

Managerial Response to Hotel Guests' Review in Bangkok

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Abstract

The service industry is hard to measure due to its characteristics which are perishability, intangibility, inseparability and variability so the service industry like the tourism industry highly relies on the guests' WOM. This research is aiming to help hotel managers in Bangkok investigate what makes a good response. Since the research is limited to the hotel industry in Bangkok. It is a remarkable way to conduct interviews with managers and tourists to gather data with a qualitative approach. The researcher conducted in-depth interviews with three managers and three tourists to collect data. Due to Covid-19 pandemic regulation, numbers of interviewees are limited; also, some interviews were conducted online by Zoom and Microsoft team. The researcher analyzed data by the classic content analysis technique. The key findings of the research are: first, the speedy managerial response has a positive impact on guests' opinion; next, response numbers have a positive effect on guests' WOM; then the manager should concentrate on both positive and negative responses; finally, relevant managerial response affects guest' points of view. Based on researcher's findings, managers should be empathy when response to guests' reviews. Putting them in the guests' shoes will make it easier to understand what problem guests have faced.

Keywords : Bangkok, Guests' Review, Hotel, Managerial Response, Tourism.

JEL Classification Code: Z13, Z31, Z32

1. Introduction¹

Bangkok as a capital city and top major destination, hotel business competition became cruel here. A good and appropriate managerial response will manage customer relationship well and set up a good hotel image among guests. Certainly, hotels could gain strategy advantage by professional managerial response in industry competition.

In the hospitality industry, according to Huete-Alcocer (2017), WOM is both the oldest medium for sharing opinions about products or services and the one most likely to influence consumer behavior, due to the high reliability and credibility transmitted through family and friends. The

hotel review website provides a platform for its guests to share their experiences with others. Thakran and Verma (2013) believed online review, an alternative form of word-of-mouth (eWOM), has significantly changed the way guests share their experience with others and becomes a great influence when guest decide to purchase the service from hotel (Litvin et al., 2008). In a word, guests of the hotel will be influenced by most of the other guests' opinions. Hence guests' reviews are becoming more challenging than before for hotel managers.

The managerial response is public in the media, so it's not only a mutual communication between the current guests and manager but also a display for the potential

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guests. Lee and Song (2010) believed that when there is a service crisis and received a criticized review from guests; the potential guests will find out if the managers could find the proper way to solve it in their response. Moreover, whenever guests post appreciation reviews, it is a good channel to manage the customer relationship (CR). A manager could communicate with guests who just had a wonderful stay with them. Not only shows how they maintain customer relationships but also shows potential guests the service quality, so managerial response will likely influence the eWOM of potential guests towards the hotel.

In a word, the purpose of managerial response is first, to manage guest relationship by interactive with them online; second, to show service quality to potential guests; third, to recover the previous service failure. The response of the hotel management towards the reviews can raise the rating of the hotel and can boost the occupancy rate (Sumarsono et al., 2019). It shows that how managerial response the guests review will influence customers' purchasing decisions. Customers are less likely book a hotel with aggressive and defensive response to negative reviews. As result, how to response the guests review is just as crucial as response itself.

2. Research Questions

RQ1: Does speed of managerial response influence the guests' satisfaction?

RQ2: Do the numbers of managerial response influence guests' opinion?

RQ3: Should manager response more concentrate on positive reviews or negative reviews?

RQ4: Does manager providing relevant response to the problem which guests mentioned in their reviews influence hotel performance?

3. Research Objectives

RO1: To understand the role of speedy managerial response that influences guests' points of view towards hotels.

RO2: To investigate the numbers of managerial responses influencing guests' electronic word of mouth.

RO3: To compare and understand hotel management's response to the positive and negative guest reviews.

RO4: To know the relevance of response that influences guests' electronic word of mouth.

4. Literature Review

First of all, it makes sense that managerial responses to those reviews are equally significant. Park and Allen (2012) studied that shows that there are two significance of response, to solve the problem for service failure and engage guests in a deeper relationship. They focus on up-scale and luxury hotel in western city of America. As a result, even different properties under the same brand has different response rate. And researchers suggested that hotel managers should be better prepared for response to online reviews. Moreover, the study also shows hotels should pay attention to both positive and negative reviews. Ideally hotels should focus on both positive and negative reviews but do hotels in Bangkok focus on both sides? That rises one of the research questions, the study shows hotels should pay attention to both positive and negative reviews.

Moreover, Xie et al. (2017) studied that managerial response effects on hotel performance vary across the hotel classes. The purpose of study is to identify effects of hotel class on the relationship between managerial response and hotel performance. As conclusions, there is moderating effects of hotel class on the relationship between managerial responses to hotel performance. Different from other research of response and guest review, Xie, Kwok and Wang's study find out hotel classes will be a significant factor when we study about managerial response. Their research reminds researcher that numbers or volume of managerial response maybe change the opinions of guests. So, question must be asked, Do the numbers of managerial response influence guests' opinion?

According to Sumarsono et al. (2019) reviews on blogs and travelling sites, as well as ratings on various platforms become very important for travelers before they make decisions all over the world. Travelers seeking information's online is trending. As the conclusion the managerial response shows significant positive impact to hotel images. But does any response from hotels could have the same effect? More specifically does the relevance of response that influences guests' electronic word of mouth?

In the end, in a study by Min et al. (2014), they raised three hypotheses that empathy, paraphrasing, and speed of response to a negative review are more favorable for potential guests or not. As result, the study suggests that guests are more favorable of empathy, paraphrased statements, and quick responses. Researcher believe there must be other angles to investigate on speed of the managerial response so researcher questions of speedy response will be asked and with different objectives.

5. Literature Review

5.1 Research Design

The research is limited geographically in Bangkok. The target populations are three managers who are responsible for responding to guests' reviews and three tourists with experience of staying luxury hotels in Bangkok. The principles of selecting interview targets are different. For managers interviewed, they were selected for their positions in luxury hotels and experience. All three managers interviewed have been worked as guests experience managers or charged of response to guests' reviews for years in different three luxury hotels. For tourists, researcher chose two domestic tourists and one international tourist. They all have been to more than one luxury hotels in Bangkok for different purpose. And they all have made reviews and received response from hotels.

5.2 Sampling procedure

From October 7th, 2021 to November 3rd, 2021, three in-depth interviews (see Table 1) for managers are conducted to collect data from hotel managers who are responsible for guests' reviews. In order to participants, researcher contacted multiple luxury hotels HR departments and request for interview with managers who response to guests reviews. And interviewee P, W and C were willing to accept interviews. The researcher conducted a face-to-face interview with interviewee P who worked in luxury hotel S. She has worked as Guest Experience manager for more than 2 years. For manager interviewees W and C, under the regulations of Bangkok, the researchers conduct an online interview via the Microsoft team with interviewee W. She is a QI and CSR manager worked for luxury hotel G and she is charged of response guests' reviews for two years at the end of 2021. As for interviewee C, he is a Guest Experience manager from luxury Hotel H more than two years.

Two face-to-face interviews (see Table 2) were conducted to collect data from domestic tourists N and M. Researcher interviewed them randomly in public. They are both female, Thai and have multiple experience staying luxury hotels in Bangkok. Another tourist is America and have had plenty business trip to Bangkok and always stay in luxury hotels. The interview with him was conducted online via Zoom due to pandemic regulation.

Based on research questions, research objectives and different respondent' positions, the data are coded and analyzed in a style of Classical Content Analysis. Since the researcher would like to quantify specific occasions through counts, it is proper to use Classical Content Analysis according to the study of Leech and Onwuegbuzie (2007). Through the data collected by interviewees, the elements

could consist of good managerial response to understand better so does the strategies hotels use to respond to guests' reviews. Also, opinions and recommendations of good managerial response will be clear.

Table 1: Checklist question for interviewing managers

Sr.	Checklist questions
1	What is the organization policy to guests' review received?
2	Do you discuss in a team/individual to respond to the guests' review received?
3	How often do you follow/implement the guests' review received?
4	What system or mechanism is followed to enhance guest reviews?
5	Why regular responses to the guests' review are important to a hotel?
6	What would you do to make your response different from other hotels?
7	How do you think a timely response to guest reviews changes guests' satisfaction?
8	Why does response to positive reviews important to hotel?
9	Why does response to negative reviews important to hotel?
10	How does response to positive reviews affect guests' opinions?
11	How does response to negative reviews affect guests' opinions?
12	How do you balance response for positive reviews and negative reviews?
13	Who ensure responding a guest review response fix the actual problem that stated in the reviews?
14	Why is hotel providing relevant response key important to potential guests?
15	What would you do to ensure fixing the actual problem that guests addressed in the reviews?

Note: Hotel managers are experts of response reviews so the questions are complicated and professional for them

Table 2: Checklist question for interviewing tourists

Sr.	Checklist questions
1	What do you think of manager response to (your) reviews within 24 hours?
2	What do you think of a hotel that manager response for all the reviews?
3	What do you think when hotel response to the positive reviews?
4	What do you think when hotel response to the negative reviews?
5	What do you think when hotel actually solved issues been addressed in (your) reviews?

Note: Questions for tourists are simply aiming to get their opinions.

6. Result

The researcher acquires answers for four major objectives and here they are:

6.1. To understand the role of speedy managerial response that influences guests' points of view towards hotels.

Managers are fully aware of the significance of the speedy response. First, if the quick response shows the responsibility of the hotels. Hotels do care about their guests and are willing to fix the problem they have when they stay. Besides, sometimes, when guests make the reviews, they are still in the hotel so managers could fix the problem and report to the guests to win a second chance that changes negative reviews to positive. Also, hotels' response fast to guests' suggestions shows they value the opinions of guests and their ways of hospitality.

Tourists love the speedy managerial response. They feel they are important when hotels respond to their reviews in a short time. And they feel their opinions are valued when hotels initiate implications right away. Obviously, with the speedy managerial response, hotels build a responsible and hospitality image among their guests. And guests are willing to come back and stay with them. By responding fast, hotels influence guests' opinions and purchasing decisions.

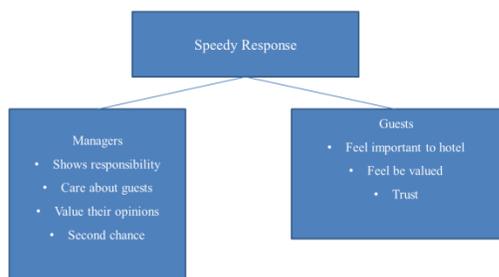


Figure 1: Managers and guests' opinions of speedy response

6.2. To investigate the numbers of managerial responses influencing guests' electronic word of mouth.

Managers agreed that response to massive guest's reviews is the way to keep engagement with guests and the main way to build up reputation and images. But the different hotel has different policy to respond certain percentage of response. In the interviews, one replies to ninety to ninety-five percent of the response. The other two hotels reply hundred percent of them. But they all believe keeping a good amount of response will show guests their respect and provide information to the readers.

For tourists, they appreciate that hotels respond to all reviews. They think a response to every guest is a gesture that hotels care about every individual guest. They feel being recognized and valued.

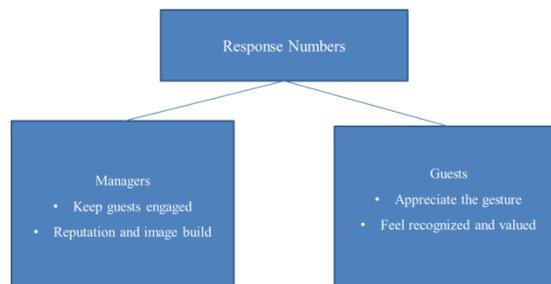


Figure 2: Managers and guests' opinions of response numbers

6.3. To compare and understand hotel management's response to the positive and negative guest reviews.

As research discussed before, the different hotel has a different policy on response. Guest experience of Sofitel believed that it is not necessary to respond to all positive reviews. Just take them as a compliment and focus on response negative reviews. But managers of Shangri-La and Hyatt believe that responding to positive reviews could retain your happy guests and it is possible to transfer your happy guests to loyal guests by the response to positive reviews. Besides this, managers share the same opinion on response to negative reviews. Negative reviews always indicate guests face a problem or worse service failure during their stay. Response to negative reviews with a delicate investigation will not only solve the problems for guests but also improve the service quality. Moreover, hotels being serious about negative reviews could show to the guests that hotels care about them and their experience.

Tourists are surprised by the manager's response to positive reviews. Usually, they don't expect managers to respond to positive reviews. They feel appreciated. But for negative reviews, most tourists demand a solution. Some are looking for compensation, some are emotional and some are skeptical. Anyway, guests always need an answer for whatever negative happen to them when they stay hotel. So it is reasonable that hotel managers prioritize negative reviews before positive reviews.

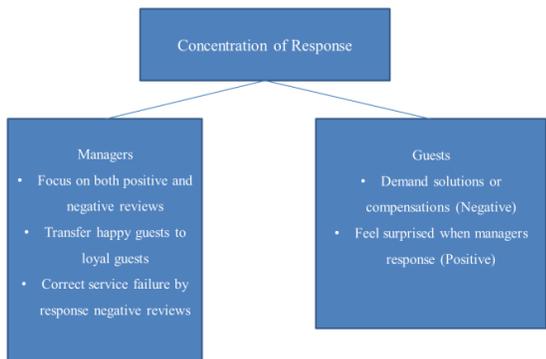


Figure 3: Managers and guests’ opinions of concentration of response

6.4. The relevance of response influences guests’ electronic word of mouth.

It is a basic understanding for hotel managers to provide guests with a relevant response. Any comforting words are null compared to the actual solution. To provide guests with an actual solution, hotel managers need to consult with every department that may be mentioned in the reviews. And then investigate the issues and come up with a solid solution to respond to guests’ reviews. Templated response or robotic response could not help but it will damage the reputation of the hotels. Every guest may have different problems so it requires managers of hotels to personalize and customize the response.

Tourists demand a reasonable response for whatever problems they meet. If hotels handle the response properly, guests would change their minds tuning negative to positive. Additionally, a response with a solution to guests’ reviews will make guests feel confident with hotels’ service and management. It helps build the WOM of the hotels.

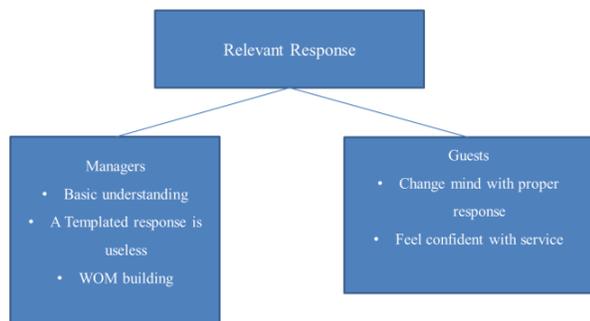


Figure 4: Managers and guests’ opinions of relevant response

6.5 Finding

First of all, in order to answer the research question, “Does speed of managerial response influence the guests’ satisfaction?” (See Table 3) speedy response was used 17 times in the interviews with three managers. And also it is second high frequency used in the interviews. It is safe to say that speed of managerial response has positive impact on influence the guests’ satisfaction. According to the interview, managers recommended that response to guests’ reviews in a quick fashion for its policy and to show respect and value to their guests.

Then, in order to answer the research question, “Do the numbers of managerial response influence guests’ opinions?” The code “response numbers” was appealed 7 times in the interviews. The lowest frequency indicates that response numbers are not as significant as other three factors, but it still shows the positive impact on guests’ opinions because not only the hotels have policy to response to all the reviews but managers also would like to keep engagement with their guests to have constant feedback from them so they can use the feedback improve their service performance and set up their images among guests.

Moreover, in order to answer the research question, “Should manager response more concentrate on positive reviews or negative reviews?” The frequency of “Focus on positive” is 9 times lower than “focus on negative” which is 16 times. It indicates that response to both reviews has positive impact on guests’ opinions but when it comes executing managers will prioritize response negative reviews before response positive reviews.

Finally, in order to answer the research question, “Does manager providing relevant response to the problem which guests mentioned in their reviews influence hotel performance?” The code “relevant response” was mentioned 22 times among all interviews. Each manager interviewed well knows the significance to response guests’ reviews with relevant answer and they are aware to customize and personalize their response to guests’ reviews. It again shows that hotels pay attention to guests, their opinions and problems. Also, they would like to provide or offer an appropriate solution for the guests.

Table 3: Findings of managers

Code	Number of times used
Speedy response	17
Response numbers	7
Focus on positive	9
Focus on negative	16
Relevant response	22

As for tourists, the most used code is “speedy response” 9 times, and then focus on negative and relevant response

has same frequency 7 times. Followed by “*focus on positive*” 5 times and “*response numbers*” 4 times. (see Table 4)

In order to answer the research question, “*Does speed of managerial response influence the guests’ satisfaction?*” It is the most used code among interviewees. It makes sense that tourists love hotel response to reviews quickly for it means hotels do value their opinions and professional enough to deal with problem in a short time.

Next, in order to answer the research question, “*Do the numbers of managerial response influence guests’ opinions?*” It’s same like the managers’ results; “*response numbers*” is the lowest frequency in the interviews but it still shows that “*response numbers*” will be appreciated by guests.

Furthermore, in order to answer the research question, “*Should manager response more concentrate on positive reviews or negative reviews?*” The frequency of “*Focus on positive*” is 5 times lower than “*focus on negative*” which is 7 times. The slightly difference between positive and negative reviews focus indicates that tourists do want hotels response to negative response to actually solve their problem. Also, hotel response to positive reviews will surprise guests and let them feel being appreciated.

In the end, in order to answer the research question, “*Does manager providing relevant response to the problem which guests mentioned in their reviews influence hotel performance?*” The code “*Relevant answer*” is used 7 times. It seems that tourists would like hotels to reply with actual solutions instead of only comforting words.

Table 4: Findings of tourists

Code	Number of times used
Speedy response	9
Response numbers	4
Focus on positive	5
Focus on negative	7
Relevant response	7

6.6 Comparison with past literature

Park and Allen (2012)’s study suggested that hotels should concentrate on both negative and positive reviews. And this research showed the similar results. Managers response to positive reviews could retain guests and do a good customer relationship management. Response to negative reviews correct the service failure happened and offers hotel a second chance to save their images.

Next, Xie et al. (2017)’s study showed that there is moderating effect of the hotel classes on the relationship between managerial responses to hotel performance. It also shows that managerial response affects hotels’ performance which the research’s results will confirm same outcomes. During the data collection phrase, researcher selected luxury hotels’ managers as interviewees to avoid moderating effect of hotel classes interferes the research questions.

This research shows quite similar result as Sumarsono et al. (2019)’s study. Managerial response does have positive impact on building images of hotels. Specifically, managers know the significance of providing a relevant response instead of a template. Guests would like to hear a proper solution more than a simple apologize. In a word, personalized response is the key.

In the end, Min et al. (2014)’s study shows the three factors empathy, paraphrased and quick of managerial response that has positive effect on guest reviews. This research has the one research objective same as theirs. The speedy managerial response has been analyzed and showed the positive impact on guests’ opinions. The result is quite same as their study’s result.

6.7 Managerial implications

This research is based on the luxury hotels in Bangkok and the researcher understands that the hospitality industry is a major industry in Thailand. Either positive or negative reviews could increase consumer awareness of staying in the hotels. By investigating luxury hotels’ strategies about a managerial response to guests’ reviews, this research could provide managers of hotels in Bangkok with good information about how to respond to guests’ reviews appropriately to improve the service quality of the industry and then attract more tourists come to Thailand. For long years, Thailand has been using the cheaper price to attract tourists. And it is changing to attract tourists by the quality of service for making an unforgettable experience. Moreover, managers should also embrace more empathy when it comes to response to guests’ reviews. Seeing through guests’ eyes will make it easier to understand what problem guests have faced and why they made the reviews. Hotels now could gain competitive advantages to respond to guests more appropriately by knowing their thoughts and opinions. When it comes to competition, managers need to grasp guests’ sentiment preferences and strengthen their competitive advantages in the tourism marketing and management field for Thailand’s tourism industry.

6.8 Limitations

The research has certain limitations. The important limitation is geography. All the interviews are conducted in Bangkok, Thailand and interviewees are related to the hospitality industry in Bangkok, Thailand, or tourists who visited Bangkok. Due to the Pandemic regulation of hotels, the numbers of managers interviewed are limited to three; also, some interviews have to be conducted via the Microsoft team and Zoom. The conclusions and results of the research are limited to the hotel industry in Bangkok. Another limitation is the time. The data was collected from

October 1st, 2021 to November 3rd, 2021.

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