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Digital Marketing Signals and Perceived Luxury Hotel Reputation: The Role of Online Information Credibility in an Asian Destination

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Digital Marketing Signals and Perceived Luxury Hotel Reputation: The Role of Online Information Credibility in an Asian Destination

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Abstract

This study examines how hotel-related digital marketing (DM) signals are associated with Western tourists' perceived luxury hotel reputation (LHR) in an Asian destination, and whether online information credibility (OIC) strengthens this association. Drawing on signaling theory, DM signals are conceptualized as a seven-dimensional perceived signal system comprising owned informational, paid visibility, interactive firm-managed, and earned market-generated cues, including electronic word-of-mouth (eWOM). Survey data were collected from 294 Western tourists who stayed at five-star hotels in Hue City, Vietnam, and analyzed using partial least squares structural equation modeling. The results show that perceived DM signals and OIC are positively associated with perceived LHR. OIC also positively moderates the DM signals–LHR association, indicating that hotel-related digital signals are more strongly linked to perceived reputation when tourists regard the online information environment as credible. The study contributes to hospitality marketing by advancing a credibility-conditioned signaling view of digital reputation evaluation.

Keywords: Digital marketing signals, Online information credibility, Luxury hotel reputation, Signaling theory, Asian destination

1. Introduction

Digital technologies have transformed how hospitality brands communicate with tourists, but the central marketing challenge is no longer simply whether hotels are visible across digital channels. Rather, the more consequential question is whether tourists regard hotel-related digital information as credible enough to inform reputational judgments. In contemporary service markets, hotel-related digital marketing signals (DM signals) operate as a perceived information system that includes websites, content, email communication, search visibility, display advertising (DA), social media, and traveler-generated online reviews and comments. These signals collectively structure the online information environment in which tourists evaluate hotels before direct service experience (Kannan and Li 2017; Lemon and Verhoef 2016). Yet digital visibility does not automatically translate into reputational value, particularly when online environments are characterized by information overload, sponsored messages, platform intermediation, and concerns about

review manipulation (Cheung et al. 2009; Flanagin and Metzger 2007; Luca and Zervas 2016).

This issue is especially relevant in luxury hospitality. Five-star hotels offer high-involvement, experience-intensive, and often high-priced services that tourists cannot fully evaluate before consumption. As a result, prospective guests rely on digital cues to reduce uncertainty and infer service quality, reliability, and brand standing (Leung et al. 2013; Litvin et al. 2008). In this study, DM signals include owned, paid, interactive, and earned cues. Owned informational signals include websites, content, and email communication; paid visibility signals include search engine marketing and display advertising; interactive firm-managed signals include social media; and earned market-generated signals include electronic word-of-mouth (eWOM). This distinction is important because eWOM is not treated as a firm-controlled marketing activity. Rather, it is conceptualized as a traveler-generated signal that tourists process alongside hotel-controlled and platform-mediated information. From the tourist's perspective, these heterogeneous signals are

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