang & Vásquez, 2014). Such control may take various forms, including not only improved services (Lacey, 2012; Melián-González, Bulchand-Gidumal, & López-Valcárcel, 2013; Yacouel & Fleischer, 2012), but also manipulation (Banerjee & Chua, 2014a; Ott, Choi, Cardie, & Hancock, 2011; Yoo & Gretzel, 2009), that is, attempts to influence online reputation to attract customers. As an example, 'fake reviews' have been identified as one form of manipulation (Anderson & Simester, 2014; Filieri, 2015), and while assurances of content control are omnipresent on platforms, there are indications that specific forms of manipulation, such as review solicitation (TripAdvisor, 2014a), are difficult or impossible to control even though they are usually illegal. Indeed, in October 2015 this issue came to the fore when the serviced apartments chain Meriton was reported to have been offering customers inducements to change mediocre ratings on the travel rating website TripAdvisor, who responded by stating that they were investigating if fraud had been committed (Jabour, 2015). At the same time, international publicity was also given to Amazon filing a lawsuit against over a thousand individuals who had provided fake reviews.

As the extent to which manipulation exists on tourism-related platforms, and in which forms, has remained insufficiently understood, this paper seeks to address this research gap with a focus on accommodation. Based on a qualitative study, its objective is to identify and conceptualize the *range of strategies* employed by businesses to influence online reputation, as a starting point for subsequent studies that may focus on the extent of manipulation. As only management can reveal the manipulation strategies employed, research addresses managers directly, seeking to understand how they deal with online consumer opinion, and whether there are strategies to influence or manipulate Internet-based reviews, rating, and rankings.

Literature review

Online evaluation

Over the past decade, online evaluations, that is, the opportunity for consumers to write reviews on their experiences, have become ubiquitous. There now exist opportunities to leave feedback both on specific platforms (e.g. accommodation reservations), and at sites dedicated to the collection of reviews (a list of such platforms and their rating approaches is provided in Appendix 1). As an example of the scale of the phenomenon, TripAdvisor, one of the largest review platforms, claimed to have had 280 million unique monthly visitors, drawing on 170 million reviews covering more than 4 million accommodation providers, restaurants, attractions, resorts, destinations, beaches, and islands as of February 2014 (TripAdvisor, 2014b).

Online evaluations as a form of customer feedback help businesses to improve their services (Lacey, 2012; Yacouel & Fleischer, 2012). For instance, Melián-González et al. (2013) found that early ratings of hotels are generally worse, improving over time. A possible explanation for this situation is that hoteliers and managers become aware of shortcomings and guest expectations, and improve service quality as a result (see also Torres, Adler, & Behnke, 2014). Given the importance of online reviews for decision-making, to control online reputation and to improve services on the basis of guest feedback may no longer be an option, but a necessity (Phillips, Zigan, Santos Silva, & Schegg, 2015). Given the availability and utilization of ratings and reviews, reputation management therefore appears to

occupy a growing amount of time of managers and business owners, to improve customer relations and brand attitude (Dijkmans, Kerkhof, & Beukeboom, 2015). The importance of reputation management is also reflected in a growing body of literature on strategies to improve online reputation, including, for instance, to ensure positive guest experiences related to quality or service, atmosphere, or price fairness (Jeong & Jang, 2011, for restaurants); to engage in communication with customers and to timely respond to criticism (O'Connor, 2010; Tsao, Hsieh, Shih, & Lin, 2015); to proactively consider reviews and comments to improve service performance and special offers; and to become involved in social media to increase online presence and build customer loyalty (Dijkmans et al., 2015; O'Connor, 2010; Teehan & Tucker, 2010). There is also advice to be present on various evaluation platforms (Phillips et al., 2015) and to amass large review numbers (Tsao et al., 2015).

Implications of ratings for businesses

Even though these strategies help to improve performance, and even though Vermeulen and Seegers (2009) argue that even negative reviews increase consumer awareness of hotels with only a minor negative effect on consideration, any rating system necessarily generates winners and losers, particularly if ratings are used to create rankings (Gössling & Lane, 2015). 'Losers' can potentially include not only all those businesses *not* mentioned at all on online platforms, as these become less visible in certain markets, but also those unable to compete with service performance or specific offers of the 'champions', and the specific criteria used to conduct rankings. This process is complex because prospective customers consider various elements of reviews, weighing positive and negative information, hotel standard, as well as semiotic context (e.g. Limberger, Dos Anjos, de Souza Meira, & dos Anjos, 2014; Vermeulen & Seegers, 2009; see also Filieri, 2015). Notably, online comparison can also be based on predetermined criteria that may previously have been less explicit, such as location indicated on city maps, while other criteria, such as for instance environmental performance or corporate social responsibility, are less visible or even disregarded.

Importance of online trustworthiness and credibility

In 2014, the case of a Blackpool (UK) hotel made global headlines when it fined two customers £100 for a negative online review, as per the hotel's terms and conditions (The Guardian, 2014). The case illustrates that businesses do engage in strategies to control opinion. While O'Connor (2010, p. 754) suggested that 'belief that user-generated content sites have been compromised by false reviews is unfounded' and Yacouel and Fleischer (2012, p. 220) argue that ' … unreliable reviews only rarely penetrate the OTAs' [online travel agent] websites', other authors have implied that strategies to control and manipulate consumer-generated content are becoming increasingly prevalent (Wu, Greene, Smyth, & Cunningham, 2010). For example, there are several companies that have partnered with TripAdvisor to sell products that would improve hotel properties rankings. These include Review Direct produced by Market Metrix (Waite, 2013) and Revinate post-stay surveys (Murphy, 2014). Furthermore, some hotel companies enter into special partnerships with TripAdvisor in order to increase the number of reviews collected, which is a significant determinant of ranking. In December 2014 Shangri-la Hotels and Resorts reported that prior to the review collection partnership with TripAdvisor, Shangri-La properties were averaging six reviews each month. Since the partnership began in July 2013, the average number of reviews has

increased 250% to 21 reviews per property per month. All together, the review collection partnership had driven an average of 534 out of 1930 reviews per month. In addition, the review form integration had provided reviews with a higher rating. Reviews collected in partnership with TripAdvisor average a 4.56 rating out of 5, compared to an average rating of 4.40 for reviews from other sources. Thanks to the increase in reviews and ratings, five additional Shangri-La properties had jumped into the top 5% of their market, leading to a significant increase in page views on TripAdvisor. Engagement for Shangri-La properties on TripAdvisor jumped 52 percent, nearly double the average growth for properties around the world (PATA, 2014).

Trust and credibility are key aspects of online evaluations, because trust, defined in the context of this paper as the belief that online content is reliable, and credibility, that is, the condition of being considered honest, are closely related to consumer choices (Casaló, Flavián, Guinalíu, & Ekinci, 2015; Filieri, 2015). It is thus paramount for evaluation platforms to ensure the reliability and validity of reviews, and there is evidence that platforms deem it necessary to reaffirm customers that online content is credible. As an example, TripAdvisor (2014a,b) has posted a wide range of articles on the topic of fraud, highlighting that reviews are screened to ensure that they are correctly posted and in compliance with review guidelines, and reminding businesses that 'Any attempts to mislead, influence or impersonate a traveller is considered fraudulent, and is subject to penalties' (TripAdvisor, 2014c, no page; see also Jabour, 2015). The platform admits, however, to be unable to fact-check reviews (TripAdvisor, 2014c). Indeed, one of the significant differences between TripAdvisor and Expedia or Booking.com is that the latter are also reservation websites and require for a customer to provide feedback to have reserved at least one night in a hotel. This also links the review to a transaction, making the reviewer's identity more verifiable. In contrast, platforms such as TripAdvisor do not impose the same requirements, which greatly lowers the cost of submitting fake reviews (Anderson & Simester, 2014). In their study of the two websites, Mayzlin, Dover, and Chevalier (2014) found that the distribution of reviews on TripAdvisor, therefore, contains more weight in both extreme tails. Yet, as Sparks et al. (2013, p. 8) remark: ' … trust is a very important variable for both attitude formation and purchase intention, so businesses need to be careful to ensure information about their resort is perceived as trustworthy'.

Given this situation, the credibility of online content may be seen as an increasingly important issue for both guests and businesses, also because holidays are comparably expensive products that cannot be 'tested' before consumption (van Dierdonck, Gemmel, & van Looy, 2013). Nielsen (2012) suggests that trust in online consumer reviews is as yet still high, also because reviews are generally up to date (Gretzel & Yoo, 2008). Research into trust and credibility shows that perceptions of online content are influenced by factors including valence, informational content and presentation, and source credibility (Papathanassis & Knolle, 2011; Phillips et al., 2015; Sparks & Browning, 2011). Sparks et al. (2013) show, for an eco-resort, that online travel reviews constitute a form of persuasive communication, depending on content type, source, and certification logos. In this study, consumer-generated content is generally perceived as trustworthier than manager-generated content, and specific information is more persuasive than vague content. Perceptions of trustworthiness should also depend on review platform, as anyone can assume a fake identity and register reviews on for instance TripAdvisor, a much-trusted platform (Jeacle & Carter, 2011), while, in comparison, only guests who have booked and paid for accommodation through an online reservation site such as booking.com can leave reviews on these sites (Yacouel & Fleischer, 2012). Yet, it can be assumed that few guests actually know how evaluation

systems work, as these are based on unknown algorithms, weighing various indicators to derive an overall rating.

Based on an understanding that manipulation does exist, (Yoo & Gretzel, 2009; Ott et al., 2011), Banerjee and Chua (2014a) investigated whether linguistic cues can reveal if a review is authentic or manipulated. Banerjee and Chua (2014a) indicate that manipulated reviews are richer in pronouns, personal pronouns, verbs, adverbs, and prepositions, while authentic reviews contained more nouns, adjectives, and articles. Manipulated reviews were also more richly embellished with negative cues, perceptual words, and future tense compared to authentic reviews. In another study, Banerjee and Chua (2014b) investigated the extent to which readability, genre, and writing style predict review authenticity, concluding that manipulated reviews are more imaginative, compared to genuine reviews that are generally more informative. Mayzlin et al. (2014) examine the extent of fake reviews and the market conditions that encourage or discourage promotional reviewing activity on Expedia and Tripadvisor, finding that the type of ownership or management of a hotel, as well as its location in relation to other hotels, is an indicator of manipulation. They conclude that independent hotels are more involved in manipulation than hotels with multi-unit owners or managers. Mayzlin et al. (2014) also find that hotels with close competitors are more likely to have more negative reviews on TripAdvisor (open to everyone to review) than on Expedia (only customers can judge). This would indicate third-party involvement in negative review activity, or posting of fake reviews by management.

Reports on manipulation have been widely circulated in the media (Filieri, 2015; Jabour, 2015) and have been confirmed to exist in commercialized forms in the music (Dellarocas, 2006) and book markets (Hu, Bose, Koh, & Liu, 2012). As one specific example, online platform Fiverr (https://www.fiverr.com/), a platform for buying and selling minor tasks, also has individuals offering to write reviews on platforms such as TripAdvisor (Gani, 2015). The perceived need to compete in ratings and rankings, and the notion that competitors already manipulate, may prompt businesses to engage in online review manipulation. As no study has addressed this issue as yet from the perspective of managers, that is, the only actors actually knowing the extent of manipulation of their own businesses, this research seeks to directly engage with managers.

Method

The purpose of this paper is to discuss business perspectives on the importance of online reputation, and the identification of strategies employed to control or manipulate opinion with the objective to maintain or improve online opinion, ratings, and rankings. Despite widespread focus on 'manipulation' in the scientific literature, the term appears to not have been satisfactorily described, and is for the purpose of this paper defined as *any attempt to deliberately control or influence online reputation, either with regard to one's own business or that of a competitor.*

To collect data on forms of manipulation, 20 semi-structured interviews were conducted with accommodation managers/owners in southern Sweden, including businesses in the Scania, Småland, and Kalmar counties. These regions were chosen out of convenience: any survey needs to have a geographical locus, which in this case focused on businesses that could be visited. Given the sensitivity of the research, face-to-face interviews were deemed a necessity to increase the likelihood of honest answers and to reduce the likelihood of evasive responses. Interviews were carried out from December 2014 to February 2015. Respondents were recruited from a wide range of accommodation businesses, including large chain hotels as well as small B&Bs (bed and breakfast), with a range of 9–320

beds. These were chosen on the basis of a stratified sampling approach, intended to include establishments of all sizes and standards. Managers/owners were first approached by telephone, and interviews conducted face to face after a meeting had been arranged. None of the contacted managers declined the request for an interview. Respondents were informed in a general way about the purpose of the study ('Internet/social media and guest perceptions'), and anonymity was assured.

Interviews were designed in a way to approach the more sensitive issue of manipulation after several potentially less controversial questions, that is, the importance of social media and reservation platforms for marketing, main problems experienced with these media, and complaint management on the Internet, before moving on to manipulation of reviews by others and online reputation management by the business itself. Where appropriate, respondents were prompted to move from vague statements on manipulation strategies to more explicit ones, and encouraged to reveal strategies to control online content. Notably, most online reputation management strategies were apparently not perceived as unethical, and managers appeared to be open about their activities. Omissions are nevertheless likely; yet, they are not relevant in the sense that the purpose of this paper is to capture the range of manipulation strategies, not to reliably assess the extent of these. All interviews were recorded, and transcribed afterwards. Interviews lasted between 20 and 60 minutes.

Interview content was analysed using comparative analysis to derive key strategies of manipulation. As the analysis revealed that strategies were linked to specific agents/ actors involved by management in manipulation, results were structured on the basis of agents/actors, rather than themes or strategies. Agents/actors were found to include platforms, staff, guests, 'friends', and 'commercial raters', the latter defined as companies or individuals offering to improve a business' rating or to damage the reputation of a competitor. Results are structured to discuss how managers can manipulate each agent/actor with the objective to influence online content, and illustrated in an overview (Figure 1).

The approach chosen for this research has two limitations: first of all, the sample is not representative of accommodation management in Sweden or outside Sweden; and it is unknown whether all strategies to manipulate online content have been revealed. Consequently, responses are not necessarily representative of other countries, or broader hotel manager/guest populations: as outlined by various authors, public expectations in Scandinavia are specifically high with regard to transparency, ethics, and sustainability (e.g. Falkenberg & Brunsael, 2011; Strand, 2009), and Sweden may be considered a more honest country, ranked, for instance, as the fourth least corrupt country in the world (Transparency International, 2014). Manipulation strategies as reported by Swedish accommodation managers may thus provide a conservative picture of the more global situation. Likewise, it is impossible to deduct from this research the extent of manipulation, in terms of the share of manipulated reviews in total review numbers.

Results

There is general consensus among managers/owners that evaluation systems are of enormous importance for reservations. Virtually all businesses reported to have Internet or social media representation, including their own or the chain's homepage as well as a Facebook site, and often also an Instagram site. Reservations are made through the hotels' own website, and in particular booking.com, hotels.com, expedia.com, as well as a range of other, smaller sites. For customer relations, Facebook and TripAdvisor are mentioned as the most important platforms. A majority of mostly small businesses' managers/owners were convinced of the credibility of online reviews and trusted the system to work reliably, though a few managers were
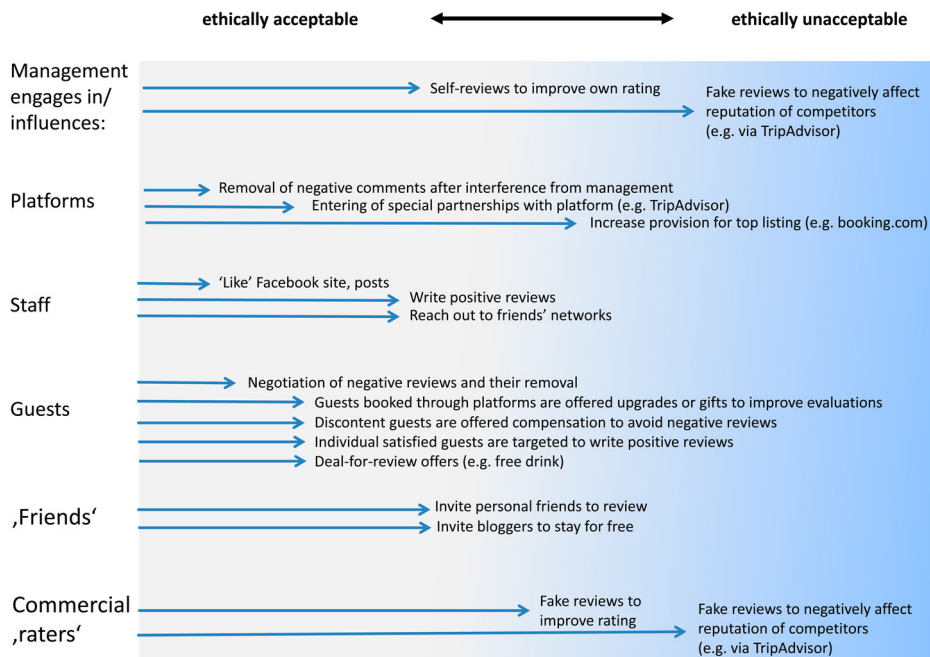
Figure 1.   Overview of manipulation strategies employed by management.
Source: Authors

also sceptical. Most managers rejected notions of involvement in manipulation with a vehe-mence; only few reported to regularly and actively manipulate ratings and reviews, though with a perception to act within acceptable ethical boundaries. All businesses had in common that they invested considerable amounts of time in reputation management. As the standard procedure, managers/staff checked online reviews on respective platforms on a daily basis, and to then reply – within 24 hours – to either negative or both negative and positive reviews. This is not always a straightforward task, as managers need to consider the effect of their answer on very different forms of guest feedback, which may refer to issues as diverse as breakfasts, room temperature, or service encounters, containing praise, critique, or sometimes damning opinion. Managers reported to always take responsibility for things that had gone wrong in the perception of guests, and, where necessary, to apologize and explain. When reviews were considered unjustified, made-up, or constituted personal attacks, platform providers were contacted and asked for removal of the respective comment. Such requests would sometimes be granted. Often, managers also sought to be in touch with guests on the phone to apologize and explain in a personal exchange, and perhaps offering some form of compensation. To prevent negative comments from being published on the Internet, several hotels engaged in real-time guest satisfaction management, by asking whether the stay had been according to expectations (check-out) or by providing printed questionnaires in rooms, hoping to identify unsatisfied guests early enough to prevent negative emotions from being vented online. Respondents also suggested that they tried to build stronger guests relations through social media sites, in particular Facebook.

Overall, interviews indicated a divide between large and chain-affiliated hotels and smaller, family-owned hotels in smaller cities, the latter characterized by more personal ser-vices, sparser presence on the Internet, and a higher share of returning guests. These hotels appeared less engaged in reputation management than larger ones. However, even

managers currently less focused on reputation management indicated that monitoring online content was a major future priority. Even though a wariness of online reviews was evident in interviews, all managers agreed that reviews helped improve services. Several managers reported to regularly discuss online reviews with staff. Owners of small businesses also reported, however, that guest comments at times were perceived as harsh and unjustified, affecting them in personal ways, contributing to emotions of hurt, sadness, irritation, or anger. All agreed that they preferred guests with complaints to approach front staff or management directly, in which all would try solve the problem and generally offer some form of compensation.

The most relevant platforms for managers are Booking.com and TripAdvisor. Booking. com is increasingly important to generate reservations, and considered reliable, as only guests who have paid and stayed at the hotel can write reviews. Yet, booking.com is also considered an ambiguous platform, as it offers higher listings against payment and does not allow managers to provide feedback on guest comments, which can be perceived as unjustified or false. In comparison, TripAdvisor is important as prospective customers use it as a reference base for decision-making. TripAdvisor allows feedback to reviews, but it is considered less credible, as anyone opening an account can leave a review.

Overall, to control and manage online reputation, respondents reported to involve various actors and strategies. Figure 1 provides an overview of these strategies, which cover a subjective spectrum of 'ethically acceptable' to 'ethically unacceptable' forms of manipulation. Strategies are discussed in more detail in the following sections.

Management: engaging agents and actors

Given the importance of reviews in attracting guests, managers are very aware of their ratings and negative reviews, with hotels belonging to international chains having to achieve minimum rating standards imposed by headquarters. For all managers, online reputation has great importance, and all expressed that their business' success is largely depending on online customer opinion: 'Word-of-mouth used to be important, but now it is a few key strikes [by a guest] and the whole world knows, positive or negative' (Interview 3). For this reason, most managers control online reputation on a daily and in some cases even on a real-time basis: 'I have an app in my phone, so wherever I am in the world, even when on holiday, I can check, and I'll get an alarm if reviews are bad' (Interview 8). Most believed that online reputation was reliable, also because it would be difficult to provide a product/service that differs from the online image: 'It would be very difficult if we bought [opinion] saying this is a five star, and then people come here and it's a four star. They'd be angry' (Interview 4). Managers also acknowledged the great power over reputation gained by customers, and the vulnerabilities this incurs: 'Another business in town … they got two reviews on TripAdvisor during one year, one of them "Welcome to old east Germany", which is not much fun to have. And they never got rid of it' (Interview 8). The quote also reveals awareness of competitors' ratings.

While most businesses stated they had never considered influencing opinion, either their own or others, managers acknowledged that influencing opinion was possible:

> I can write a TripAdvisor review about my own business, that's not difficult […] All I need is an alias which is another one than they know, and everyone has different mail addresses, I don't need to use my job's email, I can send it from my private address […] and my wife can write another one, that's not difficult. And if there are only a few reviews, this will have a considerable impact. (Interview 8)

None of the respondents admitted to have engaged in negative reviews of competitors, yet it was acknowledged that such developments could not be ruled out:

Manager: 'So just when we had published our new website [Facebook], someone gave us one star – before we had even opened [the new restaurant]! So we were thinking: "What the hell, we have not even opened yet … "'

Interviewer: 'Could you see who posted this?'

Manager: 'Yes, we could see who did this, we saw this.'

Interviewer: 'And was it a competitor?'

Manager: 'Yes, it was. And it was not really a smart move … ' (Interview 20)

Overall, most managers rejected notions of active manipulation, emphasizing the need to be honest and trustworthy. However, pressure to manipulate may be increasing: 'We have demands from the board. Tripadvisor, we are supposed to, like "Oh, you have dropped on TripAdvisor, that's your mistake". That's when you think, "Should I write one myself?"' (Interview 1).

Platforms – crucial agents in online opinion

Partnering up with reservation platforms has become a precondition to remain competitive for all businesses. Most endorsed these forms of co-operation, even though businesses also expressed that this implied a higher degree of vulnerability: 'Booking[.com] is a Trojan horse. They have found a way in, and now they are taking larger and larger shares of reservations' (Interview 17). As businesses often receive most of their reservations through this platform, reputation management becomes increasingly important. Specifically in the case of booking.com, this is difficult, however, as the platform does not allow managers to respond to guest reviews (situation as of February 2015). In the perception of managers, the platform simultaneously encourages a critical review culture, reminding guests three times, by email, to write reviews, and prompting both negative and positive experiences. This affects reviews: ' … in summer [when most guests arrive via booking.com] we get most [negative] comments and complaints' (Interview 18). The combination of having to offer the cheapest price while at the same time being confronted with particularly critical consumers is thus considered a specific problem with booking.com: 'And it feels as if everything is just about price, these sites are just price-steered, you have to be cheap … they want a lowest price guarantee from us, so that they always get our lowest prices' (Interview 16). In the long run, this has consequences for the market, as whoever cannot compete will lose: ' … the bad ones will disappear, they will end up at the bottom [of ratings], they will be blown away' (Interview 17).

Virtually all respondents also remarked that booking.com offered a higher position in the listings and a recommendation, a 'thumb up' sign, against a higher commission. In the perception of managers this constituted a form of manipulation, as listing positions and recommendations were unrelated to service standards: 'And that's what I really despise, we are supposed to be honest, it shouldn't be possible to buy advantages, in my opinion' (Interview 10). At the same time, booking.com was seen as a major factor in competition, eating up profit margins: 'In the larger cities, they pay horrible commissions, in Stockholm there are hotels that pay 30% commission for being listed on top. Which is crazy, giving away 30%, and that's not from your profit, that's from overall turnover!' (Interview 8). Yet, several managers reported to have opted for a higher payment against high listing in order to remain competitive.

Staff – risk and opportunity

Reviews are as yet primarily seen as a resource to improve service quality, as a form of 'objective' third-party feedback that can be discussed with staff. Virtually all managers used guest comments for service management, even though it was acknowledged that review content had to be used in responsible ways:

> When we have a staff meeting, we use the first 45 minutes to go through guest reviews from various sites. […] Selected ones will be shown to staff, but not those that are personal attacks […] some are pure personal attacks. (Interview 1)

Most hotels reported not to influence staff to write reviews or engage in Facebook sites, even though managers noted whether staff had 'liked' Facebook sites or posts. Some hotels also saw staff as an 'online' resource, and implicitly or explicitly encouraged them to engage in social media on behalf of the hotel. This may include their respective 'friends'' networks [Facebook]: 'We encourage them to like and share, and to invite to events. […] you cannot force your staff to do this, but I checked and everyone has 'liked' our [Facebook] site' (Interview 16). At least two employers also encouraged staff to contribute personal content to the hotel's website, such as private photographs. Staff engagement reward systems may exist, as in the case of one hotel belonging to a chain, which informed staff in advance about upcoming '50% discount' offers, encouraging them to also send the link to friends. In contrast to these approaches, one manager also outlined that staff are a potential risk:

> … I mean, obviously we explain the importance of being visible and reaching out to as many people as possible, and then is it up to each and everyone to decide if they want to like new posts and share with their friends. […] though it is important for them to understand to absolutely never ever write anything negative about their employer. (Interview 20)

This indicates that there is a wide range of approaches to the involvement of staff into the generation of Facebook content, depending on the relationship staff has with management or its workplace. Management also uses social media as a means of team building, and as a form of outward communication of the existence of a well-functioning team: 'The best approach is to be an attractive and nice workplace, and if you like your job, you'll write positively about it' (Interview 8).

With regard to review platforms such as TripAdvisor or Expedia, managers indicated that encouraging staff to write reviews could 'go wrong', either because this was seen as unethical behaviour or because it would be too obvious that the reviewer was employed at the hotel. Consequently, no manager reported to have asked staff to review the hotel or to badmouth a competitor. Yet, in at least one case, future involvement of staff was considered:

Manager: 'So far I have not encouraged staff to rate us positively on TripAdvisor'

Interviewer: '"So far"?'

Manager: 'It may happen. There are many who do, as far as I understand. And many are found out. There was one hotel in Italy, which was … , yes, TripAdvisor banned them. So there is a risk with this'

Interviewer: 'To be removed from TripAdvisor or to cheat?'

Manager: 'Both. And both customers and we would lose if we cheated, because then we are no longer part of this [TripAdvisor] and they [the customers] will not know if we are good or bad, really. So it would be best if nobody cheated. But I don't think that's where we are today.' (Interview 1)

Guests – key actors and management focus

Guests are generally understood as the most powerful agents with regard to business reputation: 'If guests wish us ill, they can sink this hotel in a week. So this is a sort of terrorism that has reached our branch' (Interview 2). The main focus of reputation management was consequently on guests. Even though managers reported that most guests were generally satisfied, hotels also faced regular complaints. Ideally, from the perspective of managers, discontent guests should approach hotel staff on site, as this would allow managers to deal directly with problems: 'I'd prefer if they took this first with the hotel so that we can do something about it, that would be acting in the right way' (Interview 6). Managers partially expressed considerable frustration over guests who would not approach front staff: 'They sit in their room and write a bad review rather than to come down to the reception, and I can think that's wrong' (Interview 3). Where guests approached management directly, in particular chain hotels had a policy to offer compensation, including discounts on the stay (up to 100%), a free future stay, bonus points, a free dinner, or small gifts to departing guests. However, according to managers, most guests preferred to provide feedback online after their stay, possibly also as a result of subsequent requests by reservation platforms to judge accommodation.

More generally, managers distinguished three different kinds of guest complaints, (i) *legitimate complaints*, due to mistakes made by the hotel or issues related to service quality; (ii) *illegitimate complaints* referring to what hoteliers perceive as force majeure, outside their sphere of influence, or 'made-up' issues; and (iii) *corrupt complaints*, that is, guests threatening to write negative reviews based on either legitimate or illegitimate complaints to gain upgrades, free services, or financial 'compensation' including discounts: 'Some [reviews] are just lies to get some form of compensation, and some [guests] threaten to write [negative] reviews to get compensation. […] some want money, others free nights' (Interview 1). This latter type of complaint had been encountered by about half of the respondents, particularly the management of larger hotels: 'Yes, it has happened that we have been threatened, if we don't this or that, they'll write a nasty review' (Interview 20). Yet, 'The dangerous guest is the one that never says anything, and then writes a nasty review' (Interview 20). To pre-empt this, one manager had put up signs, asking guests to be in touch should anything not be as expected, while others distributed evaluation forms in rooms, or tasked front staff to ask guests whether they had been satisfied.

Where guests do not take up problems directly with staff, preferring to write negative comments, this partially resulted in considerable irritation:

> I know one guest, they stayed here for a few days, very nice people, we talked a lot with them […] really nice people, and then [upon returning home] they wrote a really nasty comment. I think that was such a bad behaviour; they could have talked to me when they were here … This was awful. (Interview 15)

All managers were also aware that they had to swallow critique, justified or not: 'Everything we can answer, we answer, and always with the idea not to end up in a sandbox, throwing sand at each other. So that's always us taking full responsibility and apologizing' (Interview 3). A general rule is thus to always take guests seriously and to post friendly, understanding replies. Often, managers also tried to reach out to guests, with the goal to turn opinion, and to implicitly or explicitly encourage guests to remove negative reviews. To achieve this, several managers reported to offer various forms of compensation, such as a free night, a free dinner at the hotel, an upgrade, a discount (up to 100%), but also cash. Others sent

small gifts (a flower check or a gift card) to unsatisfied guests, encouraging them to come back.

While most managers reported not to interfere with guest opinion at all, some managers reported to encourage satisfied guests to write reviews: 'If someone has been very satisfied and says many positive things, it can happen that you say, like, oh, it would be great if you could write this on the Internet!' (Interview 9). Some approached all guests, that is, not discriminating between more or less satisfied customers: 'We send out emails after their visit, and ask them to write something on TripAdvisor' (Interview 11). Others approached guests with a small gift: 'we put a small chocolate on the pillow together with a note that encourages them to review us' (Interview 8), or sought to reward 'likes' on Facebook: 'Check in and like us on Facebook, and you'll get a bag of sweets' (Interview 9). As one manager pointed out, encouraging as many guests as possible is important, because 'the more people judge us, the better the outcome on average, because guests are more likely to post reviews when something is bad than when something is good' (Interview 8).

In particular smaller and family-owned hotels did not seem to think approaching guests was appropriate: 'No, I don't think [we should influence guests]. Then we start on a dangerous pathway. It's like buying higher ratings. That would be a development that is bad for the sector in the long run' (Interview 17). As outlined by another manager, improving ratings may also have consequences: 'if somebody writes … that we have super modern, nice, flashy rooms, and then other guests come here and wonder if this is the hotel that was reviewed. Then they understand it's not true, and then that would be very negative' (Interview 6).

'Friends' – engaging social networks

'Friends' may include real-life friends, or other ties such as acquainted significant people (actors, singers, athletes, chefs, or other celebrities) who can help market the hotel. To arrange special events involving such ties was a strategy of, in particular, smaller upscale hotels. Bloggers were also mentioned in a number of interviews as important links to reach out to potential customers: 'We have a partner-hotel, and they invite bloggers, like, 'bring along your family', and hopefully they'll get out some positive review' (Interview 14). Another manager suggested to upgrade rooms booked by bloggers:

> […] and you do a websearch for [the hotel's name] and all of a sudden you find this blog guru who has stayed here, hell! And if they say they will come to [city], we'll VIP the room, […] an upgrade [for free] to be on the safe side. (Interview 1)

With regard to real-life friends, only one manager reported to involve friends actively:

Manager: 'I have urged friends to review us, if they have been here, even if they think it's nothing special, they will rate us 10. […] They wouldn't rate us 4 – they'd no longer be my friends … [laughs] And they'd not get discounted prices … '

Interviewer: 'And that's not cheating? That they give better ratings than they really feel is appropriate?'

Manager: 'No, that's not cheating, though really … , no, that's not cheating, but it's easy to cheat … ' (Interview 1)

'Commercial raters' – do they exist?

The term 'commercial raters' refers to individuals or companies manipulating ratings against payment, which have been reported to exist in other branches such as the music

industry (Dellarocas, 2006). None of the managers reported being formally contacted by 'commercial raters': '[…] 3-4 years ago, we had someone calling me and offering to write, in exchange for staying free of charge, 'if I can stay for free, I can badmouth your competition'. ... But I don't think that's a normal thing in Sweden, perhaps in other countries, we are too nice in Sweden' (Interview 8). The manager also reported to have declined the offer. Yet, as suggested by another manager:

> Bloggers are increasingly in touch. … thinking they can drive around and stay for free with their families in exchange for writing something positive about the hotel. … To this I say categorically no, though to give them a good price or to invite them to free extra beds [for the children], that's OK to offer. (Interview 2)

Notably, in the cases mentioned, the initiative for manipulation came from outside, and in all cases, managers declined. Sweden may thus as yet be more characterized by structures of co-operation than competition, and badmouthing competitors is considered unviable: '[…] you don't have advantages because someone else is worse off. … No, there is no reason to badmouth others' (Interview 12).

Figure 1 conceptualizes these findings, showing that a wide range of manipulation strategies were identified: Managers may seek to influence platforms directly, or involve staff, guests, 'friends', or engage commercial raters. Attempts to control online reputation were classified as more or less ethical, with a gradient implied between an ad hoc range of 'acceptable' and 'unacceptable' forms of manipulation. Notably, while platforms have posted rules as to which 'fraud' rules apply, there is so far no academic consensus as to what would constitute 'fraud' or unethical strategies. As an example, to ask an enthusiastic guest to write a review may be considered a self-evident approach of improving one's online reputation by managers. 'Fake reviews' (Filieri, 2015), on the other hand, are seen as ethically unacceptable. This graduation with respect to ethical positions is considered in Figure 1, that is, representing a subjective viewpoint that is further discussed in the following sections.

Discussion

This research has addressed managers' perceptions of ratings and reviews and their objectivity, as well as the importance of reviews for business success. It also revealed strategies to manipulate reviews. Results confirm that electronic word-of-mouth communications and consumer-generated content now have huge importance for businesses (cf. Goldsmith, Litvin, & Pan, 2008), and they also show that there exist many strategies to influence online reputation, in a perceived spectrum of ethically acceptable to unacceptable, and that many of these strategies are difficult or even impossible to control by platforms. This is because even though reviews on platforms such as booking.com can only be posted by guests who have stayed at the hotel, there exist many opportunities for management to influence guest opinion during the stay. Moreover, management may seek to create opinion through various other channels, including 'open' review platforms such as TripAdvisor, or own sites (Facebook) where content can be better controlled. In contrast, platforms seem to engage in various efforts to ensure the credibility of reviews, but as underlined by Liu and Park's (2015) research on perceived usefulness of online reviews, future manipulation could employ even more subtle strategies, such as to build up (false) identities to gain high reviewer reputation, using specific language, engaging in longer, readable reviews, and by asking others (potentially equally fake identities) to vote reviews 'useful'. Yet, though possibilities to manipulate online reputation are manifold, the scale of such manipulation

appears very limited in this Swedish study and, in particular, evidence of ethically unacceptable forms of manipulation – badmouthing competitors or false postings and reviews – was limited. This may reflect particularly strong business ethics in Scandinavia (cf. Falkenberg & Brunsael, 2011; Strand, 2009).

Manipulation strategies as currently employed by managers in southern Sweden can be compared to definitions of 'fraud' by platforms. TripAdvisor (2014a: no page), for instance, published complex guidelines in December 2014 (Box 1), to define what is considered 'fraud'. The list indicates that virtually all manipulation strategies reported by management in this study are ethically unacceptable from TripAdvisor's viewpoint. TripAdvisor's view on fraud is consequently at odds with the perceptions of a share of managers to influence opinion within ethically acceptable boundaries. This also concerns recommendations in the scientific literature, with for instance Sparks et al. (2013, p. 8) suggesting that in order to enhance trust: ' … a business could encourage satisfied guests to post comments about their stay and ask them to highlight specific examples of what they liked, including any information about sustainable or socially responsible practices'. This would be in contradiction to TripAdvisor's view that businesses do not solicit reviews selectively, though it may not necessarily be in breach of fraud definitions of other platforms. At the same time, in the perception of managers, it is not only the businesses that act manipulative: Platforms, in their view, encourage dishonesty, because their sole purpose is to maximize yield, as exemplified by booking.com and the platform's policy to provide top rankings or recommendations against payment.

Box 1: TripAdvisor on fraud.

TripAdvisor is committed to ensuring the integrity of the content it collects and provides to its global community of travellers and businesses. Any attempt to mislead, influence, or impersonate a traveller is considered fraudulent, and is subject to penalties. This may include but is not limited to:

- Attempts by an owner or agent of a property to boost the reputation of a business by:

- Writing a review for their own business, or for any property the reviewing party owns, manages, or has a financial interest in.
- Utilizing any optimization company, marketing organization, or third party to submit reviews.
- Impersonating a competitor or a guest.
- Offering incentives in exchange for reviews, including discounts, upgrades, or any special treatment.
- Asking friends or relatives to write positive reviews.
- Submitting reviews on behalf of guests.
- Copying comment cards and submitting them as traveller reviews.
- Selectively soliciting reviews (by email, surveys, or any other means) only from guests who have had a positive experience.
- Pressuring travellers to remove a negative review on TripAdvisor.
- Asking guests to remove their reviews in return for a discount or incentive.
- Prohibiting or discouraging guests from posting negative or critical reviews of their experience

- Attempts to damage competitors by submitting a negative review

- Owners and agents of owners should NOT write reviews of direct competitors, even if they are relaying a genuine experience.

(TripAdvisor, 2014a).

Generally speaking, platforms potentially foster competition in at least three different ways, that is, (i) the introduction of rating comparability, which distinguishes winners and losers; (ii) by introducing direct price comparability; and (iii) by fostering critical consumer judgement cultures. All of these are likely to have repercussions for business and consumer ethics, and, ultimately, manipulation. With regard to leaders and laggards of online reputation (winners and losers), reviews and ratings began, less then 10 years ago, as a process encouraging businesses to improve service quality. However, this appears to subsequently have turned into a question of survival for many accommodation establishments, as only the highest ranked businesses may see growth in bed nights. It can be assumed that a share of these arrivals is recruited from businesses not rated or reviewed, that is, not represented by platforms, or negatively reviewed. At the same time, direct price comparability is likely to force many businesses to adjust prices downward, while businesses also have to pay commissions of 20% and higher to reservation platforms. This reduces overall turnover, while it has potentially increased the share of money paid for advertisement. In summary, there is thus a concentration process in terms of money flows, in which a share of businesses will loose, and including both the accommodation market and associated branches such as travel agents or marketing agencies. As an outcome of this process, businesses may increasingly feel threatened by these new market forces, with some managers of chain hotels already facing demands to achieve minimum ratings, and manipulation may, in the longer run, not only be seen as an opportunity, but also as a necessity to survive.

From a theoretical viewpoint, this situation may be seen as a Prisoner's dilemma (Rapoport & Chammah, 1965), that is, a situation in which different parties have two options whose outcome depends on the simultaneous choice made by the other. A variant of the Prisoner's dilemma can be applied to the situation of accommodation managers: clearly, they would profit most from cooperation (all being strictly honest), but individual dishonest parties will be better off if other parties act honestly. Paradoxically, the 'reward' for cheating would be specifically high for an individual business if all other competitors decided to be honest. As players in this version of a non-cooperative game do not know how others will decide, but have to assume that at least individual players will choose to cheat, the rational choice for any business would be to also cheat: This perspective is already evident among some of the managers interviewed for this research. In the case of review manipulation, a rational choice would then be to engage in forms of manipulation that are difficult to detect or prove, such as to encourage satisfied guests to write reviews. Notably, even though cheating as a form of non-cooperative behaviour is likely to yield only short-term advantages (e.g. Axelrod, 1984), players in the manipulation game may not be aware of longer term implications of cheating.

An equally important outcome of this study is that rating systems affect consumer culture, as they encourage critical cultures or what might rather be termed a 'judgement culture', both empowering customers and also encouraging overly critical guests, allowing for, and even demanding judgement: to evaluate is no longer a choice rather than a consumer obligation (Johnson, Matear, & Thomson, 2011). This phenomenon has been described in a more general context as 'Übertribunalisierung' (German philosopher Odo Marquard, 1981), with evidence that consumers increasingly understand and use their power over reputation (McQuilken & Robertson, 2011). This is also evidenced in platforms' reactions. TripAdvisor asks, for instance, 'As a business representative, how can I report that a guest threatened me with a bad review?' (TripAdvisor, 2014c), suggesting that incidents of guests demanding service additions on the basis of a threat are becoming more prevalent. This could also be an indication that guests are

increasingly aware of their power over business reputation, and the relevance of positive/ negative reviews for business success. Managers' views of the future are thus somewhat sceptical:

> I think I see that guests are, how should I put it, more intolerant? […] the climate has become tougher, even though that may be true for society more generally. […] People increasingly take things for granted. And of course, it's a kind of fight, there are many to share the cake […] and nothing is secret any more, […] and so there are more and more demands, guests become more demanding. (Interview 10)

In terms of management implications, it seems clear that platforms may foster processes of competition with potentially detrimental outcomes: While high service quality is in the interest of consumers and businesses, competition on the basis of price alone, or the fostering of judgement consumer cultures clearly is not. More cooperative forms of tourism may consequently be needed to reduce the risk of manipulation among businesses.

Conclusions

This study has investigated aspects of manipulation from the viewpoint of managers. Results confirm the significance of online reviews and ratings for business success, and indicate that concerns over online reputation have become a major force for product improvement and focus on hospitality and service management. However, reviews and ratings have also been revealed as a source of frustration and suspicion, and they have introduced competitive structures as a result of direct comparison and struggles for top ratings and listings. Importantly, results also show that opportunities for customers to rate and review, and growing awareness of the importance of consumer-generated content for business success have initiated changes in consumer culture due to the encouragement of judgement. In these emerging consumer judgement cultures, evaluating a business becomes a consumer responsibility.

With regard to manipulation, results indicate that many businesses find themselves at a crossroads, aware of the growing importance of online reputation, wary of the power of guests to judge service quality and to decide over the fate of businesses, as well as longer term concerns about the credibility of reviews. This research has thus argued that businesses are increasingly caught up in a Prisoner's dilemma, where engaging in manipulation is the most rational choice. Even though many manipulation strategies were identified, virtually all of which are in breach of ethics codes as published by TripAdvisor, there is only limited evidence of systemic manipulation in this study of hotels in southern Sweden. Yet, in the future, pressures on businesses to engage in dishonest practices may increase, as there is already evidence of winners and losers, and a growing share of income lost to reservation platforms.

As the study is qualitative, seeking to conceptualize strategies of manipulation, further studies are needed to verify results and to better understand differences in manipulation activities based on subsector (e.g. accommodation, transport, and restaurant), geography (country/cultural context), location (rural/urban), as well as with regard to relative levels of competition, or customer types. Research may also address the extent of manipulation, and how emerging judgement cultures are perceived from the viewpoint of guests, that is, whether guests are becoming increasingly aware of their power over reputation, and whether they handle this power responsibly.

Disclosure statement

No potential conflict of interest was reported by the authors.

ORCID

C. Michael Hall 🄳 http://orcid.org/0000-0002-7734-4587

References

Anderson, E. T., & Simester, D. I. (2014). Reviews without a purchase: Low ratings, loyal customers and deception. *Journal of Marketing Research*, *51*(3), 249–269. doi:10.1509/jmr.13.0209

Axelrod, R. (1984). *The evolution of cooperation*. New York, NY: Basic Books.

Ayeh, J. K. (2015). Travellers' acceptance of consumer-generated media: An integrated model of technology acceptance and source credibility theories. *Computers in Human Behavior*, *48*, 173–180. doi:10.1016/j.chb.2014.12.049

Banerjee, S., & Chua, A. Y. (2014a). Applauses in hotel reviews: Genuine or deceptive? In *Science and Information Conference (SAI)* (pp. 938–942). London: IEEE.

Banerjee, S., & Chua, A. Y. (2014b). A study of manipulative and authentic negative reviews. *Proceedings of the 8th International Conference on Ubiquitous Information Management and Communication*. Siem Reap, Cambodia. doi:10.1145/2557977.2557984

Casaló, L. V., Flavián, C., Guinalíu, M., & Ekinci, Y. (2015). Do online hotel rating schemes influence booking behaviors? *International Journal of Hospitality Management*, *49*, 28–36. doi:10.1016/j.ijhm.2015.05.005

Chaves, M. S., Gomes, R., & Pedron, C. (2012). Analysing reviews in the Web 2.0: Small and medium hotels in Portugal. *Tourism Management*, *33*(5), 1286–1287. doi:10.1016/j.tourman.2011.11.007

Dellarocas, C. (2006). Strategic manipulation of internet opinion forums: Implications for consumers and firms. *Management Science*, *52*(10), 1577–1593. doi:10.1287/mnsc.1060.0567

van Dierdonck, R., Gemmel, P., & van Looy, B. (2013). *Service management: An integrated approach*. (3rd ed.). Harlow: Pearson Education.

Dijkmans, C., Kerkhof, P., & Beukeboom, C. J. (2015). A stage to engage: Social media use and corporate reputation. *Tourism Management*, *47*, 58–67. doi:10.1016/j.tourman.2014.09.005

Falkenberg, J., & Brunsael, P. (2011). Corporate social responsibility: A strategic advantage or a strategic necessity? *Journal of Business Ethics*, *99*, 9–16. doi:10.1007/s10551-011-1161-x

Filieri, R. (2015). Why do travelers trust TripAdvisor? Antecedents of trust towards consumer-generated media and its influence on recommendation adoption and word of mouth. *Tourism Management*, *51*, 174–185. doi:10.1016/j.tourman.2015.05.007

Gani, A. (2015). Amazon sues 1,000 'fake reviewers'. *The Guardian*. Retrieved October 18, http://www.theguardian.com/technology/2015/oct/18/amazon-sues-1000-fake-reviewers

Goldsmith, E., Litvin, W., & Pan, B., (2008). Electronic word-of-mouth in hospitality and tourism management. *Tourism Management*, *29*, 458–468. doi:10.1016/j.tourman.2007.05.011

Gössling, S. & Lane, B. (2015). Rural tourism and the development of Internet-based accommodation booking platforms: A study in the advantages, dangers and implications of innovation. *Journal of Sustainable Tourism*, *23*(8–9): 1386–1403. doi:10.1080/09669582.2014.909448

Gretzel, U. (2006). Consumer generated content–trends and implications for branding. *E-Review of Tourism Research*, *4*(3), 9–11.

Gretzel, U. & Yoo, K. (2008). *Use and impact of online travel reviews*. In P. O'Connor, W. Hopken & U. Gretzel (Eds.), *Information and communication technologies in tourism 2008* (pp. 35–46). Vienna: Springer-Verlag Wien.

The Guardian. (2014, 19 November). TripAdvisor bad review hotel to refund £100 'fine' to customers. *The Guardian*. Retrieved from http://www.theguardian.com/uk-news/2014/nov/19/tripadvisor-couple-bad-hotel-review-charged-blackpool-broadway

Hu, N., Bose, I., Koh, N. S., & Liu, L. (2012). Manipulation of online reviews: An analysis of ratings, readability, and sentiments. *Decision Support Systems*, *52*(3), 674–684. doi:10.1016/j.dss.2011.11.002

Jabour, B. (2015). Claims Meriton offered inducements to guests to upgrade TripAdvisor ratings. *The Guardian*, 21 October. Retrieved from http://www.theguardian.com/travel/2015/oct/21/claims-meriton-offered-inducements-to-guests-to-upgrade-tripadvisor-ratings

Jalilvand, M. R., & Samiei, N. (2012). The impact of electronic word of mouth on a tourism destination choice: Testing the theory of planned behavior (TPB). *Internet Research*, 22(5), 591–612. doi:10.1108/10662241211271563

Jeacle, I., & Carter, C. (2011). In TripAdvisor we trust: Rankings, calculative regimes and abstract systems. *Accounting, Organizations and Society*, 36(4), 293–309.

Jeong, E., & Jang, S. S. (2011). Restaurant experiences triggering positive electronic word-ofmouth (eWOM) motivations. *International Journal of Hospitality Management*, 30(2), 356–366. doi:10.1016/j.ijhm.2010.08.005

Johnson, A. R., Matear, M., & Thomson, M. (2011). A coal in the heart: Self-relevance as a post-exit predictor of consumer anti-brand actions. *Journal of Consumer Research*, 38(1), 108–125. doi:10.1086/657924

Lacey, R. (2012). How customer voice contributes to stronger service provider relationships. *Journal of Services Marketing*, 26(2), 137–144. doi:10.1108/08876041211215293

Limberger, P. F., Dos Anjos, F. A., de Souza Meira, J. V., & dos Anjos, S. J. G. (2014). Satisfaction in hospitality on TripAdvisor. com: An analysis of the correlation between evaluation criteria and overall satisfaction. *Tourism & Management Studies*, 10(1), 59–65.

Liu, Z., & Park, S. (2015). What makes a useful online review? Implication for travel product websites. *Tourism Management*, 47, 140–151. doi:10.1016/j.tourman.2014.09.020

Marquard, O. (1981). *Abschied vom Prinzipiellen*, Stuttgart: Reclam.

Mayzlin, D., Dover, Y., & Chevalier, J. A. (2014). Promotional reviews: An empirical investigation of online review manipulation. *American Economic Review*, 104(8), 2421–2455.

McQuilken, L., & Robertson, N. (2011). The influence of guarantees, active requests to voice and failure severity on customer complaint behavior. *International Journal of Hospitality Management*, 30(4), 953–962. doi:10.1016/j.ijhm.2011.02.003

Melián-González, S., Bulchand-Gidumal, J., & López-Valcárcel, B. G. (2013). Online customer reviews of hotels as participation increases, better evaluation is obtained. *Cornell Hospitality Quarterly*, 54(3), 274–283.

Murphy, C. (2014). *Revinate announces results of TripAdvisor review collection partnership*. Revinate customers using post-stay surveys see an average of 409% increase in their TripAdvisor review volume. Retrieved from http://www.revinate.com/blog/2014/10/revinate-announces-results-tripadvisor-review-collection-partnership/

Nielsen, 2012. *Global Trust in Advertising and Brand Messages*. Retrieved from http://www.nielsen.com/us/en/insights/reports/2012/global-trust-in-advertising-and-brand-messages.html

Noroozi, A., & Fotouhi, Z. (2010). The influence of semantic web on decision making of customers in tourism industry. *International Journal of Information Science and Management (IJISM)*, 1, 77–98.

O'Connor, P. (2010). Managing a hotel's image on TripAdvisor. *Journal of Hospitality Marketing & Management*, 19(7), 754–772. doi:10.1080/19368623.2010.508007

Öğüt, H., & Onur Taş, B. K. (2012). The influence of internet customer reviews on the online sales and prices in hotel industry. *The Service Industries Journal*, 32(2), 197–214. doi:10.1080/02642069.2010.529436

Ott, M., Choi, Y., Cardie, C., & Hancock, J. T. (2011). Finding deceptive opinion spam by any stretch of the imagination. *Proceedings of the 49th Annual Meeting of the Association for Computational Linguistics* (pp. 309–319). Portland, OR: Association for Computational Linguistics.

Papathanassis, A., & Knolle, F. (2011). Exploring the adoption and processing of online holiday reviews: a grounded theory approach. *Tourism Management*, 32(2), 215–224. doi:10.1016/j.tourman.2009.12.005

PATA. (2014). *Shangri-La Hotels and Resorts study shows review collection partnership with TripAdvisor leads to more reviews and higher ratings*. Retrieved from http://www.pata.org/shangri-la-hotels-and-resorts-study-shows-review-collection-partnership-with-tripadvisor-leads-to-more-reviews-and-higher-ratings/

Phillips, P., Zigan, K., Santos Silva, M. M. & Schegg, R. (2015). The interactive effects of online reviews on the determinants of Swiss hotel performance: A neural network analysis. *Tourism Management*, 50, 130–141. doi:10.1016/j.tourman.2015.01.028

Rapoport, A., & Chammah, A. M. (1965). *Prisoner's dilemma: A study in conflict and cooperation*. Chicago, IL: University of Michigan Press.

Sparks, B. A., & Browning, V. (2011). The impact of online reviews on hotel booking intentions and perception of trust. *Tourism Management*, 32(6), 1310–1323. doi:10.1016/j.tourman.2010.12.011

Sparks, B. A., Perkins, H. E., & Buckley, R. (2013). Online travel reviews as persuasive communi-cation: The effects of content type, source, and certification logos on consumer behavior. *Tourism Management*, *39*, 1–9. doi:10.1016/j.tourman.2013.03.007

Strand, R. (2009). Corporate responsibility in Scandinavian supply chains. *Journal of Business Ethics*, *85*, 179–185. doi:10.1007/s10551-008-9937-3

Teehan, R., & Tucker, W. (2010). A simplified lean method to capture customer voice. *International Journal of Quality and Service Sciences*, *2*(2), 175–188. doi:10.1108/17566691011057348

Torres, E. N., Adler, H., & Behnke, C. (2014). Stars, diamonds, and other shiny things: The use of expert and consumer feedback in the hotel industry. *Journal of Hospitality and Tourism Management*, *21*, 34–43. doi:10.1016/j.jhtm.2014.04.001

Transparency International. (2014). *Corruption by country*. Retrieved from www.transparency.org

TripAdvisor. (2014a). *What is considered fraud?* Retrieved from https://www.tripadvisorsupport.com/hc/en-us/articles/200615037-What-is-considered-fraud-

TripAdvisor. (2014b). *Does TripAdvisor screen reviews?* Retrieved from https://www.tripadvisorsupport.com/hc/en-us/articles/200614987-Does-TripAdvisor-screen-reviews-

TripAdvisor. (2014c). *As a business representative, how can I report that a guest threatened me with a bad review?* Retrieved from https://www.tripadvisorsupport.com/hc/en-us/articles/200614417-As-a-business-representative-how-can-I-report-that-a-guest-threatened-me-with-a-bad-review-

Tsao, W.-C., Hsieh, M.-T., Shih, L.-W. & Lin, T. (2015). Compliance with eWOM: The influence of hotel reviews on booking intention from the perspective of consumer conformity. *International Journal of Hospitality Management*, *46*, 99–111.

Vermeulen, I. E., & Seegers, D. (2009). Tried and tested: the impact of online hotel reviews on con-sumer consideration. *Tourism Management*, *30*(1), 123–127. doi:10.1016/j.tourman.2008.04.008

Waite, M. (2013, May 6). *Metrix Blog, Interested in improving your TripAdvisor ranking?* Retrieved from http://corp.marketmetrix.com/want-to-boost-your-tripadvisor-ranking/

Wu, G., Greene, D., Smyth, B., & Cunningham, P. (2010). Distortion as a validation criterion in the identification of suspicious reviews. *Proceedings of the First Workshop on Social Media Analytics* (pp. 10–13). Washington, DC: ACM.

Xiang, Z., & Gretzel, U. (2010). Role of social media in online travel information search. *Tourism Management*, *31*(2), 179–188. doi:10.1016/j.tourman.2009.02.016

Yacouel, N., & Fleischer, A. (2012). The role of cybermediaries in reputation building and price pre-miums in the online hotel market. *Journal of Travel Research*, *51*(2), 219–226. doi:10.1177/0047287511400611

Yoo, K-H. & Gretzel, U. (2009). Comparison of deceptive and truthful travel reviews. In W. Hopken, U. Gretzel & R. Law (Eds.), *Information and communication technologies in tourism 2009: Proceedings of the international conference* (pp. 37–47). Vienna: Springer-Verlag.

Zhang, Y., & Vásquez, C. (2014). *Hotels' responses to online reviews: Managing consumer dissatis-faction. Discourse, Context & Media*, *6*, 54–64.

Zhang, Z., Ye, Q., Law, R., & Li, Y. (2010). The impact of e-word-of-mouth on the online popularity of restaurants: A comparison of consumer reviews and editor reviews. *International Journal of Hospitality Management*, 29(4), 694–700.

Appendix 1.   Overview evaluation systems accommodation.

Platform	Who reviews?	Evaluation system	Aspects evaluated
Booking	Guests after stay	1–10 scale, open text	Cleanliness, comfort, location facilities, staff, value for money
TripAdvisor[a]	Open to anyone after registration	1–5 scale, open text	Service, standard, sleep quality, cleanliness, location, room, swimming pool, spa, food, atmosphere
Travelocity[a]	Open to anyone after registration	Uses TripAdvisor rating	
We8there[b]	Open to anyone after registration	1–5 scale, open text	Cleanliness, service, value for money, rooms, food, atmosphere
Expedia[a]	Guests after stay	1–5 scale, open text	Cleaning, service and staff, room comfort
HolidayCheck[a]	Open to anyone after registration	1–6 scale	Hotels, room, service, location, gastronomy, sport and leisure
Hotels	Guests after stay	1–5 scale, open text	Cleanliness, service, comfort, location
Venere	Guests after stay	1–10 scale, open text	Location, noise, space, service
Yahoo travel[a]	Open to anyone after registration	1–5 scale, open text	Room quality, cleanliness, activities, dining, pool, staff and service, bed comfort, value for money, fitness facilities, location, security and safety
Travel[a]	Open to anyone after registration	1–5 scale, open text	Cleanliness, facilities, service, location, price
Hostelz	Open to anyone; combination of own and other sites' reviews	1–5 scale, open text	Cleanliness, staff, location, atmosphere, security
Hostelworld	Guests after stay	1–100% scale, open text	
	Value for money, staff, facilities, security, atmosphere, location, cleanliness		
Yelp[a]	Open to anyone after registration	1–5 scale, open text	Restaurants, shopping, nightlife, pubs

[a]Hotels as well as other aspects of tourism.
[b]Restaurants and accommodation.