

UNIVERSITY OF ECONOMICS - VARNA
FACULTY OF "MANAGEMENT"
DEPARTMENT OF "ECONOMICS AND ORGANIZATION OF
TOURISM"

Radostina Hristova Prodanova
„ONLINE REPUTATION MANAGEMENT OF HOTELS
IN THE MUNICIPALITY OF VARNA“

ABSTRACT

of a dissertation

for acquiring of an educational and scientific degree "doctor"
in a professional direction 3.9. Tourism,
scientific specialty “Economics and Management (Tourism)”

SCIENTIFIC SUPERVISOR:

Assoc. Prof. Georgina Lukanova, PhD

VARNA

2026

The dissertation consists of an introduction (6 pages), three chapters (164 pages), a conclusion (4 pages), and a list of references used (16 pages). The main text contains 58 tables and 44 figures. The list of references used comprises 284 information sources, including 267 literature sources and 17 Internet sources. The dissertation also includes 3 appendices.

The defense of the dissertation will take place on at in Hall of the University of Economics – Varna, at a meeting of the Scientific Jury appointed by Order No. of the Rector of the University of Economics – Varna.

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**Online reputation management of hotels in the
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I. GENERAL CHARACTERISTICS OF THE DISSERTATION

1. Relevance and significance of the research

The development of internet technologies has contributed to the rapid introduction and establishment of online reviews as a major factor shaping consumer behavior. Nowadays, almost all consumers read online reviews before making a purchasing decision.

Online reviews are one of the main sources of online reputation. A number of scientific studies have found that a positive online reputation has a significant impact on accommodations, increasing occupancy, financial profitability and competitiveness. In addition, it has a significant impact on consumers, contributing to building trust and customer loyalty, which are key to the long-term sustainability of the hotel business.

However, there is still a lack of sufficiently in-depth research that systematically analyzes how hotels manage their online reputation across various digital channels. Most existing studies focus on individual components of online reputation or on specific digital channels, most commonly review and booking platforms, without offering a comprehensive and integrated approach to analyzing its management. Furthermore, hotel-owned distribution channels, such as the corporate website and social media, remain under-researched. This necessitates the development of a conceptual model for analyzing and evaluating online reputation management, as well as a theoretical analysis of opportunities for its improvement in the context of the hospitality industry.

The circumstances described above underscore the relevance and significance of this dissertation, which focuses on analyzing the management of hotels' online reputation across various digital channels and the factors that influence this process.

2. Object and Subject of the Study

The object of the study is the management of the online reputation of hotels in the municipality of Varna across review and booking platforms, corporate websites, and social media.

The subject of the study in the dissertation is the online reputation of hotels and the tools for its management.

3. Aim and Objectives of the Study

The aim of the dissertation is, through a theoretical and empirical analysis, to examine the management of the online reputation of hotels in the municipality of Varna, to identify the factors influencing it, and to determine guidelines for its improvement.

To achieve this aim, the following main research objectives are addressed:

1. Theoretical analysis and definition of the essence and specific characteristics of online reputation and its management in the hotel industry;
2. Development of a conceptual model for assessing the management of hotels' online reputation in a digital environment;
3. Analysis of online reputation and its management across review and booking platforms, corporate websites, and social media of hotels in the municipality of Varna;
4. Formulation of guidelines and recommendations for improving the management of the online reputation of hotels in the municipality of Varna.

4. Research Thesis and Hypotheses

The main thesis of the dissertation is that *the online reputation of hotels is the result of the interaction between user-generated and corporate content in a digital environment, and its purposeful and systematic management depends on a complex set of factors, among which the characteristics of the accommodation, customer satisfaction, and popularity in social media are of primary importance.*

Within the framework of this study, online reputation management is considered as a multi-component process, which is implemented through various digital channels, which have specific functions and influence on consumer perceptions. In order to operationalize the main thesis and take into account the specifics of the main channels for forming and managing the online reputation of hotels - review and booking platforms, corporate websites and social media, the following research hypotheses have been formulated:

H1. There is a positive relationship between the characteristics of the accommodation, customer satisfaction, and the management of online reputation on review and booking platforms.

H2. There is a positive relationship between the characteristics of the accommodation, customer satisfaction, and the management of online reputation on corporate websites.

H3. There is a positive relationship between the characteristics of the accommodation, popularity (measured by the number of followers), and the management of online reputation on social media.

5. Research Methods

In the development of the dissertation, in order to achieve the set scientific aims and objectives, a combined research approach has been applied, integrating general scientific methods with specific empirical techniques. Among the methods used are description, analysis, synthesis, induction, and deduction, which allow for the systematization and interpretation of existing theoretical frameworks and empirical data related to the management of online reputation in the hotel industry.

In the empirical part of the study, quantitative and qualitative methods of data collection and analysis were applied. The main method for collecting primary information is content analysis, which examines the characteristics of the online presence of hotels in various digital channels - review and booking platforms, corporate websites and social media. This method analyzes key elements of online reputation, including content created by the hotel and content generated by users. Descriptive statistics methods and methods for statistical testing of dependencies between variables were used to process and analyze the collected data. Statistical analysis was carried out with the IBM SPSS Statistics software, using Pearson's χ^2 test, one-way analysis of variance (ANOVA) and t-test for independent samples.

6. Limitations and problems of the study

The study of the examined issues, in line with the defined research aim, has been conducted under the following limiting conditions:

First limitation. The territorial scope of the study is limited to hotels operating within the municipality of Varna; therefore, the conclusions drawn cannot be directly generalized to all tourist destinations in the country.

Second limitation. The research sample includes only hotels classified as three-, four-, and five-star categories. Hotels in the one- and two-star categories, as well as other types of accommodation establishments (hostels, guest houses, serviced apartments, etc.), are not included in the analysis, which limits the generalization of the results to the entire sector.

Third limitation. The collection of empirical data was carried out within a specific time period aligned with the active tourist season. The dynamic nature of online content and the continuous publication of new reviews and ratings on digital platforms may lead to changes in the analyzed indicators after the completion of the study.

Fourth limitation. The analysis is based entirely on publicly available data from digital platforms. These data do not allow for capturing the perspectives of managers, nor the challenges encountered in the implementation of online reputation management activities.

The main problem associated with the development of the dissertation is the lack of specialized, systematized, and focused academic literature addressing hotels' online reputation and its management as a comprehensive managerial process. Another significant issue is the absence of an established and widely accepted methodology for analyzing and evaluating online reputation management applicable in the practice of hotel enterprises.

The stated limitations and problems do not diminish the significance of the obtained results; rather, they outline opportunities for future research aimed at expanding the scope of analysis and conducting a more in-depth examination of online reputation management in the tourism sector.

7. Information Sources

The information sources used in the development of the dissertation are divided into two main groups:

➤ **Secondary sources**

Secondary sources include scientific articles and publications by Bulgarian and international authors related to online reputation, digital marketing, and the hotel industry; statistical data from the National Statistical Institute; as well as analytical reports and market analyses from international platforms and specialized organizations such as ReviewPro, TripAdvisor Insights, and other publicly available studies in the field of the hotel business. Information from specialized online sources and previous empirical studies relevant to the research topic has also been used, serving as a basis for the theoretical framework of the study and for the interpretation of the obtained results.

➤ **Primary sources**

Primary sources include empirical data collected and analyzed independently by the author within the framework of the present study. These comprise information from review and booking platforms, corporate websites, and social media.

II. STRUCTURE AND CONTENT OF THE DISSERTATION

The dissertation is structured into an introduction, three chapters, a conclusion, references, and appendices. The total length of the study is 198 pages, including: 1 title page, 2 pages of contents, 6 pages of introduction, 164 pages of main text, 4 pages of conclusion, 16 pages of references, and 13 pages of appendices. The main text contains 58 tables and 44 figures. The list of references consists of 284 sources, including 267 literature sources and 17 internet sources.

In accordance with the defined aim and research objectives, the dissertation is structured in the following sequence:

Introduction

Chapter One. Theoretical aspects of online reputation management in the hotel industry

1.1. Essence and specific features of reputation

1.1.1. Historical perspective and development of the term reputation

1.1.2. Image and reputation – similarities and differences

1.1.3. Influence of reputation on the organization

- 1.2. Essence and specific features of online reputation
 - 1.2.1. Conceptual characteristics of online reputation
 - 1.2.2. User-generated content (eWom)
 - 1.2.3. Hotel-generated content
- 1.3. Online reputation management
 - 1.3.1. General principles of online reputation management
 - 1.3.2. Specific features of online reputation management on the hotel website
 - 1.3.3. Specific features of online reputation management on the hotel's social media profile
 - 1.3.4. Specific features of online reputation management on review and booking platforms
 - 1.3.5. Conceptual model for evaluating online reputation management in the hotel industry

Chapter Two. Analysis of the online reputation of hotels in the municipality of Varna

- 2.1. General characteristics of the hotel industry in the municipality of Varna
- 2.2. Analysis of the online reputation management of hotels in the municipality of Varna on review and booking platforms
- 2.3. Analysis of the online reputation management of hotels in the municipality of Varna on their corporate websites
- 2.4. Analysis of the online reputation management of hotels in the municipality of Varna on social media

Chapter Three. Guidelines for improving the online reputation management of hotels in the municipality of Varna

- 3.1. Guidelines for improving the online reputation management of hotels on review and booking platforms
- 3.2. Guidelines for improving the online reputation management on the hotel website
- 3.3. Guidelines for improving the online reputation management on the hotel's social media profile

Conclusion

References

Appendices

III. BRIEF OVERVIEW OF THE DISSERTATION

Introduction

The introduction justifies the relevance and significance of the issues considered in the dissertation, related to the management of the online reputation of hotels in a digital environment. The object and subject of the study are presented. The research objective, main tasks and research hypotheses of the development are formulated. The research thesis is defined. The research methods used are indicated. The limitations of the research, as well as the scientific and applied significance of the obtained results, are outlined.

Chapter One. Theoretical aspects of online reputation management in the hotel industry

In the first chapter, a theoretical overview of the development of the concept of reputation and its significance for organizations is presented. The main theoretical approaches and definitions of corporate and online reputation in the scientific literature are examined. The characteristics of online reputation as a specific form of reputation, formed in a digital environment, are clarified. The main components of online reputation – user-generated content and organization-generated content, are analyzed. The characteristics of online reputation management in the hotel industry and the main digital channels through which it is formed and managed are also presented.

In paragraph 1 – **Essence and specific features of reputation**, the theoretical foundations of the concept of “reputation” and its development in the scientific literature are examined. The evolution of the concept is traced – from its initial interpretations as an assessment of the quality of products and the behavior of the organization to its contemporary understanding as a complex construct, formed by the perceptions of different stakeholders. A theoretical overview of the main approaches and definitions of

corporate reputation, developed in the scientific literature (Shapiro, 1983; Weigelt & Camerer, 1988; Walker, 2010), is presented and its key characteristics are identified.

The relationship between the concepts of "image" and "reputation" is analyzed, emphasizing their similarities and differences and their role in forming the public assessment of organizations. Special attention is paid to the influence of reputation on the activities of organizations, highlighting the main areas of its impact on competitiveness, stakeholder trust, financial results, the ability to attract investments, the formation of loyal customers and resilience in crisis situations.

In paragraph 2 – **Essence and specific features of online reputation**, the conceptual characteristics of online reputation and the factors that determine its emergence and development in the digital environment are examined. The influence of the Internet on the transformation of market relations is traced, in which consumers acquire greater awareness and a stronger market position. The main scientific approaches to online reputation are analyzed. According to the first approach, it is viewed as a market assessment of the quality of the products and services offered, formed by the consumers themselves. According to the second approach, online reputation has a broader scope and includes both the content created by consumers and the content created and distributed by the organization itself in the digital space. On this basis, the dissertation adopts the second approach, according to which online reputation is formed as an integrated image built from the interaction between the content generated by consumers and the content created by hotel organizations.

Special attention is paid to the content created by users in the form of eWom, clarifying its essence, features and differences from traditional word of mouth. The motives for publishing and reading online reviews are analyzed, as well as the place of eWom in the purchase decision-making process. On this basis, it is emphasized that eWom influences all stages of consumer choice - from recognizing the need and searching for information to evaluating alternatives, making a decision and post-purchase behavior. The main characteristics of eWom - valence, text content, volume, length and visual elements - are also examined, and the results of leading scientific studies on their impact on consumer behavior, booking intention, prices, occupancy and

financial results of hotels are systematized (Anderson, 2012; Öğüt & Onur Taş, 2012; Viglia et al., 2016, etc.).

In addition, the content created by the hotel as the second main component of online reputation is also examined. Its main forms, text, images and video, are analyzed, as well as the specifics of its distribution in different digital channels: corporate website, social media and platforms for reviews and reservations. It is emphasized that each of these channels performs different functions and implies a different type of communication with the audience – from formal and informative presentation on corporate websites to more informal and engaging content on social profiles.

In paragraph 3 – **Online reputation management**, the theoretical foundations and general principles of online reputation management are examined, as well as its specific manifestations in the main digital channels of hotel organizations. Leading scientific understandings of the essence of this process are presented, emphasizing that online reputation management includes not only building and maintaining a positive public image, but also systematic monitoring, analysis, addressing and correcting content related to the organization in the online space. On this basis, the main activities in online reputation management are summarized – data monitoring, analysis and evaluation of results, content creation and distribution, crisis management and search engine optimization. Special attention is paid to monitoring and analysis as a basis for recognizing problems, tracking reputation dynamics and identifying opportunities for improvement, as well as to the creation of valuable content as a key tool for building and maintaining a positive online image. The role of crisis management in the emergence of reputational threats is also examined, as well as the importance of SEO for increasing the visibility of positive information about the hotel.

The section consistently analyzes the specifics of online reputation management in the three main groups of digital channels – corporate website, social media and review and booking platforms. Regarding the hotel website, its role as an official and controllable source of information through which the hotel presents its services and builds trust, leading to an increase in direct bookings, is examined. The main directions in scientific research devoted to the content of hotel websites are systematized, highlighting the key components of the content created by the hotel – product

information, contact information, booking information, non-product and marketing information (Chung & Law, 2003; Schmidt et al., 2008; Salavati & Hashim, 2011). In addition, the content created by users on the website, including reviews, ratings and awards from external platforms, is also examined, emphasizing the growing importance of these elements for the hotel's online reputation. On this basis, the main steps in managing content on the hotel website have been derived - planning, creation, publishing, monitoring, analysis, correction and archiving.

With regard to social media, the emphasis is on their dynamic and interactive nature, which also determines the specifics of online reputation management in this channel. The role of Facebook as the most widely used social media in the hospitality industry is examined, highlighting the main characteristics of the published content - its more informal and engaging form, the high frequency of updates and the possibility of immediate feedback from users. The factors influencing audience engagement are analyzed, among which visual content, frequency of publication and active interaction with customers stand out. Special attention is paid to user-generated content, which is difficult to control and requires a timely response to negative information. On this basis, the understanding is derived that online reputation management in social media, although following the general logic of online reputation management in hotel websites, requires a more dynamic approach and active interaction with the audience.

The section on review and booking platforms examines their leading role in shaping online reputation in the hospitality industry. The importance of platforms such as Booking.com, Google.com and TripAdvisor.com is explored, as is the role of hotel content on them – both by providing up-to-date information about the property and by publishing management responses to reviews. Research on the impact of management responses on trust, booking intention, financial performance and hotel competitiveness is analysed (Li et al., 2017; Anderson & Han, 2016; Xie et al., 2017)

Additionally, the paragraph examines and systematizes the main characteristics of management responses – frequency, speed and authenticity, presenting results from scientific research in this area. It also examines the management of user-generated content through monitoring, analysis and identification of reviews with a potentially negative impact on reputation. It also emphasizes the importance of distributing positive

customer reviews and quality certificates across the hotel's other digital channels as part of overall online reputation management.

In the final part of the paragraph, a conceptual model for assessing online reputation management in the hospitality industry is developed. The model is built on the interaction between the tourist and the hotel in the digital environment and takes into account the influence of external factors, such as digitalization, technological platforms and the competitive environment, as well as internal factors on the part of the tourist and the hotel. The model focuses on the process of online reputation management on the corporate website, social media and review and booking platforms, carried out through monitoring, analysis and evaluation, as well as through content creation and distribution. On this basis, the understanding is derived that effective online reputation management is a systematic and multi-component process that requires coordinated management of various digital channels and has a direct impact on the trust, loyalty, sales and competitiveness of hotel organizations.

Chapter Two. Analysis of the online reputation of hotels in the municipality of Varna

The second chapter is dedicated to the empirical part of the dissertation and aims to present how the online reputation of hotels in the municipality of Varna is formed and managed. The study begins with a presentation of the tourist resource potential of the destination and its superstructure. These data serve as a starting point for a more in-depth analysis and provide a generalized picture of the scale and significance of the tourism industry in the region.

Following the statistical framework, three independent studies are presented, analyzing different aspects of hotel online reputation management. They are interconnected and build on each other, each looking at a different perspective:

- **Study №1** - analysis of online reputation in review and booking platforms and practices for its management.
- **Study №2** - analysis of the content of hotel websites as a tool for online reputation management.

- **Study №3** - analysis of social media as a tool for online reputation management.

The three studies together build a comprehensive picture of the way hotels in the municipality of Varna use their digital channels to form and manage their online reputation.

In paragraph 2.1 **General characteristics of the hotel industry in the municipality of Varna**, a brief analysis of the tourist resource potential of the destination and the state of the hotel superstructure is presented. The main natural and anthropogenic tourist resources that form the tourist image and competitiveness of the municipality of Varna are examined. Based on statistical data from the National statistical institute, the structure and dynamics of accommodation facilities, bed capacity, realized overnight stays and revenue from overnight stays by accommodation category are analyzed. The results show a strongly pronounced seasonality of hotel activity and a clearly differentiated structure of demand by star categories.

In paragraph 2.2 **Analysis of the online reputation management of hotels in municipality of Varna on review and booking platforms**, the first empirical study aimed at assessing online reputation and its management in the Booking.com platform is presented. The choice of the platform is justified by its leading position among online booking platforms in Europe, as well as by the fact that only guests who have actually stayed have the right to publish reviews, which increases the reliability of the published information. The study was conducted to test the hypothesis of a positive relationship between the characteristics of the accommodation facility, customer satisfaction and online reputation management in online booking platforms. In the study, “characteristics of the accommodation facility” means the star category of the hotel and its bed capacity, and “customer satisfaction” means the hotel rating formed on the basis of user ratings in the Booking.com platform.

The study is organized in four main stages: participant selection, online reputation analysis using platform indicators, formulation and verification of research questions, and discussion of the results. The research population includes three-, four-, and five-star hotels in the municipality of Varna. After processing the information from the National Tourist Register and checking the active profiles on Booking.com, 89

hotels were included in the study. Quantitative indicators such as overall rating, ratings by subcategories – staff, facilities, cleanliness, comfort, value for money, and location, as well as the number of reviews and the number of management responses were used to analyze the online reputation (Table 1).

Table 1

Types of reputation indicators

<i>Reputation indicators</i>	<i>Types of indicators</i>
Overall rating	Quantitative
Cleanliness rating	Quantitative
Staff rating	Quantitative
Location rating	Quantitative
Value for money rating	Quantitative
Comfort rating	Quantitative
Facilities rating	Quantitative
Number of reviews	Quantitative
Number of responses	Quantitative

Source: The table is compiled by the author.

The results of the descriptive analysis show relatively high average scores in all categories considered. For three-star hotels, the highest average score is recorded for the indicator “staff” (8.31), followed by “location” (8.04) and “value for money” (8.04), while lower scores are observed for “facilities” (7.61), “cleanliness” (7.89) and “comfort” (7.86) (Table 2).

Table 2

Booking.com Category Ratings for Three-Star Accommodation Establishments

Category	No,	Mean	SD	Min	Max
Staff	28	8,3070	,7071	6,80	9,30
Facilities	28	7,6143	,88682	5,50	9,10
Cleanliness	28	7,8857	,90296	6,00	9,40
Comfort	28	7,8643	,91255	5,90	9,60
Value for money	28	8,0357	,65896	6,60	9,10
Location	28	8,0429	,94807	6,40	10,00

Source: The table is compiled by the author.

Four-star hotels have higher average values in most categories, with the highest scores for "comfort" (8.26), "location" (8.27) and "staff" (8.29), while the lowest score is for "facilities" (7.90) (Table 3).

Table 3**Booking.com Category Ratings for Four-Star Accommodation Establishments**

Category	No.	Mean	SD	Min	Max
Staff	54	8,289	,6252	6,80	9,40
Facilities	54	7,8981	,68556	6,40	9,50
Cleanliness	54	8,1889	,73348	6,30	9,70
Comfort	54	8,2556	,67339	6,60	9,60
Value for money	54	8,0167	,58817	6,60	9,30
Location	54	8,2741	,69423	7,00	9,60

Source: The table is compiled by the author.

In the group of five-star hotels, the values are the highest, with “location” reaching an average value of 9.33, “comfort” – 9.03, and “cleanliness” – 8.99, which is an indicator of a very high level of customer satisfaction. At the same time, in this group, the lowest values of standard deviation are also observed, which can be interpreted as an indicator of a high degree of homogeneity in the quality of the service offered among the representatives of this category. (Table 4).

Table 4**Booking.com Category Ratings for Five-Star Accommodation Establishments**

Category	No.	Mean	SD	Min	Max
Staff	7	8,643	,5412	7,50	9,20
Facilities	7	8,6857	,52418	8,00	9,40
Cleanliness	7	8,9857	,43753	8,50	9,60
Comfort	7	9,0286	,41115	8,50	9,60
Value for money	7	8,3429	,46136	7,70	8,90
Location	7	9,3286	,24976	8,90	9,60

Source: The table is compiled by the author.

The analysis of the indicators related to online reputation management shows that for the studied period, a total of 3,411 reviews were published on the platform Booking.com, of which 1,694 contain a comment. Of these, 517 received a managerial response, which represents 30.5% of all comments. The share of hotels that publish at least one response is 35.96%, and a clearly expressed relationship is observed between the star category and the activity in responding – 28.6% for three-star, 35.2% for four-star, and 71.4% for five-star hotels.

The next stage of the study includes the formulation of two groups of research questions. The first group is aimed at analyzing the online reputation of hotels, and the second – at the management of online reputation on the platform Booking.com. For the

statistical processing of the data, analysis of variance (ANOVA), Pearson correlation analysis, and an independent samples t-test are applied, and the analyses are carried out using the statistical software SPSS.

The first group of research questions (No. 1–No. 3) is aimed at analyzing the online reputation of hotels. The results of the conducted statistical analyses show a statistically significant relationship between the star category of the hotel and its overall rating, which means that with an increase in the star category, a higher rating is observed by guests. Pearson's correlation analysis establishes a strong positive relationship between the overall rating and the ratings in the subcategories "staff", "facilities", "cleanliness", "comfort", "value for money" and "location" ($p < 0.01$), which indicates that each of these categories indirectly influences the formation of the overall hotel rating. The analysis of the relationship between the hotel capacity and reputation indicators does not establish a statistically significant relationship with the overall rating and most subcategories. The exception is the indicator "staff", where a weak but statistically significant negative correlation is reported. This indicates that hotels with a higher capacity experience difficulties in maintaining a high level of service.

The second group of research questions (No. 4–No. 6) examines online reputation management through the publication of management responses. The results show a statistically significant relationship between the star category of the hotel and the number of published responses, with higher-category hotels demonstrating significantly greater activity in online reputation management. Additionally, the results of the t-test show that hotels that publish management responses have, on average, a larger bed base (394 beds) compared to those that do not publish (275 beds), with the difference bordering on statistical significance ($p = 0.050$). A statistically significant difference was also found between the average rating of hotels that respond to reviews (8.18) and those that do not (7.80), indicating that hotels with higher customer satisfaction manage their online reputation more actively.

The results obtained confirm the formulated hypothesis of the existence of a relationship between accommodation characteristics, customer satisfaction and online reputation management in online booking platforms.

In paragraph 2.3 **Analysis of the online reputation management of hotels in the municipality of Varna on their corporate websites**, the second empirical study is presented, aimed at assessing the management of online reputation through the content of the corporate websites of the hotels. It is based on the research hypothesis that there is a positive relationship between the characteristics of the accommodation, customer satisfaction, and the management of online reputation in corporate websites. By “characteristics of the accommodation” the star category of the hotel is understood, and by “customer satisfaction” – the ratings of the hotels on review and booking platforms.

The study is conducted in several consecutive stages: identification of hotels with corporate websites, analysis of the content of the websites, formulation and testing of research questions, and discussion of the results. The analysis includes all hotels from study №1 that have their own website (N=79). For the purposes of the analysis, a framework of 20 indicators is developed, based on previous studies in this field. They are distributed into 5 main categories, namely hotel information, reservation, non-product information, marketing information, and eWOM (Table 5).

Table 5

Indicators for analysis of hotel websites

Category / Characteristics	Category / Characteristics
<i>1. Hotel information</i>	<i>3. Non-product information</i>
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Description of the hotel • Description of services • Telephone number • Email address • Links to social media • Photo gallery • Virtual tour 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Local transport • Weather indicator • Attractions • Links to other websites
<i>2. Reservations</i>	<i>4. Marketing information</i>
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Description of rooms • Prices • Online reservation 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Innovations and renovations • Promotions • Games, surveys
	<i>5. eWom</i>
	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Ratings and reviews • Awards, certificates from accommodation platforms

Source: The table is compiled by the author.

In the first category “hotel information”, high values are expectedly observed. Description of the hotel, services, telephone numbers, email address, and photo gallery are included in all analyzed websites. Links to social media are present in 87.3% of the

hotels, and virtual tours – in 40.5%, with their frequency of use increasing with the rise in the star category of the hotels.

In the second category “reservations”, high values are also reported. All analyzed hotels publish a description of the rooms, and 87.3% of them provide an option for direct online reservation and an up-to-date price list. The category “non-product information” is weakly represented, with information about local transport to the hotel provided by only 11.4% of the properties, a weather indicator for the destination – by 12.7%, and information about attractions – by 21.5% of the hotels. In the category “marketing information”, with the exception of promotional offers, the other indicators are weakly represented. Information about innovations and renovations is published by only 3.8% of the hotels, and interactive forms of interaction with users, such as games and surveys, are not used by any of the analyzed properties. The last category “eWOM” is also relatively weakly represented. Ratings and reviews from external platforms are published by 44.3% of the hotels, and in most cases they are presented in a static form and do not contain elements confirming their timeliness and reliability. Awards and certificates from external platforms are published by only 7.6% of the analyzed hotels.

In order to empirically test the previously formulated hypothesis, two research questions were formulated.

The first research question is aimed at establishing a relationship between the star category of hotels and the content of their websites, including the visibility of eWOM on them. To answer this question, a Pearson χ^2 test was applied to study the relationship between categorical variables. The results of the analysis show the presence of a statistically significant relationship between the star category of hotels and some of the studied indicators of the websites. The most pronounced relationships are the presence of links to social media, the possibility of online booking, the publication of awards, as well as the visualization of ratings and reviews.

The second research question examines the relationship between the rating of hotels and the presence of published eWOM content on their websites. A t-test for independent samples was applied to test this relationship. The results show a statistically significant difference between the average ratings of hotels that publish eWOM content

and those that do not, with hotels with higher ratings being more likely to display ratings and reviews on their websites.

The results obtained confirm the research hypothesis that accommodation characteristics (star category) and customer satisfaction (rating) influence online reputation management on corporate hotel websites.

In paragraph 2.4 **Analysis of the online reputation management of hotels in the municipality of Varna on social media**, the third empirical study aimed at assessing the online reputation management in the social media Facebook.com is presented. The study is based on the hypothesis of a positive relationship between the characteristics of the accommodation facility, popularity and online reputation management in social media. By “characteristics of the accommodation facility” we mean the star category of the hotel, and by “popularity” – the number of followers on the social profile.

The study included all hotels from study №2 that have a Facebook page, with the total number of analyzed sites being 77. The study was conducted in several consecutive stages: selection of participants, analysis of content and activity in social profiles, formulation and verification of research questions, and discussion of the results. The content analysis method was applied to assess online reputation management, using 25 indicators grouped into several main categories: hotel information, links to social media, publication characteristics, followers, and eWOM (Table 6).

Table 6

Criteria for analyzing the content of hotel Facebook pages

<i>Basic hotel information</i>	<i>Metric type</i>
Hotel description	Qualitative
Hotel logo	Qualitative
Phone number	Qualitative
Email address	Qualitative
Address/map	Qualitative
Link to hotel website	Qualitative
Quick contact button	Qualitative
Booking button	
<i>Social Media Links</i>	
Link to Tik Tok	Qualitative
Link to Instagram	Qualitative
Link to YouTube	Qualitative
Link to Twitter	Qualitative

Post Characteristics		
Number	Posts	Quantitative
	Likes	Quantitative
	Shares	Quantitative
Type	Video	Qualitative
	Photos	Qualitative
Content	Innovations	Qualitative
	Achievements	Qualitative
	Promotions	Qualitative
Followers		
Number of Followers		Quantitative
eWom		
Rating (Booking.com, Hotel.com.....)		Qualitative
Customer satisfaction Survey (NPS)		Qualitative
Hotel responses to NPS		Qualitative

*NPS- Net promoter score

Source: The table is compiled by the author.

The results of the content analysis of Facebook profiles show that basic hotel information – hotel description, phone number, email address and address – is widely presented. At the same time, a direct booking button is only available in 26% of profiles, indicating limited use of social media as a channel for direct bookings. Integration with other social platforms is also relatively limited. Links to Instagram were posted by 19.5% of hotels, while links to TikTok, YouTube and Twitter were rare (between 1.3% and 2.6%) (Table 7).

Table 7

Key features of hotel Facebook pages

Category / Features	%	Category / Features	%
<i>1. Hotel information</i>		• Quick contact button	98.7
• Hotel description	100.0	• Booking button	26.0
• Hotel logo	63.6	<i>2. Social Media Links</i>	
• Phone number	100.0	• Instagram	19.5
• Email address	100.0	• You Tube	1.3
• Address/map	100.0	• Twitter	1.3
• Link to hotel website	98.7	• Tik Tok	2.6

Source: The table is compiled by the author.

In terms of publishing activity, 67.5% of hotels published at least one publication during the study period. The highest activity was observed in five-star hotels, followed by four-star and three-star hotels. Publications were mainly focused on promotional

offers (41.6%), while content related to innovations (3.9%) and achievements (5.2%) was found significantly less frequently. At the same time, the results show that one publication receives an average of 22.95 likes and only 1.49 shares, which is an indicator of a relatively low level of engagement and interaction with followers. According to the study data, the average number of followers of hotel Facebook profiles is 4928.19, with significant differences observed between the individual hotel categories. The highest average value is reported for five-star hotels (17350), followed by four-star (4944.04) and three-star (1341.38), which shows that as the hotel's category increases, its popularity on social media also increases (Table 8).

Table 8

Followers of Facebook profiles by star category

Category	No.	Mean	SD	Min	Max
3 star	21	1341,38	1137,913	162	4600
4 star	50	4944,04	5727,569	378	31000
5 star	6	17350,00	22299,574	1200	61000
Total	77	4928,19	8363,210	162	61000

Source: The table is compiled by the author.

Additionally, the analysis reports a still low integration of eWOM from other platforms. In the present study, only 5.2% of hotels publish this reputation component on their social profiles.

In order to empirically test the previously formulated hypothesis, a research question was formulated, aimed at determining whether the star category of the hotel has an impact on the content of the published content on social media, the number of followers and their engagement. For this purpose, the relationship between the category of hotels and various characteristics of their Facebook profiles, including publication activity, content formats used and eWOM elements, was analyzed.

Descriptive statistics show that five-star hotels report the highest posting activity, use video content the most, and post the highest number of replies to user comments. Four-star hotels most often include links to Instagram, post reviews from external platforms, and use customer satisfaction surveys, while three-star hotels use the booking button the most.

To test the statistical significance of these differences, a Pearson χ^2 test was applied. The results show that for none of the analyzed indicators, a statistically

significant relationship was established between the star category of the hotels and the characteristics of their social profiles ($p > 0.05$). This means that the higher category of the hotel is not a determining factor for more active online reputation management in social media.

The second research question aimed to determine whether the popularity of hotels on social media, measured by the number of followers, has an impact on their activity and audience engagement, expressed by the number of posts, likes and shares. Pearson correlation analysis was applied to test this relationship. The results show that hotels with a higher number of followers are more likely to publish content more often. However, no statistically significant relationship was found between the number of followers and the number of likes or shares. This means that the greater popularity of hotels on social media does not automatically lead to higher audience engagement, therefore the research hypothesis is not confirmed.

Chapter Three. Guidelines for improving the online reputation management of hotels in the municipality of Varna

In the third chapter, guidelines for improving the management of online reputation of hotels in Varna municipality are formulated, based on the results of the conducted empirical studies. The recommendations reflect the specifics of the analyzed digital channels and outline opportunities for increasing the effectiveness of online reputation management in them.

In paragraph 3.1 **Guidelines for improving the online reputation management of hotels on review and booking platforms** based on the results of the empirical study, the following recommendations are formulated:

- The need to maintain up-to-date and credible content created by the hotel - including description, services and facilities, in accordance with the requirements of the platform.
- Regularly check and optimize visual content, including the use of 360° images for better presentation and increased competitiveness.
- Actively and personalizedly respond to customer reviews, focusing not only on the frequency, but also on the quality of responses.

- Analysis and monitoring of user ratings and comments through the functionalities of the Extranet platform.
- Encouraging satisfied guests to leave reviews through discreet and ethical approaches that stimulate the generation of positive eWom content.
- Using user-generated content as a marketing tool by sharing positive reviews and rewards in the hotel's own communication channels.
- Implementation of specialized software solutions for review management.

Paragraph 3.2. **Guidelines for improving the online reputation management on the hotel website** provides recommendations for more effective use of hotel websites as a tool for building and managing online reputation. The recommendations are structured in two main directions – towards content created by the hotel and towards content generated by users.

Regarding the content created by the hotel, it is recommended:

- Increasing the use of video content, especially in three- and four-star hotels.
- Expanding the presence on social media.
- Introducing the possibility of direct online booking in all hotels. To stimulate direct bookings, it is recommended to apply various price discounts.
- Adding information about access and transport to the property, including a description of transport connections from key points (airport, bus station, city center) and directions for reaching the location.
- Integration of a weather forecast module for the destination, with the aim of improving the information and planning of tourists' activities.
- Adding information about the destination, cultural events, and attractions in the region.
- Development of tourist packages related to cultural events (concerts, festivals, museums, tours, etc.).
- Inclusion of external links to tourism portals, transport operators, cultural institutions, and events.
- Regular publication of information about innovations and renovations.

- Updating promotional offers and removing expired campaigns.
- Integration of interactive elements that stimulate engagement, such as games and raffles, which support two-way communication between the hotel and the user.
- Introduction of an online customer satisfaction survey that provides feedback on both the quality of the services and the quality of the website content.
- Adding information about available job positions, which can support the attraction of workforce.

Regarding user-generated content, it is recommended to integrate dynamic ratings and reviews from booking platforms. To increase their credibility, it is also recommended to add verification elements to the published reviews (name or initials, period of stay, source). It is also emphasized on regularly updating reviews and publishing balanced feedback, not only positive reviews.

In paragraph 3.3. **Guidelines for improving the online reputation management on the hotel's social media profile**, recommendations are formulated for more effective use of social media as a tool for online reputation management. The recommendations follow the logic of the previous paragraph and are structured in two main directions – towards content created by the hotel and towards content generated by users.

Regarding the content created by the hotel, it is recommended:

- Publishing strategic content, aligned with both the organization's goals and the interests of the audience.
- Preparing and maintaining a publication schedule to ensure regular and consistent activity.
- Introducing marketing research on social networks to collect feedback from users.
- Integrate a direct booking functionality (“Book now”) to help increase direct sales and reduce dependence on intermediaries.
- More intensive use of video content as a means of increasing consumer engagement, especially in three- and four-star hotels.

- Publish more content related to innovations and improvements in the hotel base.
- Posting content related to the destination, including local landmarks, events and cultural attractions, which increases the information value of the profile and stimulates interest in travel.

In terms of user-generated content, it is recommended to more actively integrate ratings and reviews from external platforms, as well as present achievements, awards and certificates as a means of building trust. It also emphasizes the need to actively encourage guests to share their experiences through posts, photos and comments. It also emphasizes the importance of active dialogue with users through timely and professional responses to all comments and questions posted on the social profile.

Conclusion

This dissertation analyzes the management of the online reputation of hotels in the municipality of Varna. Based on a synthesis of theoretical perspectives, it argues that online reputation represents a complex outcome of the interaction between content created by hotels and content generated by users across various digital channels.

The study identifies the main factors influencing online reputation management, among which the characteristics of accommodation establishments and the level of customer satisfaction stand out. The formulated research hypotheses confirming a positive relationship between these factors and online reputation management on review and booking platforms, as well as on corporate websites, are validated. The only hypothesis that is not confirmed is the one related to social media.

Based on the obtained results, guidelines have been formulated for improving online reputation management across the three examined digital channels—online review and booking platforms, corporate websites, and social media. These guidelines are aimed at enhancing online reputation management practices, increasing consumer trust, and strengthening the competitiveness of hotel enterprises.

As a contribution to both the academic and practical fields, the dissertation proposes a conceptual model for the analysis and evaluation of online reputation management in the hotel industry, integrating the main digital channels and their specific characteristics. The model provides an opportunity for a more in-depth understanding

of the processes involved in the formation of online reputation, the factors that influence it, as well as the benefits that a positive online reputation brings to hotel enterprises.

In conclusion, the present study confirms the importance of effective online reputation management as a key factor for the competitiveness of hotel enterprises and highlights the need for an integrated approach to its management across different digital channels.

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IV. STATEMENT OF THE CONTRIBUTIONS OF THE DISSERTATION

1. The essence of online reputation in the hotel industry has been clarified, its specific features and structural elements have been identified, and the main stages of its management have been delineated.

2. A conceptual model for the analysis and evaluation of online reputation management in the hotel industry has been developed, integrating the main digital channels: review and booking platforms, corporate websites, and social media.

3. A comprehensive empirical analysis of the online reputation management of hotels in the municipality of Varna has been conducted, through which the main characteristics, problems, and gaps in its management have been identified.

4. Practical guidelines and recommendations have been formulated for improving the online reputation management of hotels, aimed at the more effective use of digital communication channels, increasing consumer trust, and stimulating direct bookings.

V. LIST OF PUBLICATIONS RELATED TO THE DISSERTATION TOPIC

Reports

Проданова, Р. Оценка на онлайн репутацията на хотелите в гр. Бургас. *Туризм, образование, бизнес: Сборник с доклади от международна научна конференция, Колеж по туризъм – Бургас, 7–8 октомври 2022 г.* Бургас: Университет „Проф. д-р Асен Златаров“, 2022, с. 134–140. ISSN 2738-893X

Articles

Prodanova, R. Comparative Analysis of the Online Reputation of Class A and Class B Accommodation in Burgas. *Izvestia Journal of the Union of Scientists - Varna. Economic Sciences Series, Varna: Union of Scientists - Varna, 11, 2022, 1, 120-129, ISSN(печатно) 1314-7390, ISSN(онлайн) 2603-4085*

Prodanova, R. An Analysis of Hotel's Responses to Negative and Mixed Online Reviews in Varna. *Izvestia Journal of the Union of Scientists - Varna. Economic Sciences Series, Varna: Union of Scientists, 10, 2021, 3, 33-43., ISSN(печатно) 1314-7390, ISSN(онлайн) 2603-4085*

Prodanova, R. (2024). The impact of hotel's operating period on customer satisfaction. *Tourism Opportunities and Models for Development in Bulgaria, Newcastle upon Tyne : Cambridge Scholars Publ., 2024, 1, 71-85., ISBN(печатно) (10): 1-0364-0008-5, ISBN(онлайн) (13): 978-10364-0008-8*

Declaration of Originality

I hereby declare that this dissertation is entirely my own original work and that no copyrighted publications or research works of others have been used in breach of intellectual property rights.