



PRIMARY RESEARCH

# Application of social media from the hotel's point of view: How to retain customers

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## Abstract

Marketing trends have been changing over the last decades, and companies need to adapt themselves in order to remain competitive. In the last few years, social media has become one of the most important tools of marketing in many industries. The hotel industry is a dynamic and fast-growing sector, and the importance of social media in this industry is more pronounced. Social media allows hotels to provide information about their services to their customers and get immediate and direct feedback from them. The main aim of this research is to understand how hotels apply social media in order to attract and retain customers and how social media can affect their success. This research has been conducted in the Czech Republic, considering 4 and 5-star hotels. Data for this research was collected through interviews and also observation. Managers and hotel employees who had enough knowledge about the marketing and social media of the hotels were selected for interviews. Public pages of hotels on social media were also monitored in order to understand the contents and also the customers' comments. The findings of this research can provide a better understanding about the importance of social media in the hotel industry and can provide beneficial implications in practice.

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## INTRODUCTION

One of the most beneficial investments a company can make is in customer retention. This is one of the most important variables in a company's success. Effective customer retention strategies allow businesses to build long-term connections with customers who will become brand loyal.

There are various reasons that make customer retention more important for companies. Attracting new clients can be more expensive than keeping old ones. While businesses spend money on attracting new customers to increase income, however, customer retention is typically faster and more cost-efficient compared to customer acquisition. Companies that focus on customer retention generally find it an effective process because they are marketing to those customers who have previously expressed an interest in the product and service and are already engaged with the brand. It's generally more productive to run a business with current customers since companies do not need to recruit, educate, or challenge new employees. That is,

customer retention contributes to the improvement of customer relationships, as well as an increase in customer lifetime value and, as a result, revenue.

However, customer retention is not easy for business owners, especially in the hotel industry. Companies must use appropriate marketing strategies in order to retain consumers and attract new ones. Since marketing trends have been changing over the last few years, companies need to adapt themselves to the changes. New tools need to be applied to business processes in today's business world. These technologies are used for marketing purposes. One of these instruments is social media. It helps companies differentiate themselves from their competitors in various ways (Hashim & Fadhil, 2017).

Social media marketing is a relatively new concept and does not have a long history. These platforms have created a new era, and therefore adoption and utilization of these tools can be a huge challenge for hotels (Garrido-Moreno & Lockett, 2016).

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Despite all of the emphasis, few studies have focused on understanding how hotels use social media platforms for marketing purposes (Hashim & Fadhil, 2017; Waheed & Jam, 2010). The relevant literature mostly considered the importance of social media from the customer's perspective. Moreover, looking through the relevant literature, it appears that the majority of previous research from the hotel's point of view considered these platforms based on hotel outcomes. However, there is still a gap in understanding how social media is being utilized by hoteliers for marketing purposes.

Social media can be applied more efficiently as an efficient marketing tool for promoting hotels when hoteliers have a better understanding of these instruments. The main aim of this research is to understand how hotels apply social media in order to attract and retain customers and how social media can affect their success.

## LITERATURE REVIEW

### Social Media

Social media refers to a set of web-based technologies that enable people to communicate and share diverse materials (Hanafizadeh, Shafia, & Bohlin, 2021; Kietzmann, Hermkens, McCarthy, & Silvestre, 2011). Organizations use a range of social media platforms for a number of purposes, including public relations, hiring, research, testing products, finance, etc., (Hanafizadeh et al., 2021; Ziauddin, Khan, Jam, & Hijazi, 2010).

According to Willis (2019), social media platforms are important tools for facilitating online involvement; nevertheless, the information published on the platforms is important since it must appeal to a variety of customers. The type of platform and also the quality of the contents are both important factors in achieving successful outcomes. For many companies, using social media is critical to maintaining favorable relationships with customers. Customer retention hinges on trust, satisfaction, fairness, and mutual reliance. Willis (2019) mentioned that brand attitudes and purchase intentions are associated with positive assessments of companies' posts on social media.

Wibowo, Chen, Wiangin, Ma, and Ruangkanjanases (2020) indicated that because recruiting new consumers takes more time and effort, relationship quality plays a crucial role in retaining existing clients. Aside from that, the key to service providers' success is when customers are ready to submit feedback after using a service. The notion of relationship quality motivates the execution of consumer behaviors (e.g., buying intention, loyalty intention, and involvement intention) toward the organization. Customers

want to be associated with the firm because of the benefits and values that they and the company share. They are also prepared to support the firm, and if they notice a shortcoming in service or have any suggestions for improvement, they prefer to discuss this with the company rather than simply switching to another company. And social media help to create this company-customer relationship.

Leung, Law, Van Hoof, and Buhalis (2013) emphasize the importance of social media in travel decisions in their study. They discovered that most people use social media during the research stage of their vacation preparation. Anderson (2012) claims that the guest experience has become the dominant factor in hotel selection. Therefore, review sites will continue to be at the forefront when consumers are planning to book a hotel room. Rate and review platforms (such as Trip Advisor) have the potential to affect hotel performance with their marketing options (Hashim & Fadhil, 2017; Waheed, Khan, Khan, & Khalil, 2012).

### Customer Retention

Customer retention is clients' commitment to do business or exchange with a specific company on a continuous basis (Syaqirah & Faizurrahman, 2014). This is related to a business's capacity to shift customers into repeat buyers and keep them from switching to a competitor. It focuses on clients who have already purchased a product or signed up for a service from the company. However, customer retention is not only about transactions but also about building relationships.

Richards (1996) indicated that in the face of strong competition in the hotel business, hoteliers are shifting their focus from customer acquisition to customer retention while concurrently shifting their strategy and information technology to promote client retention and loyalty. Retaining client loyalty is an important source of revenue for hotels (Khan, 2013), and this can be done in various ways.

Customer retention is important in all businesses; however, this importance is more pronounced in the hotel industry. The hotel industry is far more dynamic, with changes occurring on a constant basis in this sector. According to Sim, Mak, and Jones (2006) hotel, guests may prefer to switch to other hotels when returning to the same destination.

The hotel industry is a leisure sector, and while consumers may be satisfied with their experience in the hotel, they may be eager to stay at a different hotel on their next visit simply to have a unique and new experience. However, there are a number of factors that can influence a customer's likelihood of returning. For instance, the price can have a significant impact on the consumer's judgment of value. How-

ever, other factors might also be important besides the monetary cost, such as service quality, performance, customer relationship, brand image and so on. Customer experience while visiting a hotel is an important factor in customers' satisfaction and their attitude towards value. Understanding the major factors of customer satisfaction is critical to success in the hotel sector and returning customers.

## METHODOLOGY

This study was conducted in the Czech Republic and considered the hotel industry. The Czech Republic is a very popular destination for travelers in Europe. Every year, millions of tourists visit this country and stay in hotels.

The methods used to collect the data include observation, interview, and survey with an administered questionnaire. Emails were sent to the hotels asking about their willingness to participate in the research. Respondents were told that their responses would be kept completely confidential and that the study would not publish their personal information.

The open-ended interview was applied in the research focused on the use and experience of the hotels with social media. This enables respondents to contribute extra information, such as their feelings, attitudes, and understanding of the subject.

Hotel managers or those employees who were responsible for the social media of the hotel participated in this research and were interviewed in order to understand their perception and evaluation of social media communication. In this research, economy hotels/hostels were disregarded since customers of low prices and economy hotels/hostels are more concerned about cost (compared to quality), while customers of luxury hotels are more conscious about the quality of services along with the cost they pay. In general, quality is more important in luxury hotels than economy accommodations.

This research was conducted in June-October 2021 when there were still restrictions on traveling due to the COVID-19 pandemic. Many hotels were still closed or just reopening during this time. Due to these issues, only 8 hotels were accepted to participate in the interviews/survey.

The observation was carried out by looking at the hotels' social media accounts. Facebook, Instagram, and LinkedIn were among the platforms analyzed. In addition, monitoring of third-party platforms was also considered in this study. In order to understand how hotels use these platforms to serve their clients, the contents, comments, and sequence of shares were also studied.

## FINDINGS

### Types of Information Shared by Hotels on Social Media

Good and rich social media content is critical to a hotel's success. It can be considered a reliable source of information, as well as a place where customers can get the information they may require. There are various contents that hotels typically share on social media. These contents can be divided into three main categories. The following are what hotels commonly share on social media:

#### *Information about the hotel*

Hotels use this type of information to explain their products and services, as well as new modifications, promotions and discounts, forthcoming events, what services are included in the price, customer service, and so on. This category can also include information about location and accessibility. Hotels use this type of information to attract guests by assuring them of the value and service quality.

Customers don't want to make the wrong selection, so the information provided in this category is a critical aspect that may influence the entire decision experience. People can make their decisions easier by gathering more information and by not wasting too much time on researching. Therefore, content shared for this purpose can play a critical role in retaining customers.

#### *Information about surroundings and attractions*

Hotels can share information about sight-seeing and other tourist attractions, which may entice tourists to visit/revisit the destination. Attractions are an essential factor for some people when making travel decisions. Therefore, the goal is to capture the interest of the consumer so that they will visit a specific region and discover the many attractions while on vacation. As a result, this content has the potential to draw travelers from all over the world.

In addition, there might be specific rules and regulations imposed by governments; recent changes to rules that may affect people's travel decisions may be considered in this category. For instance, hotels may inform customers about new rules and restrictions during the COVID-19 pandemic.

#### *Announcements regarding specific occasions*

There are times when hotels are eager to share messages to demonstrate their concern for guests and other people. For example, while the first day of school, Labor Day, and other occasions may not be directly related to hotel marketing, sharing such information may demonstrate how much hoteliers care about their clients and the events in their lives. Hotels may also provide some additional tips and information on these special days.

Moreover, some promotions can be offered on occasions such as mothers' day, women's day, teacher's day, and so on, which can show the support of hotels and their appreciation towards those people. As a result, this can affect the brand reputation and improve the brand image in the long run.

### Importance of Social Media for Hotels

This study findings revealed the importance of social media for hotels. Hotels may use social media for a variety of reasons to improve their performance. There are a few key factors that have been identified through monitoring various hotel social media platforms. Moreover, the perspectives of hoteliers were also considered for this reason. Table 1 shows a summary of the findings.

**TABLE 1.** Advantages of social media marketing for hotels

Creating connection	Being more accessible
	Responding the queries
	Connecting people
Involving customers	Rate and Reviews
	Tagging and hashtagging
Source of information	Introducing new products services
	Learning from customers
	Customization
Competing	Being attractive
	Being updated with changes
Visibility	Making the message visual
	Celebrities' involvement
Affordability	Low Cost
	Covering wide audiences
Post-satisfaction	Apologizing and compensating
	Keeping the connection
	Providing rewards

### Creating connection

The usage of the internet and new technologies has resulted in the emergence of social media as a new phenomenon in hotel marketing efforts. Social media improves performance by fostering relationships between customers and service providers, as well as allowing users to engage with one another and share their thoughts and ideas (A. J. Kim & Ko, 2010). Indeed, hoteliers consider social media to be a vital tool for connecting people. The greater the emotional bond a customer has with a hotel, the more likely that customer will return.

**Being more accessible:** In certain ways, social media can overcome the constraints of time, place, and language. People can ask questions via social media platforms from anywhere in the world with little effort and expense. Messages do not necessarily need to be sent and responded to during working hours in order to be considered. The barrier in a language is minimized with social media, as it provides the possibility of online translation simply by a click.

**Responding to queries:** Receiving a quick response to

comments on social media platforms can increase the satisfaction of potential or existing consumers. It will demonstrate not only that the company values customers' thoughts and inquiries, but it will also portray the company as a responsible service provider which facilitates the transaction. People can use social media to obtain answers to their questions, which may have been discussed previously on the hotel's social media. If there are additional queries, the hotel's social media platforms give quick and easy access to contact the service provider and even other users.

**Connecting people:** The most significant distinction between social media and conventional media is that social media allows for two-way contact, whilst traditional media only allows for one-way communication. Human-to-human interactions are the purpose of public social networks. Users share user-generated content on these networks.

People can contact the hotel via social media when they need to. Furthermore, social media allows users to communicate with one another and receive feedback. People trust

this source more because they are obtaining content from a peer. Clearly, hotels emphasize their advantages and usually do not speak about their disadvantages. Connecting with other users, on the other hand, provides more reliable information about the hotels, and provides both positive and negative feedback.

### ***Involving customers in hotels' marketing***

Customers may pass on their positive recommendations to others in their circle. However, it is not only limited to people in the near surroundings. Social media enables people to share their experiences with a wider range of audiences all over the world.

**Rating and reviews:** Reviews are significant since they help the website rank higher in search engines naturally, without having to do any work. Customers that submit reviews unintentionally utilize keywords that help other customers locate the business more quickly online. Before making a purchase, customers examine customer reviews. If the hotel has internet reviews, it quickly establishes credibility and confidence. Online reviews give potential customers the impression that the hotel is authentic and offers a genuine product or service.

**Tagging and hashtagging:** When a person, a business, or any other entity with a social profile is mentioned in a post, social media users can use tags to communicate with them. On social media networks, a hashtag is kind of a label that makes it simpler to find information with a sort of theme or substance. Hashtags encourage social media users to seek out information that they find interesting. People can utilize hashtags to reach out to their target audiences and to assist members in finding one another. Anyone who can see a photo or video can see the individuals tagged in it.

### ***Source of information***

Hoteliers may gain instant and direct feedback from their customers through social media. Social media can be used to track audience behavior. It is a source of data that can be used to identify and find mistakes. In real-time, social media generates a massive amount of data about clients. Hotels can utilize that data to generate more information about business decisions. This might assist in better tailoring social media marketing plans to communicate directly to target demographics.

**New products/services:** Social media networks are a great way of informing people about goods and services. Attempts to promote goods and services in social media groups will inevitably yield better results. People can be informed about new products and services, along with photos

or videos. Further information about products and services can also be provided by adding a link. Social media provides this opportunity to gain access to other accounts. For instance, there is the possibility to add a link in the bio on Instagram. Companies and customers can also include links in their posts or comments, making the process of gathering information about new products and services easier.

**Learning from customers:** One of the most effective ways to learn about clients' goals and needs is to speak directly with them, ask questions, and receive replies. People use social media to ask follow-up inquiries when they can't find answers on the hotel's numerous platforms or when they want a rapid and up-to-date response. This can serve as a signal to hotel managers about what is important to customers so that they can incorporate it into their services and offer more personalized information on social media.

All social media networks are open to the public, allowing businesses to track their customers' or potential buyers' activities. This enables marketers to have a better understanding of their target audience's interests, likes, and dislikes, as well as design a more effective marketing approach to attract them.

**Customization:** The target audience for social media is the exact group of people companies wishes to reach through social media channels. They're the ones who'll be most interested in specific information, products, or services. They are likely to be linked by some shared characteristics, such as demographics and behaviors. On social media, people seek out a variety of information. It's critical to provide more relevant information to the intended audience. Companies can use social media to gather information about their audience's interests, preferences, and behavior in order to provide more relevant content. Customers can use social media to search for a term or filter information based on their needs. This makes the search more efficient because it takes less time and produces more accurate results.

### ***Competing with competitors***

In any business, especially for service-providing companies, it is vital to recognize their own and also their competitors' strengths and shortcomings. It's critical to keep track of how hotels are performing in comparison to other competitors and understand what this means for the brand. Knowing this may give insights into how each brand is perceived by customers and who has the most social media reach and share of voice.

**Being attractive:** Before making a final selection, customers always compare various service providers. They can look over the information provided by hotels and connect

with other users to make the best decision possible. Hotels can use social media to compare themselves to other market competitors and improve their business. They can keep an eye on what other hotels are sharing on social media and aim to be more appealing. Hotels can share information on their social media, which makes them more attractive than other competitors existing in the market. The way hotels present the content regarding their services can directly affect the hotel's attractiveness in customers' eyes. Hotels can work more effectively on the pictures, videos, and other content which they share on social media, and make them as attractive as possible.

**Updating:** Hotels can use social media to say what is new and deliver the most up-to-date information to their guests. For example, during the COVID-19 pandemic, when travel restrictions and rules were continually changing, hotels were able to keep their audiences informed at all times. Furthermore, the most up-to-date information on new products and services, discounts, and special events can be published via social media platforms, allowing customers to stay informed about recent changes. There's also the possibility to monitor when materials are shared on social media, which may be quite useful in that customers can see the date of publishing information and ensure which one is the latest.

### **Visibility**

Social media has evolved into a powerful tool for building brand awareness, interacting directly with customers and the market, launching promotions, updating news, generating leads, monitoring competitors, building links, learning how the market works, and establishing thought leadership. Hotels are now more accessible to people compared to previous forms of marketing. Traditionally, finding information about hotels, products and services, costs, and other information was more challenging. In recent years, hotels can use a variety of platforms to increase their visibility even internationally.

**Making the message visual:** Social media provides opportunities for hoteliers to share information in various forms of text, pictures, videos, links, and a combination of them. Hoteliers believe that adding photos or videos can explain the content better. Furthermore, hotels can provide more detailed information just by sharing various forms of information. Customers can receive information in a variety of formats, and they can get a better visual representation of the services before the actual experience. Social media can feature more appealing designs, sound and images, videos, and so on, all of which increase brand visibility. Experiences

are more valued using social media, and it can motivate customers to spend more time on them.

**Celebrities:** A celebrity endorsement can help a company gain credibility and reach more customers. Celebrity impact refers to a person's ability to influence others. Some hotels work with celebrities in order to attract customers. They might take advantage of the celebrity's popularity and influence to promote their own goods and services. This may help a brand gain a reputation. Celebrities share photos or videos of those hotels or recommend the hotels in the comments. This can help the information to be more visible and also encourages the fans of those celebrities to use the same service provider.

### **Affordability**

Despite the fact that social media covers a wide variety of customers, the cost of using the platforms is relatively affordable. There are platforms that companies and individuals can use completely free of charge, and there are other forms that may cost hotels in order to use them. However, considering the coverage of audiences and also productivity of the platforms, using such social media is cost effective for hotels.

**Low cost:** In comparison to traditional marketing, social media marketing is much less expensive. The money that would have been spent on traditional marketing can now be used for other purposes, such as improving the quality of services and products. Social media, on the other hand, does not completely eliminate all costs. People will be working on content that will be posted on social media. Hotels must budget for the employees who will respond to comments, manage and operate the social media platforms, as well as the costs of training those employees. As a result, hotels should set aside financial resources and staff personnel to respond to negative online comments from consumers on social media networks and other travel websites on a regular basis in order to meet their needs and improve customer satisfaction (W. G. Kim, Lim, & Brymer, 2015).

**Covering wide audiences:** Using social media is one of the most popular internet activities. One of the most significant advantages of using social media is that it allows you to reach a larger audience in a shorter amount of time. People from all around the world may utilize social media platforms like Facebook, Instagram, LinkedIn, YouTube, and so on, which is beneficial to business owners. Hotels may use social media to reach out to a wide range of people and deliver information to them.

### **Post-satisfying customers**

Appropriate responses to online complaints improve customer satisfaction, which increases the likelihood of retaining unsatisfied customers. In addition, fast responses to customers help customers feel important to the firm and develop relationships, both of which are key social media functions (Chan & Guillet, 2011).

**Apologizing and compensating:** Sending a rapid response with an empathizing and apologetic message is a good method to handle customer complaints quickly and efficiently (Park & Allen, 2013).

It occurs when hotels are confronted with dissatisfied guests who leave poor ratings and unfavorable reviews. Hoteliers can use social media to reply to those consumers and develop ways to satisfy them. They can explain why they were unable to provide satisfactory services and attempt to make amends. Depending on the nature of the complaint, hotels aim to satisfy their customers. They may compensate by issuing a refund (wholly or partially), providing a discount for future visits, providing free services, and so on. Hotel managers should create operational manuals on how to respond to online reviews from customers. This is also suggested by Park and Allen (2013) hotel administrators need to devise a strategy for responding to online reviews (W. G. Kim et al., 2015).

**Keeping the contacts:** Social media can provide an opportunity by allowing people to stay in touch with the hotel and communities, participate in online discussions, and keep up with news and current events.

Hotels try to keep the connection with their customers in various ways. They encourage their customers to follow them on social media to keep updated about upcoming discounts and new services offered by hotels. Moreover, more customized information can be shared with them through private messages or email.

**Providing rewards for contribution (points):** It is impossible to overestimate the significance of ratings and reviews. Before making a decision, consumers overview online ratings and reviews just as much as taking personal advice.

Customers can be enticed to share their most recent experiences by offering them incentives. There are some cases where service providers encourage their customers to participate in ratings and reviews. Regardless of whether the feedback is positive or negative, this contribution can be rewarded by the hotels via a discount code or by offering some free services.

### **DISCUSSION AND CONCLUSION**

Social media is a crucial tool in a hotel's marketing strategy. Therefore, this study examined the importance of social media across a variety of social media platforms. The findings, which were supported by interviews and observations, indicated a positive association between the use of social media and customer retention intentions, which is in line with prior research findings (W. G. Kim et al., 2015; Xie, Szymanski, & Liu, 2011).

This research contributes to expanding the existing knowledge about social media and hotels. Most prior studies focused on only one platform to reflect online reviews, such as Trip Advisor. However, the current study takes into account a variety of social media platforms as well as third-party intermediaries like booking.com, Trip Advisor, and Expedia, which is a significant contribution to this research (W. G. Kim et al., 2015).

This research further highlighted the benefits of social media for hotels. Even though social media has a huge impact on hotels' performance, hotels may not be completely aware of all these benefits. This research listed these advantages, which may provide beneficial information to hotels in order to apply these platforms more actively and effectively.

The findings of this study showed that hoteliers believe in the importance of social media in retaining customers, and they actively use these platforms for marketing purposes. They try to use various social media to build a relationship with customers and keep them updated. However, there are some hotels that use only a few social media platforms, or even if they do, they do not actively share information across all of them.

The main advantage of using all social media platforms (instead of just one or two) is that they represent information from/to a wide range of people who may favor different platforms. Furthermore, customers are more likely to combine and employ different cues from various websites in their prepurchase, and they value different opinions (W. G. Kim et al., 2015). Therefore, dealing with various social media provides a better opportunity for customers to find information about hotels that affect their purchase decisions.

Moreover, using various social media platforms is more likely to exhibit a broad understanding of customer behaviors and to have a strong association with hotel performance. However, it is critical for some hotels to be active on social media. Hotels with more bureaucracy may find this process more time-consuming. For example, some chain hotels may require prior approval from the marketing department headquarters before sharing information on so-

cial media. The process may take longer as a result.

### LIMITATIONS

Similar to other research in the field of social science, this study also has several limitations.

The hotel industry was the focus of this study. The data for this research was obtained between June and October 2021, when travel restrictions related to the COVID-19 pandemic were still in place. Some hotels were still closed during this time or were busy reopening, which influenced their refusal to participate in the survey. Connecting with more hotels could have provided more detailed information about the perception of hoteliers toward social media platforms.

### FUTURE RESEARCH DIRECTIONS

This study was entirely qualitative, focusing on hoteliers' perceptions and points of view on the utility of social media for marketing and, in particular, its effects on customer retention. However, doing a further qualitative study comparing the perceptions of both customers and hoteliers with re-

gard to social media would be valuable. This clarifies which elements are more essential to customers in their decision-making, allowing hoteliers to focus their efforts more effectively on those factors.

This study involved only 4 and 5-star hotels since these types of hotels are more quality oriented. Customers visiting luxury hotels might have different criteria than customers of economy hotels when it comes to choosing accommodation. Therefore, the findings of this research cannot be generalized to economy hotels. It would be beneficial to conduct a research study involving economy hotels/hostels, and the findings could be compared with the result of this study to understand the importance of social media in even greater detail.

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