

STUDY: HOW DO HOTEL REVIEWS WITHOUT TEXT AFFECT THE HOTEL'S SCORE?



Hotel reviews on platforms like TripAdvisor, Google, or Booking Holdings can significantly impact hotel bookings, either for better or worse. But what happens when a customer leaves only a star rating without any accompanying text? New academic research has explored this topic.

"Previous studies have shown that longer comments tend to correlate with lower average ratings, but no research has investigated the implications of hotel reviews without text," says Juan Pedro Mellinas, a Department of Marketing and Market Research professor at the University of Murcia.

Juan Pedro Mellinas and researcher Verónica Leoni from the University of the Balearic Islands authored the study titled **"Beyond Words: Unveiling the Implications of Blank Reviews in Online Rating Systems."**

The research analyzed nearly half a million hotel reviews from Booking Holdings, revealing a clear pattern: reviews with fewer words tend to receive higher scores.

The researchers even noted a significant difference between reviews containing very few words (or just one word) and empty reviews. "Specifically, reviews without written text receive a 17% higher score than those with a single-word review," explains Mellinas.

Positive Feedback Box and Negative Feedback Box

Booking Holdings provides two separate sections for comments: one for positive aspects and another for negatives. The researchers tested whether the correlation between word count and punctuation was the same for both sections.

The analysis revealed some surprising results. The research co-author explains, "For the negative reviews, there is a clear trend: the more words there are, the smaller the score."

"However, a different pattern emerges with positive reviews: the more words a review contains, the higher the score tends to be, up to 79 words. After that point, the score begins to decline as the word count increases," he adds.

Why are longer reviews associated with lower scores? Human nature plays a significant role in this trend.

According to Juan Pedro Mellinas, the findings from this research suggest that "the motivation to write reviews tends to be stronger when the experience is negative." In contrast, satisfied customers often feel less compelled to write a detailed review. Instead, they are more likely to provide a score simply.

"It's one thing to click on a numerical score, which takes just a few seconds, and another to spend several minutes elaborating on the pros and cons of the hotel where I stayed," explains the

researcher.

Platforms Allow Rating without Reviews

It's important to note that while Booking Holdings and Google allow users to rate hotels without requiring a written review, other platforms like TripAdvisor require a minimum number of symbols/words of text to accompany the rating, justifying the hotel review.

According to Mellinas, **the systems used by Booking Holdings and Google lead to a higher volume of reviews, especially from "lazy or unmotivated" users who are reluctant to write.** As a result, these customers tend to give higher scores, which boosts the average rating of hotels on these platforms.

In contrast, TripAdvisor's approach results in fewer hotel reviews overall but provides more detailed information for readers.

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