

ELECTRONIC WORD OF MOUTH AND ELOQUENCE: AN ANALYSIS OF REVIEWS IN HOSPITALITY SECTOR

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ABSTRACT

With the advent of internet and internet based media, electronic word of mouth has gained prominence in influencing consumer decision. An exploratory study using qualitative analysis has been conducted in the hospitality industry in order to understand the trends in the generation of electronic content in hotel reviews by customers. Two hundred positive and an equal number of negative reviews of a top brand hotel have been explored in the order of appearance in a popular accommodation website. The analysis indicated that customers are more eloquent in describing positive aspects, overall evaluations and positive overall evaluations than negative aspects, attribute based evaluations and negative overall evaluations. Negative evaluations are more based on specific attributes than overall evaluations. The adjectives and verbs used in describing a positive evaluation are found to be more compared to negative evaluation. The findings are at variance with some of the earlier studies. These findings are of practical relevance to hoteliers in focusing their marketing and operation efforts.

Keywords: Electronic word of mouth, hospitality, review, eloquence, social media

INTRODUCTIONS

Electronic word of mouth as a source of information has considerable significance to both marketer and consumer. It is a free and powerful source of information compared to other forms advertising since it is interpersonal communication. Chan and Ngai (2011) conceptualized WOM from an input-process-output (IPO) perspective.

Electronic word-of-mouth communication (e WOM) is defined as customer feedback on the internet regarding a product, service or a company which becomes available to a huge population (Hennig-Thurau et al., 2004). EWOM is more powerful than normal worm owing to the features of its wide reach and the fact that it remains on the internet forever and also it can be monitored (Manovich, 2009) E WOM can either positively or negatively influence people and their buying decisions. Negative feedback can be used to spot mistakes and rectify it.

LITERATURE REVIEW

Historic marketing researchers have established that personal influence plays an important role in consumer behaviour (Arndt, 1967).

Cha et al (2008) found that experience with social network sites is positively associated with internet purchase behaviour. The expansion of new media has increased the personal influence in marketing and unconventional marketing tools are becoming more effective and popular than traditional ones (Bilgihan et al., 2013). This in turn has led to customers' decision making and purchase intentions to be strongly affected by online reviews from various websites and blogs (King, Racherla and Bush, 2014).

Common elements between the traditional word-of-mouth and the electronic version are the creation of emotional link that needs to be established in order to guarantee the effectiveness of this media (Dobele, Toleman and Beverland, 2005). Both word of mouth and eWOM are informal, interpersonal communication with no commercial interest (Carl, 2006). In other words, e WOM applies the traditional word-of-mouth practices to the online environment with the advantage of passing the marketing message to a wider audience, creating the potential for exponential growth in the message's exposure and influence (Golan and Zaidner, 2008).

EWOM is any remark made by future, past or present customer regarding a product, service or brand on the internet. Litvin et al (2008) define e WOM as informal communication on the internet, targeting potential customers regarding the characteristics of particular goods and services. These statements tend to travel quicker because of their venue like internet, they are relatively permanent in nature and come at a minimal search cost to potential recipients. These features of eWOM are reinforced by Dellarocas (2003) along with added features like affordability, wider reach and difficulty to control. The effects of electronic word-of-mouth

(e WOM) have long captured the interests of brand marketers because they affect key performance indicators such as sales, customer value and loyalty consumer recommendations (Gruen, Osmonbekov and Czaplewski, 2006).

HOSPITALITY AND USE OF E WOM

Seekers of e WOM are interested in reducing risk, securing lower prices, and having easy access to information prior to purchase decisions (Goldsmith and Horowitz, 2006). Recommendation from others is given prime importance while making high risk purchases owing to the risk involved in it. Tourism and hospitality related services are considered high risk owing to its intangible nature and prospective guests appreciate recommendations from previous customers while making their selections (Litvin et al., 2008). In the hospitality industry, WOM recommendations are more influential since service production and consumption are inseparable (Grönroos, 2000).

The easiest way to reach to prior customer reviews is through the internet which is considered as the most reliable source of information by most travellers. A customer's exposure to online reviews increases his/her awareness of a hotel and amplifies his/her consideration of it (Vermeulen and Seegers, 2009). Positive contents in online reviews increase the number of hotel rooms booked and thereby improve hotel revenues. Social media plays an important role in affecting hotel guests' satisfaction, service process enhancement guests' purchase behaviour and hotel performance (Anderson, 2012).

E WOM can be used as a tool for advertising and revenue generation (Kirkpatrick, Roth and Ryan, 2005). The experience of customers would be enhanced during their stay in the hotel in order to increase the chance of them sharing their positive feedbacks. Negative product reviews have been shown to weigh more heavily on consumer minds than positive reviews (Park and Lee, 2009). Responses to negative reviews (complaints) play a role that is just as important as traditional remedies. The hotel can alleviate customer dissatisfaction or recover its service failure by fully taking advantage of response to negative reviews (Hoffman et al., 1995).

DEVELOPMENT OF HYPOTHESES

Positive and Negative Reviews

Positive and negative forms of WOM are frequently distinguished in the literature. Eloquence is defined as the number of times a definite number of words are repeated in expressing overall feelings or the number of times a particular word is repeated in expressing a particular feeling. Since people who post a comment on the internet are generally extremely satisfied or extremely unsatisfied it is important to check the eloquence in order to convert these reviews as a marketing tool. If it is found the positive reviews are having more eloquence it should be encouraged so as to become a good marketing tool and on the contrary if negative reviews are higher on eloquence, care must be given in giving adequate response. Hence it is important to check if there is any difference in eloquence between positive and negative evaluations.

H1: There is no significant difference in eloquence between positive and negative evaluations

Overall and Attribute Based Evaluations

A customer could judge a service either in its entirety or based on any particular attributes of the service. It is important to check the aspect which is given more importance by the customers while writing online reviews. It is important to analyse if reviews are based on overall attributes of the product and service or customers concentrate on particular aspect of the product or service in order to achieve maximum positive reviews. Therefore this study tests the following hypotheses:

H2: There is no significant difference in eloquence between overall positive evaluations and overall negative evaluations

H3: There is no significant difference in eloquence between attribute based positive evaluations and attribute based negative evaluations

H4: There is no significant difference in eloquence between overall evaluation and attribute based evaluation

Qualifiers

Qualifiers are adjectives or verbs used to describe products or services which represent overall or attribute based evaluations. They describe the qualities of the product or service by giving some information. For example, a customer may describe a stay as wonderful or horrible. These adjectives may be associated with either positive or negative evaluations. By improving or increasing the number of qualifiers associated with positive reviews organisations can increase positive impact on the reviewers. This study tests the difference in the number of qualifiers associated with positive and negative evaluation.

H5: There is no significant difference in the number of qualifiers used in describing positive and negative evaluations

METHODOLOGY

Two hundred positive and an equal number of negative reviews of a well known hotel in India have been extracted from a popular accommodation website in the order of their occurrence in the website. Word counts have been extracted using R software and a word cloud each has been prepared for both positive and negative reviews taking top repeated 25 words.

ANALYSIS AND RESULTS

The total number of words used for positive evaluations is 1211 where as the number of words used for negative evaluation was found to be only 805 confirming that customers are more eloquent in positive evaluations than negative. In general, the top 25 words used were found to have been repeated more number of times in positive evaluations than negative evaluations. For example while the word hotel has been repeated 151 times in positive evaluations, the same has been found repeated 102 times in negative evaluations. Similar is the case with the word stay. However, there are a few exceptions like the word room.

Table 1

A classification of words into overall, attribute, and qualifiers (adjectives and verbs) indicate that the number of overall words used is more in negative evaluations than positive evaluations while attribute related words were equal. It has been found that qualifiers like adjectives and verbs were used significantly more in positive evaluations than negative evaluations. In the case of overall evaluations and qualifiers it has been found the average number of repetitions

of words was higher in the case of positive evaluations while the repetitions in the case of attribute related words were found to be almost equal. This indicates that there are differences in number of words used as well as their repetitions between positive and negative evaluations except in the case of attributes.

Table 2

Word Cloud 1

Word Cloud 2

CONCLUSIONS

Customers in general are more eloquent in expressing positive evaluations than negative evaluations. While overall dimensions coming to the mind of customer is more in negative evaluations, attribute based dimensions coming to the mind of customer is almost equal for positive and negative evaluations. Eloquence was found to be more in the case of positive evaluations in the case of overall dimensions while the same is almost equal in the case of attributes. Both number of dimensions recalled and eloquence were more for positive evaluations in the case of qualifiers. This indicates that emotions are more strongly and elaborately expressed in the case of positive feelings. On the whole it is right to conclude that positive experiences are expressed more strongly and elaborately.

MANAGERIAL IMPLICATIONS

Since electronic word of mouth is a powerful tool for creating and enhancing customer feelings and resultant purchase related behaviour it is worthwhile for a hospitality firm or marketer

to invest effort and time in managing it well. It entails that hospitality firms should strive to create positive experiences since they create more positive word of mouth and at the same time

they should try to avoid negative experiences since they are perceived more elaborately. The firms should encourage reviews by satisfied customers than unsatisfied customers.

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