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Do social media display correct conventional hotel ratings?

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This study investigates conventional ratings as they are presented on TripAdvisor. Conventional ratings are ratings, commonly using stars as a symbol, allocated by government or private bodies that work with hotel inspectors. The data from guest ratings on TripAdvisor was explored through two samples of hotels that were purposively selected based on the TripAdvisor rankings covering 11 international destinations. These data were compared to the ratings of the same hotels as they were retrieved from the databases of the conventional rating system bodies that were active in the respective destinations. Findings indicate that it is difficult to retrieve conventional rating system databases and that almost half of the conventional ratings displayed on TripAdvisor are incorrect. These findings suggest that contemporary marketing and tourism opportunities on TripAdvisor outweigh those presented by conventional hotel-rating systems.

Keywords: guest reviews, hotel ratings, marketing, social media

Geven de sociale media een goed beeld van de conventionele hotel ratings?

Deze studie onderzoekt de conventionele 'ratings' (hotel classificatie) zoals ze op TripAdvisor gepresenteerd staan. Conventionele ratings zijn waardebeoordelingen, vaak weergegeven met behulp van sterren, toegewezen door de overheid of particuliere organisaties welke werken met behulp van hotelinspecteurs. De gegevens van gastenbeoordelingen op TripAdvisor werden onderzocht door middel van twee samples met hotels die non-random werden geselecteerd op basis van de ranglijst van TripAdvisor met betrekking tot 11 internationale bestemmingen. Deze gegevens werden vergeleken met de ratings van dezelfde hotels, weergegeven in databases van de conventionele rating systeeminstanties welke actief zijn op de betreffende bestemmingen. De bevindingen wijzen erop dat het moeilijk is om conventionele rating systeem databases te achterhalen en dat bijna de helft van de conventionele ratings op TripAdvisor onjuist zijn. Deze bevindingen suggereren dat hedendaagse marketing en toeristische mogelijkheden op TripAdvisor overheersen over diegene welke worden gepresenteerd door conventioneel hotel rating systemen.

Trefwoorden: gastenbeoordelingen, hotel ratings, marketing, sociale media

社会媒体能否正确反映普通酒店星级？

这项研究调查依据到到网（TripAdvisor）的评级标准。传统的等级评定，通常使用标志星，评级通常由政府或私人机构的酒店核查人员进行。此排名数据由顾客在到到网（TripAdvisor）近两年的酒店评论中非随机挑选的11个国际目的地中得到。这个数据将与同类酒店进行比较，因为这是传统评级机构从评级系统中按各自的目的地活跃性中检索评级。但是结果表明，由于在到到网（TripAdvisor）的数据库中，几乎对传统的评级显示有一半左右是不正确的，因此评定依据很难从传统评级系统数据库中得到。所以这些结果表明，当前到到网（TripAdvisor）的旅游业市场机遇已经超过了酒店评级系统带来的市场机遇。

关键词：顾客评论，社会媒体，营销，酒店评级

Introduction

With the growth of social media platforms for guest feedback, such as TripAdvisor, confusion is created with regards to the star rating of hotels (conventional rating systems). This confusion appears to come from the fact that ratings found on different websites differ and that it is not always clear how the ratings have been established.

Consumers are increasingly influenced by social media forums before they make purchasing decisions (Dellarocas,

2006; Rubinson, 2009) and this influence applies to the hospitality industry as well. TripAdvisor is the largest and fastest growing hotel review website with over 40 million reviews in October 2010. As TripAdvisor presents both the ratings given by reviewers and the conventional star rating of each hotel on its website, a comparison can be made between the conventional rating system and those reflected on TripAdvisor. Hensens, Struwig and Dayan (2010a) indicate that there is no evidence to suggest that guest reviews and ratings on TripAdvisor are manipulated on a scale that would influence the accuracy of the information provided. This study investigates whether the conventional star ratings presented on TripAdvisor are congruent with the ratings from the conventional rating system bodies in the respective destinations of the sampled hotels.

Literature review

Organisations involved in hotel rating
Over the last 30 years, a multitude of organisations have become involved in hotel rating. These organisations can be divided into two categories, namely, national and independent bodies. National organisations can be defined as bodies run by or for a national government, usually in the form of national tourism authorities (for example, Dubai Department of Tourism and Commerce Marketing, 2008).

Independent organisations can be categorised into four groups, namely, automobile associations, travel media, online travel agents and social media. Independent rating organisations are generally 'for profit' organisations that use the ratings they create for travel publications that can be sold (automobile associations and travel media), to classify their offerings (online travel agents), or to generate income from referrals to online travel agents (social media). Figure 1 outlines how these organisations supply information to the prospective traveller.

Figure 1 displays a wide variety of communication lines through which the information of hotel-rating systems is shared and supplied to prospective travellers.

The execution of a national system can be facilitated through an appointed tourism authority, for example, in Qatar, Dubai and Abu Dhabi, an industry representative body, in the Netherlands, independent consultants, and in Puerto Rico, structures in between. National tourism organisations generally run hotel-rating systems as part of a strategy to increase and control the quality of its tourism product and may use tourism by-laws to enforce their efforts.

Automobile associations, such as the American Automobile Association, Mobil, and Michelin have a historic presence in the hotel-rating market resulting from a need they filled during the early days of motoring (Vine, 1981). The largest player in the independent market is the American Automobile Association, which grades almost 40 000 hotel properties worldwide (American Automobile Association, 2008). The American Automobile Association is one of the few systems that has not sought any harmonisation and is frequently quoted in hospitality and tourism textbooks as the world's most respected system (Chon & Sparrowe, 2000; Ismail, 2002; Kasavana & Brooks, 2005; Vallen & Vallen, 2005; Stuts & Wortman, 2006; Hayes & Ninemeier, 2007).
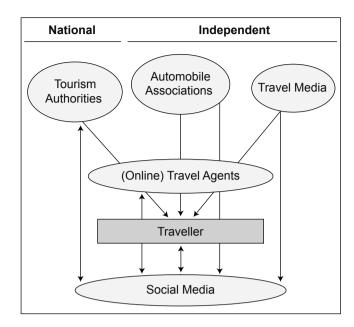

Figure 1: Organisations involved in hotel rating (after Hensens, Struwig and Dayan, 2010b)

The role of traditional travel agents with a physical presence has been largely taken over by online agents who provide electronic access and structure to the entire tourism supply chain, allowing travellers to build their own holidays. Online travel agents such as Expedia and Orbitz have aggressively entered the market with their own rating systems (Expedia, 2009; Orbitz, 2009). As more and more travellers book via online travel agents, the use of their ratings becomes more important. Online travel agents frequently use the ratings of national systems, automobile associations, or travel media for their ratings. Travelocity receives its ratings from North Star (Schaal, 2007), Orbitz uses industry ratings, such as the American Automobile Association and Michelin (Orbitz, 2009), and Expedia uses up to 12 points of data for their ratings, including that of other rating systems (Expedia, 2009). Perhaps the largest threat to the existing rating organisations is the growth of websites that focus solely on traveller reviews, providing an independent platform for guest feedback, which categorises them as social media (Zarella, 2009). TripAdvisor is the market leader in this segment, offering over 40 million guest reviews on over 450 000 hotels. These reviews provide both a rating (1–5) and qualitative feedback through narratives (TripAdvisor, 2010).

A recent development is the exchange of ratings between social media organisations and tourism authorities, automobile associations and travel media. TripAdvisor seeks to display conventional ratings on its website and categorise hotels accordingly (TripAdvisor, 2010). In like manner, tourism authorities display an interest in the data available on TripAdvisor and link it to their websites (Thomas, 2007). Automobile associations and travel media do not yet seem to use information from social media such as TripAdvisor.

A growth in the number of rating systems in operation started in the 1970s, accelerated from 1980 to 1990, and continued over the last two decades, resulting in an estimated 150 systems in operation today. This growth

may however have reached a turning point as regions seek harmonisation in criteria and systems. The World Tourism Organisation's (2004) joint study with the International Hotel and Restaurant Association on hotel rating describes the multiple initiatives of countries to join in regional schemes. An example is the Nordic-Baltic Rating scheme where the Danish hotel-rating system is used as the basis for the systems in Sweden, Iceland, Lithuania, Latvia and Estonia. However, in all member countries, the criteria are adjusted to the local conditions (Northern Baltic Rating Board, 2008). Harmonisation is also sought on a national level, with Russia and the United Kingdom (UK) being recent examples. In 2003, Russia went from four systems and 30 star-awarding organisations to one system, executed by one organisation (Maternovski, 2003). The United Kingdom, trying to put an end to decades of disputes, launched one harmonised system in 2006 (Napier, 2006).

The importance of hotel rating

The rapid growth in hotel-rating systems results from the realisation that tourism lodging has had a major impact on the tourist experience. As the objective of most governments is to develop and grow the tourism sector, they must ensure tourists are satisfied and delighted to spread positive word of mouth about the destination (World Tourism Organisation, 2004). Such claims go hand in hand with contemporary service management theories, such as Reichheld's (1996; 2006) arguments concerning customer loyalty. Although customer satisfaction is readily associated with hotel rating, there are other reasons why governments specifically have become involved. Vine (1981) mentions six benefits of a well-planned and well-administered rating system:

- It assists government planning by supplying authoritative and reliable statistical data for different types of accommodation.
- It helps to identify the need for developing certain categories of establishments.
- It improves marketing strategies by enabling tourist board promotion of hotels in particular geographical locations (e.g. resort, city, riverside, mountain).
- It allows the travel trade and visitors to identify more easily and accurately the types of hotels they seek. This benefit is referred to by other authors as facilitating segmentation of visitors (Ingram, 1996; Federation of Hong Kong Hotel Owners Limited, 2000).
- It encourages hoteliers to improve standards and the range of facilities by pinpointing weaknesses in operational services.
- It eliminates poor hotels which harm the good reputation of the better hotels.

Other benefits mentioned are:

- Coping with the age of information technology, since contemporary guests base their purchasing decisions on information published on websites (Federation of Hong Kong Hotel Owners Limited, 2000). Today's traveller does not require a knowledgeable travel agent to tell him or her which hotel to visit, as this information is available on the Internet. A rating system generally provides a brief, but comprehensive, overview of what the guest could reasonably expect from a property.
- Increasing opportunities for local, independent hotels (Federation of Hong Kong Hotel Owners Limited, 2000).

Since local, independent hotels commonly do not share the advantages of their international counterparts in terms of access to international travellers, they need an authoritative means to communicate the quality of their offerings. Brands such as the Hilton, Marriott, Sheraton, Ritz Carlton and others have the advantage of standardised services under a recognised brand that attracts international travellers (Rowe, 2002).

All eight benefits listed above can be summarised into three areas where a destination and its industry will benefit under a well-managed system.

Quality control
An effective rating system will eliminate poor hotels that may hurt the name of the destination or industry, thereby protecting the consumers and the destination (Vine, 1981; Gee, 1994). In addition, the rating criteria and inspections are likely to stimulate hoteliers to improve (Hassanien, 2007).

Marketing
An effective hotel-rating system will provide an overview for potential visitors and the travel trade, levelling the playing field for local hotels that need to compete with international brands, and facilitating the travel trade in creating packages (Hassanien, 2007; Su & Sun, 2007).

Business development
Hotel rating may stimulate business development as it assists in tourism planning and facilitates hotel investors in positioning their properties in the market by outlining the requirements before they start building (Vine, 1981; Hassanien, 2007). Dr Aidi, chairman of the International Hotel and Restaurant Association, as quoted by Wyatt (2008), argues that 'Grading systems should be used out of respect for the people who invest heavily in a first class hotel and do not want to have another property, which doesn't have any credentials or services, sharing the same rating'.

The success of any rating system is dependent on the effectiveness of the criteria covered in that system as well as how the systems is operated, marketed, and aligned with other systems.

The effectiveness of conventional rating systems

The main disputes challenging the earlier conventional hotel-rating systems focus on criteria that are too detailed to allow hoteliers to innovate or position their properties in their own unique market segments (Ryan, 1998; Travel Assist Magazine, 2001). The use of characteristics such as size (number of rooms), room price, quality of management and other features of a hotel that do not relate directly to the quality offered have led to controversy (Callan & Fearon, 1997; Hensens, 2001; Mintel, 2004).

A number of studies of the UK systems focus on what hotel attributes prospective guests use to select hotels (Callan, 1994), the actual utilisation of hotel-grading schemes by different target groups (Callan, 1995), and the importance of different hotel attributes to guests (Callan, 1998). Callan's conclusions frequently reveal discrepancies between the systems and what the guests actually use, want, or value. Ingram (1996) also focused on the UK systems and used the service attributes of Berry, Zeithaml and Parasuraman (1990)

to define guest satisfaction. Su and Sun (2007) applied the same attributes to the Taiwanese national system, and used the five dimensions of service quality to discover that, although most criteria are covered, 'empathy' can only be measured by mystery shopping that is not presently part of the system. Lopez and Serrano (2004) applied a more direct approach in Spain, where they used four categories that linked closely to the previously mentioned service dimensions. These categories are reliability, characteristics of personnel, tangible elements, and complimentary offerings. Their findings are staggering; only in one-star hotels are the overall expectations exceeded by the perceptions of guests.

Another point of criticism, from academic authors and the travel trade alike, is the apparent differences between conventional rating systems that, it is argued, result in a confused traveller (Davey, 2008; Mintel, 2004). The World Tourism Organisation has been driving the process of international standardisation since 1962, but has not progressed much further than agreeing on five classification categories and the use of stars as symbols. After much dispute, it was agreed in 1969 that certain objections to an international system could not be overlooked and that it would be better to proceed by attempting to obtain approval for regional systems (Vine, 1981). Different attempts since this initiative have all met with resistance, including from the travel trade itself. Both HOTREC and the International Hotel and Restaurant Association, two very influential industry bodies, have strongly opposed using identical criteria in different countries and attempted to develop an international rating system (HOTREC, 1994; International Hotel and Restaurant Association, 1997). As Luthe (n.d.) argues:

Most accommodation markets are dominated by domestic guests, particularly in Germany, France and Italy as well as in Japan or the USA. Therefore it is desirable and economically correct that national rating systems focus on the specific preferences of domestic guests and other regional/local conditions.

As a result, the only successful initiatives for harmonisation have come from the operators of systems. Despite several successful initiatives for harmonisation, such as those mentioned above, many new systems still seek to differentiate rather than to harmonise. Greenwood (2008) argues that with the launch of new rating systems in both Dubai and Abu Dhabi, travellers' confusion will only grow, especially as these systems will not automatically be adopted by tour operators and online travel agents. In the 'bigger and better' race, not even the five-star category is sacred, as certification company SGS has created a voluntary rating criterion called 'SGS seven stars' (Wyatt, 2008) and Dubai created a sixth category to facilitate the Burj Al Arab Hotel that sought to position itself above the five-star category (Dubai Department of Tourism and Commerce Marketing, 2010).

As criteria have become more flexible, the focus has turned more towards consistency among different parties and regions, and the question of whether quality is actually measured. When hoteliers or the travel industry do not believe in a system, the result may be a boycott of that system, or a focus on another system that is more lenient. Jensen (2008) describes how the Australian Hotel Association predicted that many of their members would cancel their ratings with the Automobile Association and move to accommodation websites where they could post their own ratings. The scale on which this happened is not clear. In Bulgaria, the new rating standards launched in 2004 challenge the current ratings of international brands such as the Hilton, Kempinski, and Sheraton. These are brands that need to adhere to group standards and should therefore also be in line with international standards. This has resulted in strong controversy between the State Agency for Tourism and the hotel industry (Rahn, 2006). The question then arises of whether conventional hotel-rating systems have passed their expiry date (Sharkey, 2009).

The development of regional systems that seek integration seems to counter these problems, although the strong growth of online travel agents and social media platforms presents an additional problem. The Internet has facilitated the comparison of ratings and brought certain discrepancies to light, particularly those involving the new independent rating providers, namely, online travel agents. Pascarella (2005) finds that, although the definitions of the different ratings among different online travel agents are fairly aligned, their ratings are not. Hewitt (2008) analyses travellers' reviews, comparing them to the formal ratings of two hotels, using the online travel agents Expedia, Travelocity and Orbitz. The discrepancies among the three websites are apparent and so are the differences within each website with regard to the website rating versus the traveller rating.

It thus becomes clear that conventional rating systems have not been very successful in assessing and communicating the quality of hotels in a way that provides a realistic expectation to prospective travellers. This ineffectiveness may be due to the limited input of the actual guest in the development of rating systems, a tendency of many systems to differentiate rather than to align, and a limited use of communication channels, resulting in traveller confusion. This confusion is amplified by the rise of social media platforms such as TripAdvisor that also display conventional ratings in addition to guest feedback and guest ratings on each hotel.

Although TripAdvisor's methods are subject to regular criticism (see, for instance, ABC News, 2008; Elliott, 2009; Frommer, 2009; Gulliver, 2009; O'Neill, 2009), its growth does not display any limitations on its popularity and use. Research by Hensens et al. (2010b) suggests that the focus of guest reviews and ratings on TripAdvisor is different from the focus of most conventional rating criteria. Whereas most of the comments made in TripAdvisor reviews focus on service quality, most conventional rating systems tend to focus primarily on objective, tangible criteria such as the availability and size of facilities and services, occasionally on subjective tangibles such as cleanliness and state of maintenance, and rarely on service quality (Hensens et al., 2010b).

It may therefore be argued that conventional rating systems and social media platforms such as TripAdvisor may complement one another. However, one of the preconditions would be the sharing of accurate information. Research by Hewitt (2008) and Pascarella (2005) indicates that there is much confusion among travellers. This paper aims to research whether conventional hotel ratings presented on TripAdvisor are correct.

Research methodology

The main question to be answered by this research is: To what extent are conventional ratings of hotels displayed accurately on TripAdvisor?

This question was researched through three samples as outlined in Figure 2.

From Figure 2 it is clear that three samples were selected from 11 destinations. The 11 destinations that were selected are Amsterdam, Bangkok, Cape Town, Dubai, Hong Kong, London, New York, Paris, Rio de Janeiro, Rome and Sydney. Two objectives were focussed on when selecting the destinations:
• The destination received more than one million travellers annually
• The destinations together covered all continents.
For each of the 11 sampled destinations, the top 10 ranked hotels based on the TripAdvisor popularity index were selected. The TripAdvisor popularity index ranks hotels in a destination based on traveller ratings and other sources that determine traveller satisfaction (TripAdvisor, 2010). This sample presented a total of 110 hotels and is referred to as the top 10 sample.

An additional sample was selected to ensure that not only the best ranked hotels are included. This second sample is referred to as the 'spread sample' and included the highest ranking, middle ranking, and lowest ranking hotel in each of the 11 destinations on TripAdvisor. The hotel with the highest ranking was also the number one in the top 10 hotels of that destination. The middle ranking hotel was identified by dividing the total number of hotels available on TripAdvisor in each destination by two and then selecting the first hotel that fulfilled the criterion of providing sufficient usable reviews. The lowest ranking hotel in each destination was selected by identifying the first hotel that fulfilled the criteria; this was also imposed on the middle hotel, using the inverted selection criteria for hotel ranking on TripAdvisor.

A third sample comprised the conventional rating systems used in each of the 11 destinations. As not all destinations had conventional government-imposed rating systems, an independent system that rated the most hotels in that destination was used. A prerequisite for any system to be included is that it must comply with the following conditions:
• The system must be based on quality criteria
• The system must rate hotels based on these criteria
• The categorisation must be based on a physical inspection.
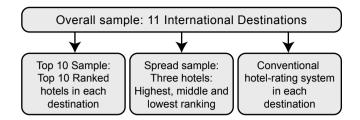

Figure 2: Samples to gather data (based on author's own model)

When a governmentally run or endorsed system was in place in a destination, this system took preference over other systems that were in place. Table 1 presents the conventional rating systems that were selected based on these conditions.

Results

The Results section of this paper will describe the effectiveness of the conventional rating systems in the 11 sampled destinations first. Then the results of the comparison of the conventional hotel ratings from the conventional rating organisation's database with the conventional ratings on TripAdvisor will be presented.

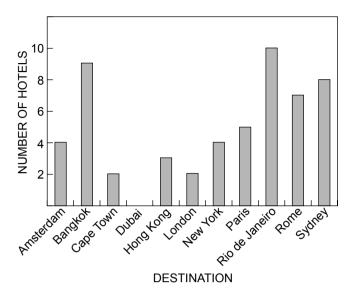### Control of the conventional rating systems
From the 11 destinations sampled, eight were under control of a governmental system and three were subject to the control of an independent system (Hong Kong, New York, and Sydney). In only three of the 11 destinations does the conventional hotel rating organisation indicate that it is obligatory to be rated. In Dubai, a hotel is required to be rated to operate, whereas in Amsterdam a hotel can only use the name hotel when it has been rated with at least one star. Rome is subject to regional control that is said to be obligatory by the government (Mintel, 2004).

The control of a rating system can perhaps best be measured by the number of hotels that are rated according to that system as a percentage of total hotels in the destination. As not all destinations provided accurate statistics to analyse, this data have been gathered from the top 10 sample and the spread sample in this study based on the data from the databases of the respective conventional hotel-rating system organisation.

A number of hotels in the top 10 ranking of each destination lack a conventional rating. Figure 3 shows the number

Table 1: Conventional rating systems selected in the 11 destinations (based on author's own model)

Destination	Conventional rating organisation
Amsterdam	Association of Hotel and Catering Associated Companies (Bedrijfschap Horeca en Catering, 2010)
Bangkok	The Foundation of Standard and Human Resources Development in Service and Tourism Industry (Tourism Authority Thailand, 2009)
Cape Town	Tourism Grading Council South Africa (2010a)
Dubai	Dubai Department of Tourism and Commerce Marketing (2001)
Hong Kong	Forbes Travel Guide (2010a)
London	VisitBritain in conjunction with VisitScotland, VisitWales and the Automobile Association (Quality in Tourism, 2009; VisitBritain, 2009)
New York	American Automobile Association (2008)
Paris	Ministry of Economy, Industry and Labour (Ministrère de l'économie, de l'industrie et de l'employ, 2009)
Rio de Janeiro	Ministry of Sport and Tourism in cooperation with the National Hotel Association (Brazilian Association of Hotels, 2010a)
Rome	Italian Government Tourism Board (2010)
Sydney	Australian Automobile Association (AAA Tourism, 2010a)

Figure 3: Number of hotels without a conventional rating in the top 10 sample (after author's own model based on TripAdvisor data gathered between 11 October and 15 November 2009)

of hotels without a conventional rating per destination of the top 10 sample.

As shown in Figure 3, all hotels in Dubai in the TripAdvisor top 10 ranking have conventional ratings. Rio de Janeiro has the highest number of hotels without a conventional rating (10), since none of the hotels in the TripAdvisor top 10 ranking appears in the Brazil Hotel Association database. Bangkok is not much different with only one hotel in the top 10 showing a conventional rating. A total number of 54 hotels in the top 10 sample (N = 110) did not have a conventional rating. This represents 49 per cent of the hotels.

The number of hotels without a conventional rating is also apparent in the spread sample. Out of the 33 hotels in the sample, 16 (48 per cent) do not have a conventional rating. The number of hotels lacking a conventional rating is highest in the lowest ranking category (nine out of 11). The middle ranking category lacks three ratings, and the highest ranking category lacks four ratings.

Conventional ratings on TripAdvisor

Through cross checking the conventional ratings shown on the TripAdvisor website and the websites of the hotels with rating lists of the bodies responsible for the conventional ratings, it was found that the conventional ratings that TripAdvisor displays are not accurate. This was found in destinations where hotel rating is not obligatory by law and where there is nothing to prevent a hotel from 'making up' its own rating. In addition, there appears to be a legal void when it comes to online travel agents and the ratings they choose to display on their websites, as the bodies responsible for conventional ratings have no say over them.

From the findings on the bodies responsible for conventional ratings in each destination, the researcher identified different databases to verify the ratings. Organisations use the databases to communicate the conventional rating system from the body appointed to administer the conventional rating system in the destination. The databases and deviations found in the top 10 sample and the spread sample are depicted in Table 2.

From Table 2 it is clear that a total of 53 conventional ratings of the top 10 sample are inaccurate. This represents 48 percent of the total sample size. The spread sample displays a similar number of inaccuracies (16 out of 33 ratings representing 48 % of the sample). In Rio de Janeiro none of the hotels in the top 10 sample could be retrieved from the Brazil Association of Hotels' database. In Hong Kong, almost all ratings from the Forbes Travel Guide database were different from the ones indicated on the TripAdvisor website. While conducting the cross check, the researcher discovered that the conventional rating of a hotel by its national rating body is the most difficult to find. When using the 'search function' on, for instance, Google, searching for 'hotel rating/ classification/ grading + destination', TripAdvisor is commonly the first result presented, whereas the actual rating database may not be found at all using search websites. One easily comes across ratings supplied by online travel agents or other independent parties that do not base their ratings on rating criteria and a physical inspection.

The only destination in which hotels did not display any inaccuracies was Dubai. This may be the result of the strict legal framework that surrounds hotel rating that does not

Table 2: Findings of the comparison of conventional ratings (based on author's own model based on findings from conventional rating system databases)

Destination	Conventional rating database	Number of inaccuracies in top 10 sample (N = 10)	Number of inaccuracies in spread sample (N = 3)
Amsterdam	Netherlands Board of Tourism and Conventions (2010)	3	1
Bangkok	Thailand Hotel Association (2010)	7	0
Dubai	Dubai Department of Tourism and Commerce Marketing (2010)	0	0
Cape Town	Tourism Grading Council South Africa (2010b)	3	2
Hong Kong	Forbes travel Guide (2010b)	8	3
London	VisitLondon (2010)	2	1
New York	American Automobile Association (2010) Forbes Travel Guide (2010a)	2	2
Paris	Paris Convention and Visitor's Centre (2010)	7	1
Rio de Janeiro	Brazilian Association of Hotels (2010b)	10	3
Rome	Italian Government Tourism Board (2010)	4	1
Sydney	AAA Tourism (2010b)	7	2
	Total	53	16

allow hotels or their representatives to communicate a different rating to that allocated by the government (Dubai Department of Tourism and Commerce Marketing, 2001).

Conclusions and recommendations

It was found that almost half of the sampled hotels did not have a conventional rating and that the two samples showed only a one per cent difference (48 per cent as opposed to 49 per cent of the sample). It follows that the popularity of a hotel on TripAdvisor does not appear to be influenced by whether or not the hotel is rated by a conventional rating organisation. An almost similar percentage of hotels (48 per cent on both samples) were misrepresented on TripAdvisor when it came to its conventional ratings. There is no evidence to suggest that this inaccuracy is biased positively or negatively. During the research, it was found that it was very difficult to find the actual databases of conventional rating systems, whereas the websites of TripAdvisor is generally presented first.

From this follows that conventional rating systems face a strong challenge in communicating their correct ratings to potential travellers. This status quo presents little value of conventional hotel-rating systems for hoteliers. If a conventional rating is not obligatory, there is little reason for hoteliers to go through the effort of a conventional rating exercise as it is likely that this rating will be distorted on social media websites. This is likely to result in a strong decrease in participation of hotels in conventional rating systems.

To overcome such a trend, it is recommended that conventional rating systems take a more proactive approach and work with social media websites and online travel agents to ensure correct ratings are supplied. In return, social media websites and online travel agents may also be challenged to critically review the systems by which the supplied information is verified.

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