Fake reviews in the hospitality industry

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Abstract: Online reviews have become essential to an individual's everyday life. Interpersonal influences are extremely important in the hospitality and tourism industry due to the intangibility of products and services. Fake reviews are products of deviant customer behavior, which may be the source of review manipulation. The result can be illegal and violating behavior, harming organizations and other customers physically or psychologically. Hoteliers and restauranters have resorted to looking for fake reviews, all to achieve certain benefits. Computer scientists have proposed methods for identifying fake reviews, but they still exist: smart advertisers strive to disguise fake reviews by presenting them as genuine and thereby avoiding detection.

Keywords: Fake reviews; Hospitality industry; Review manipulation.

1. Introduction

Online reviews have become an essential part of an individual's everyday life. Both consumers and organizations know the importance of online reviews and their influence on product sales [1–3]. Interpersonal influences are extremely important in the hospitality and tourism industry due to the intangibility of products and services. These products and services can not be evaluated before consumption, which increases the importance of interpersonal influences [4]. Purchasing tourism and hospitality products is considered high-risk, so the evaluation of emotional risk by the reference group is an essential aspect of the decision-making process [4]. Tourism and hospitality services' perishability and seasonality increase the marketing stress level for service providers [5]. All these points to the importance of managing interpersonal influences to achieve a competitive advantage. It is important to note that the credibility of online reviews contributes to their influence. Firstly, these reviews are from real customers who share their thoughts on purchasing and consumption experiences. Secondly, online reviews are posted by consumers who do not expect compensation, making their reviews authentic and unbiased. However, reviews can be fake, such as when organizations pay some consumers to share positive reviews about their brands and negative reviews for competing organizations. Due to this, both the research community [6] and the e-commerce industry recognized fake reviews as a critical challenge [7,8]. Fake reviews were created or written without the author has used the good

or service being reviewed [9]. A human writer creates these reviews manually or automatically with a computer program. Fake reviews are products of deviant customer behavior, which may be the source of review manipulation. The result can be illegal and violating behavior, harming organizations and other customers physically or psychologically [10].

2. Fake reviews in the hospitality industry

To effectively reduce fake reviews, it is important to investigate their antecedents. When it comes to hotels, Mayzlin et al. [11] pointed out that compared to large hotel chains, small, independently owned hotels are more likely to manipulate online reviews. Comprehensibility, specificity, exaggeration, and negligence between authentic and fictitious reviews were also largely inconsistent across hotel price classes (luxury, mid-range, and budget) [12]. The same authors indicated a negative association of perceived exaggeration with the perceived authenticity of reviews [13]. In addition, Banerjee [14] further confirmed how perceived exaggeration could explain the perceived authenticity of reviews depending on the hotel's category and the reviews' polarity.

This trend has not bypassed restaurants[1] either. Many restaurants strive to achieve a better reputation by looking for fake positive reviews [15] because a better online reputation leads to higher purchase potential [16], as well as higher profits [17]. The limited appearance of positive fake reviews can greatly affect an organization's online visibility and increase the likelihood of choosing that particular organization [18]. For that reason, restaurants may seek fake positive reviews to gain financial benefits [19]. Many restaurants often solicit fake reviews by hiring online publishers [20] or giving discounts to customers [21], leading to an influx of fake reviews on eWOM (electronic word of mouth) platforms.

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[1]Figure downloaded from GioeleFazzeri, available at Pixabay. Please consider supporting this author by visiting the following link https://pixabay.com/users/gioelefazzeri-16466931

3. Conclusions

All the above indicates that hoteliers and restauranters have resorted to looking for fake reviews, all to achieve certain benefits. But the question is, are hospitality organizations more vulnerable to positive or negative reviews? Many researchers have tried to identify factors that indicate a fake review. A few studies, including those by Banerjee et al. [22], Cardoso et al. [23], and Hunt [24], concentrate on the textual content of online reviews, or more specifically, on their linguistic aspects, such as the proportion of nouns to verbs, the types of words that are used, or the characteristics of reviews that are written to deceive readers. However, some studies [25–27] prioritize identifying the behavioral and emotional traits of customers who post fake reviews. Computer scientists have proposed methods for identifying fake reviews [28,29], but fake reviews still exist: smart advertisers strive to disguise fake reviews by presenting them as genuine and thereby avoiding detection [19].

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