

Social Media And Hotel Classification System

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Abstract

Purpose: The paper investigates the correlation of guests rating for hotels on hotel review websites (Trip advisor & expedia) and ranking allocated to the hotels through official hotel classification in India.

Design: The guest ratings on Trip Advisor and Expedia of officially classified (one to five star deluxe) hotels from ten states of India representing forty one percent population were collected. The hotel ratings from both the websites for all states were averaged in all-star categorized. The correlation analysis of the hotel star category and the average guest ratings was done using SPSS software.

Findings: The results revealed perfect correlation between star category awarded to the hotels and the average guest ratings from Trip Advisor and Expedia. The ratings of Trip Advisor were found to be more consistent and robust as compared with that of Expedia.

Research Implications: This study in no way communicates that the official classification system in India is perfect on account of receiving backing from the guest reviews in proportion to ranks allocated to the hotels. This study should be taken further to identify the reasons and factors responsible for high guest ratings for some hotels and lower ratings for other.

Practical Implications: The study should help in increasing the trust level for the officially classified hotels. The hotels with lower star ratings and lower guest review scores must identify the reasons for the same and establish the system to monitor and respond to the guest reviews and work to improve the same.

Originality / Value: This paper attempts to test the assumption about the ratings awarded to hotel through official classification process. The study has established that the official hotel classification system can be trusted by the guests and travel and tourism professionals.

Key Words: Hotel classification system, guest ratings, hotel review sites, social media, correlation.

Introduction

The traditional system of hotel classification evolved to make the guests aware of hotels service

quality standards. While as the term “hotel classification” is being used to distinguish the hotels according to physical features (amenities, facilities, service, and cost) , number of guest rooms with bathroom etc-“hotel grading” identifies hotels based on certain verifiable objective features of service for example 24 hours coffee shop etc [Halloway 1994]. The hotel rating system are also classified into “official” which refers to classification carried out by Government organizations and “unofficial” ratings i.e inspection carried out by private or professional agencies[Qing and Liu 1993].

The transformation in global Hotel Industry made the system of hotel classification redundant because of the alternative media including social media, guest reviews web sites etc. The biggest drawback of the official rating system is that it mainly communicates the infrastructure facilities mainly and services available are taken into account in one time inspection. Another drawback of the official hotel rating system is that it is no longer relevant to the needs of the hotels who want to differentiate and serve a particular niche market [Quo 2014]. Further, it does not represent guest experience as well. The hotels that have been awarded five star ratings through the official rating system vary in terms of the guest satisfaction as well. [Nath 2014] reported the concern of the travel planners that they sell some five star hotels as four star properties to the guest (to overcome any issue of expectations from five star hotel) in spite of the fact that these have been awarded as five star status in India through official hotel classification system.

The hotels in India are officially rated by agency appointed by Ministry of Tourism, HRACC(Hotel and Restaurant Accreditation Committee). The decades old hotel classification system has been criticized on account of awarding five star and five star deluxe ratings to the many hotels that lack basic levels of service, national and global recognition as per the opinion of tour operators. Further those hotels also lack the national and global recognition [Nath 2013, Sharma 2013 and Chopra 2006].

However at the same time, hotels in India have started getting ratings from social media and hotel review websites like Trip Advisor, Expedia etc making it easier for guests to evaluate the hotels. The online hotel booking system in India has just started growing at a tremendous pace. The revenue from hotel business of Makemytrip, one of the largest online travel portal of India increased by 55.2percent to \$48.6 million from \$31.3 million in 2011 and for big hotels , the business grew to almost by 100percent [*Sathyannarayanan 2013*]. In year 2014, India's travel and tourism industry grew by 7.3 percent, outperforming the general economy by 2.5 percent. India is the third largest Internet and face book user of the world. The ecommerce industry in India recorded 88percent growth and reached \$16billion in 2013. In this segment 70 percent of the transactions were recorded from travel industry (Soni and Mehra, 2014).

It is clear therefore that internet and social media are playing a prominent role in India and is shaping and helping the businesses. The travel & hotel Industry has also benefitted and achieved the tremendous growth. The hotel review websites like trip advisor, expedia etc are playing prominent in informing the guests about the hotel properties through pictures and actual guest reviews. These sites also rate the hotel properties and provide the rating on their sites.

This article analyses the pattern of the guest ratings for different category of star classified hotels of India to establish if the ratings are in proportion to the number of stars awarded to those hotels. This shall establish if the guest ratings are in sync with the official ratings awarded to the hotels. The results of the study show the perfect correlation between the average guest ratings of the hotels of different star categories and the guest ratings on the hotel review websites. The conclusion of this research is that the guest ratings of the five star hotels are better than the ratings of the hotels in the other categories rejecting the hypothesis established in literature review that the three star hotels are rated favorably by guests as compared to five star hotels.

Impact Of Social Media On Guest Behaviour

The hotel classification and grading system is undergoing a rapid transformation because of technological innovations in the business world, including the hotel industry. Professor Andrew McAfee coined a term “Enterprise 2.0” to describe the impact of social networking, social computing, and social media on business organizations that led the world of business to embrace the change and rapid transformation [McAfee 2015]. On account of the changes and developments taking place due to internet therefore, making a profitable use of social media is the top priority of many organizations [Levy, 2009]. Kaplan and Haenlein 2010, defined social media as the group of internet based applications that allows the creation and exchange of user-generated content. Social media has also been defined as the online services that support the social interactions among users through highly accessible and scalable web based publishing techniques [Dutta, 2010]. The examples of social media in the area of travel include websites like tripadvisor, yelp, expedia etc. These websites contain millions of the guest reviews about the hotel properties. The audience of social networking sites by 2017 is expected to be 2.55 billion. India is expected to be the second largest country after china in terms of the number of users of social media 282. 9 million (Emarketer.com, 2015). Social media has therefore been termed as a revolutionary new trend that should be of interest of the companies operating in online space (Kaplan and Haenlein, 2010).

Hospitality Industry is also undergoing transformation because of “Enterprise 2.0” paradigm because of social media which has emerged as an important channel for maintaining technological innovations for hospitality sector to compete and succeed in the market (Zafiropoulos et al., 2006). The internet provides opportunity to users to connect and maintain the network of friends for social or professional relations by use of social networking sites (SNS). These sites provide the utility, social interactions and hedonics and thus attracts the users [Pöyry et al., 2013; Algesheimer et al., 2010].

Before the advent of Internet, the travel used to be private and experiences were shared with only small circle of acquaintances that were characterized by mutual trust. However with the advent of social media, the guest experiences have converted into global databases of consumer information managed by the firms. Further the process has enabled the user's real time recording and sharing of experiences and add to advances of personal virtual identities (Munar, 2010). Numerous studies establishing the reasons for motivation for sharing experiences online pointed at altruistic and community related motivations including reason for helping others (Munar and

Jacobsen, 2014) ,(Hsu et al., 2007), social and emotional support (Baym, 2010), providing advice on practical matters (Munar&Ooi, 2012).

This motivation of the travelers to share the feedback and experiences on social networking and hotel review websites with other fellow travelers about destinations and hotel properties where they stay has become influential source of information for the guest's hotel booking decision. The hotel review and travel websites like TripAdvisor, Expedia and hotelier have millions of guest reviews posted by the guests who stay in the properties and experience the major guest services and facilities. The easy access to those reviews have influenced the customer's buying decision.

This motivation of sharing the experiences has led to the creation of the virtual public places where the guests record the feedback and simultaneously create the database for the use of online hotel review sites. These platforms also provide the opportunity for the guests to voice complaint about the products and services which dissatisfied them. The power of social networking sites gets magnified because SNS's make a way for voicing complain about the products and services to the firm. Complaining directly to the firm is not easy process and the level of dissatisfaction must be high before the complaint is made. That is where the role of online intermediaries (rating websites) starts. As compared with complaint being made directly to the firm, the online intermediaries have made it easy to post comments online and rate the products and services they purchase [Huppertz 2013].

Impact On Hotel Classification System

The virtual platform with huge database of feedback and ratings by the guests who have actually stayed in hotels has given one more option to the guest apart from hotel classification rating to make purchase decision. The hotel rating system, apart from its inherent weakness, further took back seat with the soaring popularity of the online hotel ratings. Quo (2013) in a survey focused on official rating systems through a survey by interviewing the hospitality experts and survey of travelers concluded that the “officially accredited stars” take a back seat in influencing the customer decision as rating system has a variable meanings across markets . The study also indicated that the guest's level of trust is highest for guest feedback websites and social media web sites rather than the official rating system.

The role of the hotel classification system ratings by traditional classification system raises the expectations of the guests about the hotel services. Arrifin and Maghzi(2012) in their study on the customer expectations of hotel industry found that there is a strong Association between the star ratings and expectation of hotel hospitality. However, the star rating system does not guarantee that these expectations shall be met automatically and that is where the hotel review websites start playing a role. This study correlates the average guest ratings from Trip Advisor and Expedia with the different star category of hotels. . The average ratings from both of those sites shall be correlated to check if the guest ratings on both the sites for different star category of the hotels are in sync with each other.

The research on hotel guest reviews for different category hotels by Tripadvisor has found a place in UNTWO report. The study discusses Trip Advisor findings that guests review the three

star and four star hotels delivering superior service and value more positively than five star hotels. The reason for five star hotels not getting favorable scores include these hotels not able to exceed the guest expectations (UNTWO 2014). The following hypothesis is established on the basis of the discussion in literature which shall be tested in this study.

H1₀: The guest ratings for upscale hotels are higher than mid-scale hotels.

H1_a: The guest ratings for mid-scale (e: g three and four star hotels) are higher than upscale hotels (e: g five star) hotels.

H2₀: The ratings of classified hotels on the trip advisor and expedia have no correlation.

H2_a: The ratings of classified hotels on trip advisor and expedia are correlated.

Integration of Guest Ratings with Hotel Classification System

In terms of improvement of business with the help of guest review, the study by (Ye et al., 2011) established the significant improvement in the online hotel business due to online hotel reviews by about ten percent. The impact of the social media on the hotel booking has been tremendous. The cases of integration of hotel reviews and hotel classification system under two options have been reported. The first one is “full integration” mode where a hotel can move up or down a star level depending upon guest perception of its service quality. The second option of “comparative performance” includes guest review rating displayed separately to the hotel classification without integration. The full integration model is already in use in Norway.

The integration is achieved using a series of formulae into the formal classification. Under comparative performance mode as in Switzerland, the guest ratings and the hotel classification is written separately without integrating (UNTWO 2014). Hotel Review website TrustYou allows the hotel chains to integrate the hotel reviews and raking (TrustYou score) on their websites. Apart from hotel review websites providing the hotel reviews, hotel chains like Marriott have started its own review and rating process. The integration of guest review and hotel classification has also been recommended as it helps the hotels in improving its services, image and revenue as well (Anderson 2011).

Source of Data

The data of the hotels classified by HRACC (Hotel and Restaurant Accreditation Committee) were collected from the website of Ministry of Tourism, Government of India. The hotels in India are star rated from one to five. However one more category of luxury hotels has been added by the name of five star deluxe. The guest ratings of the hotels selected through sampling were taken from two most prominent hotel review websites trip advisor and expedia. There are many such portals informing the guest about the ratings given to the hotels and also the star category awarded to the hotel through official hotel classification system (see table 1). However, trip advisor and expedia were chosen for the study on account of their coverage of large number of hotels in India as compared to the other sites. Some of the sites like Yatra.com, Trivago, travel guru use the ratings and reviews from other sites. Table 2 explains the number of the hotels of the different star category whose rating is provided by trip advisor and expedia.

| | Name of Hotel Review website | Source of rating | |
|----|------------------------------|--------------------------------|--|
| | | Uses its own ratings | Use of ratings from Official classification system |
| 1 | Trip Advisor | Yes | No |
| 2 | Expedia | Yes | Yes |
| 3 | Booking.com | No | Yes |
| 4 | Goibibo | Yes | Yes |
| 5 | Yatra.com | No (uses Trip Advisor ratings) | Yes |
| 6 | Cleartrip.com | No (uses Trip Advisor ratings) | Yes |
| 7 | Trivago | Uses reviews from other sites | Yes |
| 8 | hotels.com | Yes | Yes |
| 9 | Travelguru.com | No (uses Trip Advisor ratings) | Yes |
| 10 | Agoda.com | Yes | Yes |
| 11 | Makemytrip | No (uses Trip Advisor ratings) | Yes |

Table 1: *Different Hotel review / travel websites rating hotels in India*

Methodology

Total of 463 officially classified hotels were studied out of 983 (see breakup in table 2) . The cluster sampling technique was used in the study to identify top ten states of India where maximum number of officially classified hotels are located-representing forty one percent sample size. The guest ratings of these hotels from Trip advisor and Expedia were tabulated and averaged in all the star categories (see table 3). The average ratings from trip advisor and expedia in each category was correlated with the respective star category. Also the guest ratings of trip advisor and expedia were correlated in each star category. The mean and standard deviation of the guest ratings in each of the star category is calculated to observe the variance.

| Hotel Star Category | Total number of Hotels n= | Number of hotels included for study | Number of hotels with ratings on Trip Advisor | Number of hotels with ratings on Expedia |
|---------------------|---------------------------|-------------------------------------|---|--|
| 1 | 35 | 9 | 17 | 0 |
| 2 | 66 | 29 | 45 | 12 |
| 3 | 490 | 171 | 218 | 53 |
| 4 | 122 | 94 | 106 | 48 |
| 5 | 147 | 76 | 98 | 84 |
| 5 Star Deluxe | 123 | 87 | 111 | 108 |
| Total | 983 | 466 | 595 | 305 |

Table 2: Total number of officially classified hotel in India and their presence on hotel review sites.

| STAR RATINGS OF HOTELS | GUEST RATINGS | ANDHRA PRADESH | PUNJAB | DELHI | GOA | GUJARAT | HARYANA | KERALA | MAHARASHTRA | TAMIL NADU | KARNATAKA | Average Hotel Ratings |
|------------------------|---------------|----------------|--------|-------|------|---------|---------|--------|-------------|------------|-----------|-----------------------|
| 1 STAR | Trip Advisor | x | x | X | X | X | X | X | 3.5 | 3.26 | 4 | 3.58 |
| | Expedia | x | x | X | X | X | X | X | 0 | 0 | 0 | 0 |
| 2 STAR | Trip Advisor | x | x | 3.25 | 4 | 2.5 | 5 | 3.25 | 3.5 | 3.41 | X | 3.55 |
| | Expedia | x | x | 3.4 | 5 | X | X | 3.23 | 3.7 | 3.23 | X | 3.71 |
| 3 STAR | Trip Advisor | 3.86 | 4 | 3.28 | 3.87 | 3.62 | 3.8 | 3.81 | 3.73 | 0 | 3.75 | 3.74 |
| | Expedia | 3.66 | 3.7 | 3.73 | 3.85 | 3.36 | 4 | 3.62 | 3.63 | 0 | 3.55 | 3.67 |
| 4 STAR | Trip Advisor | 4 | 4 | 3.66 | 3.8 | 3.8 | 4.37 | 3.86 | 4 | 3.9 | 4 | 3.93 |
| | Expedia | 3.73 | 4 | 3.64 | 3.6 | 4 | 4.4 | 3.8 | 3.55 | 3.94 | 3.4 | 3.8 |
| 5 STAR | Trip Advisor | 4.18 | 3.5 | 4.08 | 4 | 4.04 | 4 | 4 | 4.07 | 4.41 | 4.1 | 4.03 |
| | Expedia | 4.08 | 0 | 4.06 | 3.85 | 4.06 | 4.3 | 4 | 4.07 | 4.25 | 4.26 | 4.1 |
| 5 STAR DELUXE | Trip Advisor | 4.5 | 4.25 | 4.2 | 4.2 | 3.5 | 4.4 | 4.38 | 4.47 | 4.21 | 4.4 | 4.25 |
| | Expedia | 4.71 | 4.35 | 4.38 | 4.2 | 0 | 4.38 | 4.33 | 4.4 | 4.35 | 4.4 | 4.38 |

Table 3: Average hotel guest ratings for classified hotels in different states of India.

Statistical Results Of The Survey

Test of Hypothesis 1

H1₀: The guest ratings for upscale hotels are higher than mid-scale hotels.

H1_a: The guest ratings for mid-scale (e: g three and four star hotels) are higher than upscale hotels (e: g five star) hotels.

Table 4: Correlations-Hotel Classification Grade V/S Average

| | | Ratings | |
|---|-----------------|----------------------------------|--|
| | | Hotel Classification Grade | Average Ratings on Trip Advisor and Expedia |
| Hotel Classification Grade | Pearson | 1 | .974** |
| | Correlation | | |
| | Sig. (1-tailed) | | |
| | N | | |
| Average Ratings on Trip Advisor and Expedia | Pearson | .974** | 1 |
| | Correlation | | |
| | Sig. (1-tailed) | | |
| | N | | |

The correlation analysis of the data (Pearson correlation –one tail) between hotel classification grade, one to five star, (and the average ratings from trip advisor and expedia) was computed using SPSS software (Table 4). Pearson's product –moment correlation coefficient was chosen instead of Spearman and Kendall's correlation. From the literature review, it was established that hotels with higher star ratings are not favorably rated by the guests. On this account, one tail test was used as appropriate test of significance. The results of the correlation analysis between the number of stars allocated and average guest rating score indicated a strong positive correlation, $r=0.974$ and the significance of the correlation is $p=0.001$ which is very much significant on account of being nearer to zero(fluke). This establishes a positive correlation between the number of stars allocated and average guest ratings. Therefore, the Hypothesis that three star hotels are rated favorably by the guests is rejected in case of hotels in India. The guest ratings are clearly directly proportional to the star category and therefore the hypothesis that the guests rate

three star hotels more favorable than five star hotels is rejected.

Correlation Analysis Of Trip Advisor And Expedia For Different Star Category Hotels

Test of Hypothesis 2

H₂₀: The ratings of classified hotels on the trip advisor and expedia have no correlation.

H₂_a: The ratings of classified hotels on trip advisor and expedia are correlated.

| | | Trip Advisor | Expedia | Trip Advisor | Expedia | Trip Advisor | Expedia | Trip Advisor | Expedia | Trip Advisor | Expedia |
|--------------|---------------------|--|---------|--|---------|----------------|---------|----------------|---------|--|---------|
| | | 5-Star Deluxe Hotels | | 5-Star Hotels | | 4-Star Hotels | | 3-Star Hotels | | 2-Star Hotels | |
| Trip Advisor | Pearson Correlation | 1 | .949** | 1 | .857** | 1 | 0.538 | 1 | 0.186 | 1 | .962** |
| | Sig. (2-tailed) | | 0 | | 0.002 | | 0.109 | | 0.633 | | 0.009 |
| | N | 10 | 10 | 10 | 10 | 10 | 10 | 9 | 9 | 5 | 5 |
| Expedia | Pearson Correlation | .949** | 1 | .857** | 1 | 0.538 | 1 | 0.186 | 1 | .962** | 1 |
| | Sig. (2-tailed) | 0 | | 0.002 | | 0.109 | | 0.633 | | 0.009 | |
| | N | 10 | 10 | 10 | 10 | 10 | 10 | 9 | 9 | 5 | 5 |
| | | **Correlation is significant at the 0.01 level(2 -tailed) | | **Correlation is significant at the 0.01 level(2 -tailed) | | No correlation | | No Correlation | | **Correlation is significant at the 0.01 level(2 -tailed) | |

Correlations between trip advisor and expedia ratings for different star categories

The correlation analysis of average ratings of Trip Advisor and Expedia for five star deluxe, five star and two star hotels showed strong positive correlation. In case of five star $r=0.949$ and $p=0$. Therefore, the higher guest ratings of five star deluxe hotels looks clearly justified. It also supports the rejection of our first hypothesis that the three star hotels are favorably rated by the guests, as the ratings from both hotel review sites are consistent and strongly correlated $p=0$. The correlation analysis of the average guest ratings on Trip advisor and Expedia five star hotels also is strongly correlated, $r=0.857$, $p=0.02$. The strong positive correlation makes a strong case for genuine ratings in support of our findings that five star hotels are rated more favorably by the guests. The guest ratings were found to be positively correlated in case of two star hotels as well. However, no significant correlation was observed in case of four and three star hotels.

| Descriptive Statistics | 5 Star Deluxe | | 5 Star | | 4 Star | | 3 Star | | 2 Star | | 1 Star |
|------------------------|-------------------|-------------------|--------------|---------|--------------|---------|-------------------|-------------------|--------------|------------------|-------------------|
| | Trip Advisor | Expedia | Trip Advisor | Expedia | Trip Advisor | Expedia | Trip Advisor | Expedia | Trip Advisor | Expedia | Trip Advisor |
| N Valid | 10 | 10 | 10 | 10 | 10 | 10 | 9 | 9 | 7 | 7 | 3 |
| N Missing | 0 | 0 | 0 | 0 | 0 | 0 | 0 | 0 | 2 | 2 | 6 |
| Mean | 4.251 | 3.95 | 4.038 | 3.693 | 3.939 | 3.806 | 3.7467 | 3.6778 | 3.5586 | 2.6514 | 3.5867 |
| Median | 4.315 | 4.365 | 4.055 | 4.065 | 3.95 | 3.765 | 3.8 | 3.66 | 3.41 | 3.23 | 3.5 |
| Mode | 4.20 ^a | 4.35 ^a | 4 | 4.06 | 4 | 4 | 3.28 ^a | 3.36 ^a | 3.25 | .00 ^a | 3.26 ^a |
| Std. Deviation | 0.28711 | 1.39371 | 0.22582 | 1.30463 | 0.19 | 0.28911 | 0.2041 | 0.18026 | 0.77557 | 1.91073 | 0.37754 |

Table 6: Descriptive statistics –mean, median and mode of guest ratings

1.8 DESCRIPTIVE STATISTICS: The descriptive statistics of the guest ratings for different star category hotels reveal very low standard deviation of the average guest ratings from ten different guest states in case of Trip advisor for all hotel star categories (0.28, 0.22, 0.19, 0.20, 0.77 and 0.37) for five star deluxe, five star, four star, three star, two star and one star hotels respectively. In case of expedia it is almost four times for all category of hotels. This shows consistency and robustness of Trip advisor ratings as compared with Expedia. The mean ratings on Trip advisor are consistently higher than the ratings on expedia for all hotel categories.

Conclusion

The highest guest's ratings for five star deluxe and five star hotels as compared to four, three, two star hotels is contrary to literature review that guests rate three star hotels more favorably because higher star ratings raise guest expectations which are difficult for hotels to meet. The results convey that the five star hotels in India are capable of meeting the guest expectations in a better way as compared to the other category of the hotels. Further, the official classification system of India accurately represents the guest perceptions about the properties.

The perception that the official classification system has been reduced to a “filter mechanism” by which guests generate list of hotels as per the budget (hotel classification being used as pricing tool) by social media sites has been discussed in literature review also. However, this study has confirmed that hotel classification system can be trusted by the guests to make decision about hotel bookings. There is however, no evidence that the higher guest ratings for five star hotels is the result of the system by which the hotels are classified. The higher ratings can be result of stringent practices of guest satisfaction, availability of superior manpower, stringent training development etc in the higher star rated hotels along with ensuring close monitoring of the guest review and taking measures for the improvement of the same- which needs to be taken up and verified in future studies.

Recommendations

The review of literature in this study has explained how the use of social media has resulted in the growth of travel and hospitality industry. The traditional means of communication with the guests through social media has created endless opportunities for businesses to present the

information and facts in the most innovative ways. Whether it is the website, social media, and hotel and travel review websites, there are numerous modes of communication available for businesses. The first finding of this study-that higher the star category better the guest ratings is one of the most important findings. This means that those hotels are most conscious of use of social media and they have system in place that takes care of the guest opinion and feedback which results in excellent ratings. Down the star category, we found that either the hotels are not covered by the hotel review websites and do not have any presence on social media. This is obvious that those hotels are lagging behind. The hotels in one, two and three star category need to create a system where the guest feedback is recorded, evaluated, improvements made and exceed guest expectations. This can happen when the role of social media as an important and decisive factor is acknowledged. This is obvious as the study has clearly indicated low level of presence of those hotels on the social media.

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