

EXTERNAL REVIEW OF THE DISSERTATION

entitled

“The Effect of Social Media Marketing on Customer Relationships”

Author: Romina Cheraghalizadeh

External reviewer: doc. Ing. Liběna Tetřevová, Ph.D., University of Pardubice

EVALUATION OF THE SIGNIFICANCE OF THE DISSERTATION FOR THE FIELD

The submitted dissertation deals with the very topical issue of the effect of social media marketing on customer relationships. Specifically, it studies the issue in question from the point of view of four-star and five-star hotels operating in the Czech Republic. The fact is that social media represent a modern, evolving channel of communication which is becoming ever more important as time goes by. Effective communication via social media contributes significantly towards building positive customer relationships and becomes a competitive advantage. Therefore, communication on social media indirectly contributes towards the economic performance and competitiveness of the companies concerned and influences their future success and existence. Focusing on the issue of hotels, which constitute an important part of the tourist industry, also seems to be very expedient. The positive economic and social effects of tourism are undeniable. Addressing this issue can therefore be considered highly desirable, in part due to the fact that the issue in question still lies outside the bounds of mainstream research. This all therefore makes the submitted dissertation a source of interesting and valuable knowledge, as it develops the current state of knowledge in one of the important areas of business economics and management.

STATEMENT REGARDING THE APPROACH TAKEN TO ADDRESSING THE ISSUE, METHODS USED AND ACHIEVEMENT OF THE STATED OBJECTIVE

The author has chosen a suitable approach to addressing the issue and appropriate methods of scientific work. The author's work is based on an extensive literature review, the subject of which was mainly professional articles, but also the websites of relevant institutions. The scope and choice of sources is appropriate to the nature and topic of the dissertation. The sources which were chosen are up-to-date. I do however believe that the author could have made more extensive use of the resources which she has developed during the course of her extensive publishing activities. The literature review was followed by primary research. I very much appreciate the fact that this was performed not only from the point of view of customers, but also from the point of view of hotel managers. This meant that the author gained a

comprehensive view of the issue under investigation. During this phase, the author used both qualitative and quantitative research techniques. Customer attitudes were investigated by means of a questionnaire survey, the attitudes of managers by means of interviews. The specified methods are perfectly appropriate and led to the expected output. The last, logical, phase was derivation of the research output. Within the framework of this process, appropriate statistical and logical methods were applied. From the point of view of the approach which was chosen to address the issue and the methods used, I would like to highlight two aspects. I very much appreciate the fact that the author has built on the work of prominent authors in this field, in particular Hyun and Perdue (2017), and that she develops this in a very interesting and original manner. I also appreciate the quality of the author's presentation of the approach taken to address the issue in question and the methods used, including their graphical presentation, which significantly contributes towards the clarity and illustration of the issue, as well as the possibility of replicating the methodology used.

The main objective of this study was to empirically evaluate whether there is a positive effect of social media on the formation of relationships with hotel customers in the Czech Republic. The specified objective can be considered to have been appropriately chosen and ambitious. In relation to the main objective of the dissertation which was stated, three partial objectives were determined and a set of six research questions were defined. These were expediently linked to the defined hypotheses. I can conclude that all of the stated objectives were achieved.

EVALUATION OF THE RESULTS OF THE DISSERTATION WHICH WERE ACHIEVED AND THE SPECIFIC CONTRIBUTION OFFERED BY THE AUTHOR

The submitted dissertation offers a comprehensive collection of new and very interesting findings which are clearly formulated and discussed in Chapter 5. The author summarises specific theoretical and managerial implications in the conclusion of her dissertation. In view of this fact, I will not give a full account of all her findings. I would like to highlight only some of them which were interesting and useful from my point of view, without wishing to diminish the usefulness or importance of her other findings. The submitted dissertation contributes towards development of theoretical knowledge in the field of social media marketing of hotels, one of the important sectors of the national economy, this specifically being tourism, taking into account, among other things, the specifics of the Czech Republic. From the point of view of managerial implications, I would like to mention that the submitted dissertation confirms the importance of social media marketing in strengthening relationships with hotel customers and encourages hotel managers to use these types of media actively and effectively. Within the framework of her efforts towards this end, the author for example formulated a comprehensive set of motives - benefits of social media marketing of hotels. I particularly appreciate the contribution in the form of recommendations for hotel managers which could lead towards improvement of the level of their social media marketing.

EVALUATION OF THE SYSTEMATICITY, CLARITY, FORMAL AND LINGUISTIC LEVEL OF THE DISSERTATION

The author approached the submitted dissertation systematically. She moved from the general to the specific, from the theoretical to the practical and she respected logical connections. She also took into account current economic and social challenges such as the Covid-19 pandemic. The dissertation is clearly presented. Extensive graphical devices in the form of figures and graphs contribute towards comprehensibility. The dissertation meets all of the formal requirements and is presented on an appropriate linguistic level.

STATEMENT REGARDING THE PUBLISHING ACTIVITIES OF THE STUDENT

The publishing activities of the author include publications in professional journals as well as in the proceedings of scientific conferences. The submitted list of publications presents the superior publishing performance of this Ph.D. student.

QUESTION FOR DISCUSSION

Based on the findings you have formulated, evaluate the importance of communicating socially responsible activities in the economic, social and environmental fields on social media operated by hotels. Which specific effects could communication of these activities on social media lead to for hotels?

CONCLUSION

In conclusion, I am delighted to say that the submitted dissertation meets all of the requirements for this type of dissertation. By drawing up this dissertation, Romina Cheraghalizadeh has demonstrated an in-depth knowledge of the issue under investigation and also her ability to present the results of her work in the form of a scientific study. While addressing the issue in question, Romina arrived at some interesting and beneficial findings which contribute towards development of knowledge in the given field. **I therefore recommend this dissertation as ready to be defended.**

In Pardubice, on 17 October 2022

doc. Ing. Liběna Tetřevová, Ph.D.

Posudek na doktorskou disertační práci
Opponent Review of Doctoral Dissertation

Romina Cheraghalizadeh

Téma práce / **Dissertation topic:**

The Effect of Social Media Marketing on Consumer Relationship

Školící místo / **Training place:**

Faculty of Economics, Technical University of Liberec

Studijní program / **Study programme:**

P6208 Economics and Management

Studijní obor / **Study branch:**

Business Economics and Management

Školitelka / **Thesis Supervisor:** doc. PhDr. Ing. Jaroslava Dědková, Ph.D.

Oponent / **Opponent:** doc. Ing. Dagmar Jakubíková, Ph.D.

Rozsah práce / **Dissertation Scope:** 293 s. včetně příloh / 293 pp. Appendices encl.

Aktuálnost tématu / Actuality of the topic

The subject matter of the doctoral dissertation chosen by the author is very topical. The field which she deals with in her work is the hotel industry, which falls under the service sector and the so-called hospitality industry. Quality customer care provided to hotel guests and communication with them are crucial in this industry. Social media sites have become a phenomenon typical for this day and age and it is almost unthinkable for service providers, including hotels, not to use them or ignore them.

Význam disertační práce pro obor / The significance of the dissertation for the branch

Czech literature has so far failed to devote enough attention to this topic and its implementation in the hotel industry. The doctoral dissertation is based mostly on foreign information sources, which can be partly explained by the fact that the dissertation was written in English. By synthesis of knowledge acquired from the theoretical part of the dissertation, the author built up the foundation for the analytical part of the dissertation, in which she deals with six factors – engagement, motivation, commitment, cross-buying, word of mouth, and customer defection, i.e., that of clients of 4-star and 5-star hotels in the Czech Republic.

In connection with the subject of the dissertation, the author conducted a research investigation, which was carried out in the form of mixed research.

- The dissertation is based on current knowledge and significantly expands on it. It brings new findings useful for this particular field, which are based on the conducted research and its conclusions.

Správnost formulace vědecko-výzkumného problému / **The correctness of the formulation of the scientific-research problem**

- The scientific-research problem is formulated correctly in this dissertation.

Definování cílů disertační práce a míra jejich naplnění / **Defining the objectives of the dissertation and the degree of their fulfilment**

“The main objective of the dissertation is to empirically evaluate whether there is a positive effect of social media in the formation of relationship with hotel customers in the Czech Republic.”

Three Sub-Objectives have been outlined in order to assist in achieving the main objectives:

SO1. To recognize the impact of social media as a cutting-edge marketing tool on consumer outcomes. In other words, to understand the importance of social media for consumer decision-making and from the perspective of consumer.

SO2. To understand the importance of social media platforms as a marketing tool and its usefulness in business from the perspective of hotel managers.

SO3. To understand how hotel customers, perceive the application of social media. Moreover, the perception of hoteliers is also considered in this dissertation.

Following the objectives, the research questions listed on pp. 16 – 17 are selected.

- The main objective of the dissertation work and the sub-objectives of the work were fulfilled.

However, it is necessary to take into account the fact that the dissertation was prepared during the pandemic time, and thus it was very difficult to carry out a much wider and deeper research that the topic of the work deserved.

Metodický postup zpracování práce / **Methodical process of dissertation work processing**

A suitable methodological process was chosen in writing the dissertation. The author first defined the principal goal of the dissertation, which was based on the theoretical knowledge gained prior to elaborating the topic of the dissertation. Subgoals and research questions were defined in connection with the main goal. The concept of the research is presented in the section entitled The Aim of the Dissertation and Concept.

The theoretical part of the dissertation was compiled primarily based on international information sources and created a well-defined foundation for the dissertation's analytical section. Both quantitative and qualitative research was used in writing the analytical part of the dissertation. The goal of the quantitative research was to find out how clients of 4-star and 5-star hotels view social media and how these media affect their decision making in choosing a hotel. The goal of the qualitative research was to ascertain the position of hotel managers on social media sites and in what way staff members responsible for managing their facilities' online presentation use social media sites.

The quantitative research was conducted using a questionnaire survey in May–October 2021. The questionnaire, which was distributed online via Facebook and LinkedIn platforms as well as in the form of a physical questionnaire at the airport and in touristy places around the Czech Republic, was first piloted. The questionnaire contained 30 questions divided into the following sections: Social media, Engagement, Motivation, Customer Commitment, Cross-Buying, Word of Mouth, and Customer Defection. The questionnaires include identification questions. A total of 238 respondents staying at 4-star and 5-star hotels in the Czech Republic filled out the questionnaire.

The quantitative research, its preparation, execution and particularly the selected methods of testing the hypotheses as well as processing the research results can be seen as the strength of the dissertation's analytical part.

The qualitative research is insufficiently described, which means that the procedure of preparing and processing the qualitative survey in the form of personal interviewing was not fully adhered to. There is no categorization of questions posed to the respondents and there are no identification questions regarding the hotels themselves. Based on the author's survey, the text of the dissertation lists the advantages of Social Media Marketing from the point of view of hotel managers, though there is no detailed information about the procedure in which the survey was conducted.

The research methodology used in writing the dissertation is well-organized and sufficiently described in Chapter 4 entitled Research Methodology, with the exception of the qualitative research.

- The methodological process used in covering the topic, meeting the goals of the dissertation, answering research questions and testing the hypotheses was chosen appropriately, with the reservation about the description of the qualitative research.

Zařazení původních řešení do disertační práce / Inclusion of original solutions in the dissertation

- The dissertation includes original solutions based on research conducted by the author of the dissertation.

Rozsah a kvalita použitých informačních zdrojů / The range and quality of the information sources used

It is obvious that the author worked with a large number of international information sources. Czech sources are referred to in the dissertation sporadically, which is caused by the fact that very few Czech authors focus on this topic in the hotel industry and even fewer of them publish their research papers in English.

What deserves commendation is the well-organized list of references to literature dedicated to research on Social Media Marketing in Table 1 on pages 24–26.

- The scope and quality of information sources fully correspond to the dissertation requirements.

Formální úprava práce / Formal adjustment

- The formal adjustment of the dissertation is sufficient.

Úroveň publikační činnosti doktoranda / The level of the doctoral student's publication activity

In the list of her publications, which is clearly presented under the 'Final Ph.D Thesis Presentation' on pp. 25–27, the doctoral student deals with topics directly connected with the topic of her doctoral dissertation.

- The amount of publication activity is adequate to doctoral studies.

Celkový postup řešení/ Overall solution procedure

The overall treatment of the topic is conducted in a logical sequence. The language processing and graphic editing of the dissertation work are of high quality. The terminology used is correct and chosen appropriately in relation to the topic.

Vědecká hodnota disertační práce /The scientific value of the dissertation

The scientific value of the dissertation lies in dealing with the topical issue of applying Social Media Marketing and its effects on the relationship between hotels and their customers in the segment of 4-star and 5-star hotels. It is an issue which, as far as I know, has not been dealt with by anyone so far.

- In general, it can be said that the dissertation has brought new original findings in an uncharted area, which are based on the sophisticated evaluation of the author's own research.

Závěr / Conclusion

The topic of the submitted dissertation is current and important, both from the point of view of theory and above all from the point of practice.

Presented dissertation of Romina Cheraghalizadeh by its methodological approach and achieved results fulfils the elementary demands on dissertations of a doctoral study programme. It answers research questions and verify hypothesis, which have been set, and by its contents it actually does bring an innovated knowledge related to the research topic. The candidate proves an acceptable theoretical and methodological background, and ability to apply it in practical application. As far as the presented dissertation fulfils the criteria, I recommend it to be defended.

Questions for discussion:

- In what way was the qualitative research conducted?

I hereby recommend the dissertation for defense before the appropriate panel.

In Pilsen: October 25, 2022

doc. Ing. Dagmar Jakubíková, Ph.D.

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