

Should Hotels Take the Conversation Offline? The Impact of Different Responses to Online Reviews on Potential Guests

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Abstract

Online reviews have proliferated in recent years. Oftentimes, potential guests refer to online reviews before making a booking decision. Therefore, many hotels have started to reply to online reviews, in particular to the negative ones, as part of their online reputation management. Although research has started to investigate the effectiveness of such a reply, little is known about how to reply. Across two studies, we investigate the impact of response strategies on trust and booking intentions. Study 1 tests four different response strategies (i.e. no reply, public explanation, private message, public explanation and private message). We find that a public explanation combined with a private message has the strongest effect on trust and booking intention of potential guests. Moreover, taking the conversation offline without any further explanation leads to lower levels of trust and booking intention. In study 2, we additionally manipulate the severity of the service failure described in the online review and show that this is an important boundary condition. Theoretical and managerial implications are discussed.

Keywords: *Reviews; Recovery; Responses*

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