

## CONTENT ANALYSIS OF TRIPADVISOR ONLINE REVIEWS: THE CASE OF VALAMAR RIVIERA HOTELS IN DUBROVNIK

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### **Abstracts**

*Purpose* - From its foundation until today, Valamar Riviera hotels are one of the leaders in the Croatian hotel industry. Their strong positioning on the market is recognized throughout Europe, and this is particularly visible through the high ratings of former guests on social networks. Online reviews have become an excellent source for capturing the entire experience, which is why potential guests looking for accommodation are increasingly inclined to search platforms such as Tripadvisor for past experiences of previous guests. Based on the above, the purpose of this research was to gain insight into the factors that influence the overall experience of the guests of the Valamar Riviera Hotel.

*Methodology* - For the purpose of this research, online reviews of three Dubrovnik's Valamar Riviera hotels were analyzed. Online reviews were scraped from the Tripadvisor platform with the help of the ParseHub software for the period from January 1, 2020 to July 1, 2022, after which a sentimental analysis was performed on a sample of 261 online reviews. Based on the results of the sentimental analysis according to factors and connotation, a cause-and-effect diagram was created.

*Findings* - Obtained empirical results indicate that positive comments from former hotel guests are leading for all three samples. Such results were expected; given that these are hotels that won the Tripadvisor Excellence Award. Former guests of Dubrovnik's Valamar Riviera hotels who wrote online reviews on Tripadvisor about their experience staying at the hotel are mostly women from abroad. Through the sentiment analysis, "Housekeeping" was determined as the most important factor of the overall hotel experience. On the other hand, the largest share of negative particles was determined for the „Other hotel services“, therefore this factor has the greatest negative impact on the eWoM of hotel guests.

*Contribution* - This research contributes to reducing the existing gaps in the literature on hotel experience, by identifying factors that have a negative impact on the eWoM of hotel guests. The findings of this study also provide practical implications based on which hoteliers can improve their strengths and weaknesses in the existing elements of the hotel offer.

**Key words** online reviews, hotel experience, eWoM, Tripadvisor, content analysis

### **INTRODUCTION**

Although travel with the primary purpose of vacation was once intended exclusively for the aristocracy, today it has become a necessary need for almost all people. The direct contribution of travel and tourism to the GDP in 2020 was approximately 4.7 trillion US dollars (Lock, 2022), which means that tourism is a complex phenomenon and driver of the world economy (Laškarin et al., 2022). Due to the expansive development of tourist destinations, competition has arisen in the quality of products and services in the dynamic tourist market with the aim of retaining existing tourists. This was primarily

reflected in the hotel industry, and the main reason for this is the emergence of various social media for booking accommodation, due to which the retention of existing users has become more complex than ever. In the past, one dissatisfied user passed on his negative experience to at least five other people (Tepavčević et al., 2018), while today that number has increased significantly. The use of Web 2.0 applications led to the emergence of the so-called “word of mouth” electronic distribution of information, which is still called eWoM in the literature (Goldsmith & Horowitz, 2006; Purnawirawan et al., 2012). In this way, users who are interested in certain products and services, in this case hotels, Web 2.0 social platforms enable interaction between like-minded people about their past experiences with the aim of making the e-shopping decision-making process easier (Amblee & Bui, 2011). Thus, hotel companies had to face the challenges of managing anonymous and brief opinions of others (Gavilan et al., 2018), given that as many as three quarters of potential guests consider online reviews as a relevant source of information when choosing to purchase appropriate products and services (Gretzel & Yoo, 2008). Due to the publication of publicly available content of reviews, eWoM has gained additional value in the business of hotel companies for all users of internet services. One of the most well-known social platforms in the field of tourism and hospitality is Tripadvisor, which not only encourages interaction between users, but also provides essential information for the management of hotel products and services to determine their strengths and weaknesses in the existing elements of the offer.

Due to the increasing focus of hotel guests on the information provided through social media in making their decision about booking accommodation, the need for researching the experience and eWoM of hotel guests is emphasized. Since Dubrovnik is the only tourist destination in Croatia that has the Tripadvisor award for excellence “Travelers’ choice 2022”, only the Dubrovnik hotel facility was taken into consideration. In addition to the destination category, the same award is also given in the accommodation capacity category, so in online reviews analysis the following hotels were exclusively selected:

- Dubrovnik President Valamar Collection Hotel,
- Valamar Argosy Hotel and
- Valamar Lacroma Dubrovnik Hotel.

The experience and eWoM of hotel guests through their online reviews on Tripadvisor will be examined for the mentioned hotels. Based on the above, the following research question was formulated: “Which elements of the hotel experience have the greatest influence on the negative eWoM of guests?”. The specific objectives of this research are: (a) scraping online reviews from Tripadvisor; (b) analyzing socio-demographic characteristics of former guests; (c) conducting a connotational sentimental analysis of scraped online reviews according to predetermined dimensions; (d) comparing the content of the analyzed online reviews for all three hotels and (e) creating a cause-and-effect diagram based on the negative content of the online reviews of former guests. The findings of this research can primarily be used by experts from the practice of hotel management in order to more easily cope with the competitive challenges of the tourist market. This scientific article is structured in such a way that the introduction is followed by the theoretical framework, methodology, results, conclusion and references.

## 1. THEORETICAL FRAMEWORK

### 1.1 Online reviews and eWoM from Tripadvisor users

Before making a decision about booking an accommodation facility, potential service guests increasingly use social platforms, such as Tripadvisor, in order to gain insight into the level of quality of products and services provided to current hotel guests based on the content of online reviews (Ahani et al., 2019; Morosan & Bowen, 2018; Xu, 2021; Qi et al., 2017; Cantalops & Salvi, 2014; Furner et al., 2022; Lee et al., 2018; Khozaei et al., 2016). Tripadvisor, as the largest travel platform in the world where users can leave desired information about accommodation, restaurants, destinations and various other tourist attractions (Insieme, 2019), provides potential visitors with legitimate coverage in choosing appropriate tourism products or services. The popularity of this platform is evidenced by the fact that more than 500,000 million users around the world visit it monthly in search of relevant information (Insieme, 2019). There are several elements that affect the ranking of a business profile on Tripadvisor, namely:

- Quality, which is synonymous with the average rating of a business entity;
- Time of last review, a recently obtained review has more value compared to reviews from a few years ago and
- Quantity, sum of the number of ratings and reviews.

All the previously mentioned elements are part of the algorithm that determines the positioning of the business profile, in this case hotel facility. Thus, the quality of the hotel facility is quantitatively expressed through the average ratings of online reviews. Based on the above, providing a high-quality hotel experience to the guest is extremely important because it has a direct impact on the guest's connotation of the review on the Tripadvisor social platform. If the guest is not satisfied with the provided hotel service, there is a high probability that such a guest will make private complaints such as spreading negative word-of-mouth criticisms (Ngai et al., 2007), which will be visible to millions of people around the world. Undoubtedly, this negative comment of an unsatisfied guest will have an impact on the perception of potential guests about the accommodation reservation, and thus on the reputation of the hotel itself. So, it is inevitable that comments on social networks have great power in creating public opinion about the way a facility operates. For this reason, it is very important that the management of hotel corporations dedicate themselves as much as possible to determining the factors that distort the collective image of the hotel facility through negative eWoM.

Concept eWOM can be defined as "all informal communications directed at consumers through Internet-based technology related to the usage or characteristics of particular good and services, or their sellers" (Litvin et al., 2008). Therefore, the role of online marketing is the effective management of negative recommendations (De Bruyn & Lilien, 2008) in order to reduce the gaps between the management of the corporation and the service user and prevent the user's potential cancellation of the hotel reservation. Thus, eWoM can have a strong influence on the decision-making process of other potential users, who search for information about a product or service on the Internet (Chevalier & Mayzlin, 2006). As in live communication, there are three basic elements in online communication, namely: the sender (guest), the message and the recipient (hotel

management). Although this relationship appears to be unidirectional, it should always be cyclical. In other words, the hotel management is expected to respond to the message, or rather the online review of a former guest. In that case, the content of the online review actually represents the sender's message primarily for the hotel management. It is important to emphasize that there are various reasons why a former hotel guest decides to write an online review. There are guests who decided to write an online review due to a positive experience that exceeded their expectations, but there are also those who wrote an online review due to extreme dissatisfaction with hotel products and services. It is the second type of reviewers that is dangerous due to the possible creation of a negative image of the hotel facility. Consequently, by analyzing online reviews, it is necessary to identify unfavorable factors of the guests' hotel experience, as the key causes of negative eWoM.

## 1.2. The experience of hotel guests

During their stay at the hotel, guests encounter a large number of different services. The way in which services are provided to guests will affect their satisfaction or dissatisfaction with the overall experience of staying in the hotel (Xu, 2021). As already noted in the previous chapter, there are guests who tend to share their hotel experience on social networks where, depending on the level of service quality, they spread positive or negative eWoM. Kim & Kim (2022) apply the technique of semantic analysis of online reviews by which they determined the following four dimensions of the hotel experience: (a) physical environment, (b) destination, (c) service and (d) reason for travel. Conversely, the most frequently mentioned hotel guest satisfaction factors in online reviews according to Liu et al. (2013) were: (a) transportation comfort, (b) food and beverage management, (c) accessibility of the tourist destination, and (d) value for money. On the other hand, for the purposes of their research, Pourabedin & Migin (2015) modified the aforementioned model, eliminating the benefit dimension in the analysis of online reviews.

A detailed review of the literature revealed that there are only a few studies on the hotel experience, but according to the author's knowledge, not a single study has yet examined the experience of Croatian luxury hotel guests by mining the content of online reviews. Therefore, the authors decided to apply the following dimensions to measure the hotel experience of guests:

- Physical environment,
- Reception,
- Housekeeping,
- Food and beverage,
- Additional content and
- Other hotel services.

The suggested dimensions of the hotel experience are, in fact, all the touch points that the guest encounters from the reservation to the arrival and consumption of products and services. In this context, the physical environment includes all material and tangible things, such as the exterior (Hwang & Ok, 2013; Tüver et al., 2018; Marković et al., 2021a, 2021b), the interior (Wall & Berry, 2007; Marković et al., 2021a, 2021b),

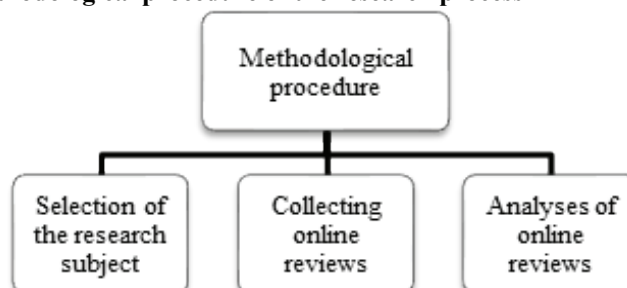
parking (Liu et al., 2013), spatial layout (Lin, 2004; Wakefield & Blodgett, 1994; Wang & Zhang, 2013) and ambience (Karamustafa & Iker, 2020; Lee et al., 2016; Lee et al., 2012; Marković et al., 2021a, 2021b). Reception refers to luggage, concierge, check in, check out, lobby, etc., while the housekeeping dimension includes the level of cleanliness and maintenance of the entire hotel (Li et al., 2013). Given that the food and beverage department generates enormous economic benefits for hoteliers, food and beverage was selected as a dimension in this research. The previously mentioned dimension includes the quality of food and beverages at breakfast, lunch and dinner (Liu et al., 2013) in all gastronomic establishments within the hotel complex.

Additional content refers to elements such as wellness services, diving services and evening programs. The last dimension “other hotel services” represent all those services that are not part of the previously mentioned dimensions. In other words, the “others” would include hotel services such as TV, WI-FI network, etc. All elements together influence the overall experience of guests during their stay in the hotel, therefore they are included as part of the research instrument. Those elements that are not provided at the expected level have a negative impact on the overall experience, and thus on the eWoM of former hotel guests.

## 2. METHODOLOGY

For the purposes of this research, a methodological approach consisting of three steps was applied, which are shown in Figure 1 below for a better understanding.

Figure 1. Methodological procedure of the research process



Source: author's work

The intention of this research was to get a comprehensive picture of the perception of former guests of Croatian hotels using the Tripadvisor platform. It was the Tripadvisor “Travelers’ choice 2022” award that was the main criterion in the selection of online reviews that will be included in the sample. In this research, into consideration were taken the awards given in the following categories: (a) tourism destination excellence and (b) hotel excellence. Only the following three hotels in Dubrovnik satisfy the above criteria: “Dubrovnik President Valamar Collection Hotel”, “Valamar Argosy Hotel” and “Valamar Lacroma Dubrovnik Hotel” located in Dubrovnik”.

The ParseHub software was used to collect, or rather scrape, the content of online reviews from Tripadvisor. The content of reviews from January 1, 2020 to July 1, 2022 was scraped for all three hotels. A total of 261 reviews were analyzed, of which 149 were reviews of the Dubrovnik President Valamar Collection hotel, 64 were reviews of the Valamar Argosy hotel, and 48 were reviews of the Valamar Lacroma Dubrovnik hotel. The content of scraped online reviews was analyzed, according to the connotation (positive and negative) and predefined dimensions of the hotel experience (physical environment, reception, housekeeping, food and beverage, additional content and other hotel services), and the research results were presented in tabular form in continuation. After determining the connotation, the negative content of online reviews was separated and further analyzed, and the obtained results served as the basis for creating a cause-and-effect diagram. The previously mentioned diagram shows the determined causes that influenced the creation of negative eWoM of former hotel guests.

### 3. RESEARCH RESULTS

As already mentioned, an analysis of the content of online reviews was carried out from 2020 to 2022, and a total of 261 online reviews were included in the sample. First, the socio-demographic profile of former guests who wrote reviews about their hotel experience on Tripadvisor will be tabulated below, followed by the results of the content analysis of online reviews about the hotel experience according to connotation.

Table 1: Socio-demographic profile of the hotel guests

Characteristics	Dubrovnik President Valamar Collection Hotel (n=149)		Valamar Argosy Hotel (n=64)		Valamar Lacroma Dubrovnik Hotel (n=48)		TOTAL (N=261)	
	<i>f</i>	%	<i>f</i>	%	<i>f</i>	%	<i>f</i>	%
<b>Gender</b>								
Male	57	38.3	21	32.8	19	39.6	97	37.2
Female	86	57.7	36	56.3	24	50.0	146	55.9
Unknown	6	4.0	7	10.9	5	10.4	18	6.9
<b>Country of origin</b>								
Foreign guests	135	90.6	59	92.2	42	87.5	236	90.4
Domestic guests	5	3.4	1	1.6	2	4.2	8	3.1
Unknown	9	6.0	4	6.2	4	8.3	17	6.5

<b>Company on a journey</b>								
Organised group/friends	4	2.7	5	7.8	5	10.5	14	5.4
Single	7	4.7	2	3.1	2	4.2	11	4.2
Young couple	16	10.7	18	28.1	10	20.7	44	16.9
Family with children	27	18.1	6	9.4	12	25.0	45	17.2
Older couple	0	0.0	1	1.6	1	2.1	2	0.7
Unknown	95	63.8	32	50.0	18	37.5	145	55.6
<b>The time when the journey was made</b>								
Summer	54	36.2	26	40.6	21	43.7	101	38.7
Preseason	37	24.9	16	25.0	12	25.0	65	24.9
Postseason	49	32.9	14	21.9	14	29.2	77	29.5
Winter	7	4.7	8	12.5	0	0.0	15	5.7
Unknown	2	1.3	0	0.0	1	2.1	3	1.2

Source: author's research

Based on the results obtained from the content analysis of online reviews, the socio-demographic profile of former guests of the Dubrovnik Valamar Riviera hotels is presented. Table 1 shows that the sample includes 261 online reviews whose authors were mostly women (55.9%). Also, 37.2% of former guests were male, and only 6.9% of reviewers could not determine their gender. Looking at the gender structure according to the hotel where the guests stayed, it is possible to see that for all three hotels, women were more inclined to write online reviews than men. Specifically, 57.7% of women commented on their hotel experience on the Tripadvisor page of Dubrovnik President Valamar Collection Hotel, 56.3% of women on the Valamar Argosy Hotel page, while 50% of women commented on the Valamar Lacroma Dubrovnik Hotel. In other words, at all three hotels, women made up more than half of the total sample.

The geographical structure of former guests is divided into three groups. The largest number of reviewers were foreign guests (90.4%), while only 3.1% of the sample were domestic guests. Unknown origin was identified in 6.5% of cases. While segmenting the results of the geographical analysis by the hotels where the guests stayed, it was determined that more than 90% of foreign reviewers are represented on the Tripadvisor pages of Dubrovnik President Valamar Collection Hotel and Valamar Argosy Hotel. For the Valamar Lacroma Dubrovnik Hotel, there were the most cases for which it was not possible to determine the origin of former guests (8.3%).

For more than half of the respondents, it was not possible to determine an escort during the trip (55.6%), followed by guests traveling with family (17.2%) and those traveling accompanied by a partner (16.9%), while the smallest number of respondents are older











couples (0.7%). Looking at the values for each hotel separately, it can be seen that in the cases of Dubrovnik President Valamar Collection Hotel (18.1%) and Valamar Lacroma Dubrovnik Hotel (25.0%), the unknown is followed by guests traveling with family, while in Valamar Argosy, the hotel has a larger share of young couples (28.1%).

By analyzing the sample in this empirical research, the basic characteristics of the former guests related to the period of stay in the hotel were defined. It was found that most former guests who commented on their hotel experience stayed in the hotel during the summer (38.7%), while the fewest guests stayed in Dubrovnik hotels during the winter season (5.7%). The postseason is represented by 29.5%, and the preseason by 24.9%.

Table 2 below shows the results of the content analysis of online reviews about the hotel experience of guests according to connotation.

Table 2: Results of the analysis of online reviews about the guest's hotel experience

ELEMENTS OF HOTEL EXPERIENCE	Dubrovnik President Valamar Collection Hotel		Valamar Argosy Hotel		Valamar Lacroma Dubrovnik Hotel		Total by dimensions	
								
Physical environment	89.5	10.5	90.9	9.1	82.1	17.9	87.5	12.5
Reception	77.8	22.2	86.7	13.3	100.0	0.0	88.7	11.3
Housekeeping	95.4	4.6	97.5	2.5	90.3	9.7	94.4	5.6
Food and beverage	91.4	8.6	92.0	8.0	77.1	22.9	88.8	11.2
Additional contents	87.5	12.5	85.7	14.3	60.0	40.0	77.7	22.3
Other hotel services	64.7	35.3	66.7	33.3	50.0	50.0	60.5	39.5
<b>Total by connotation</b>	84.4	15.6	86.6	13.4	76.6	23.4	82.5	17.5

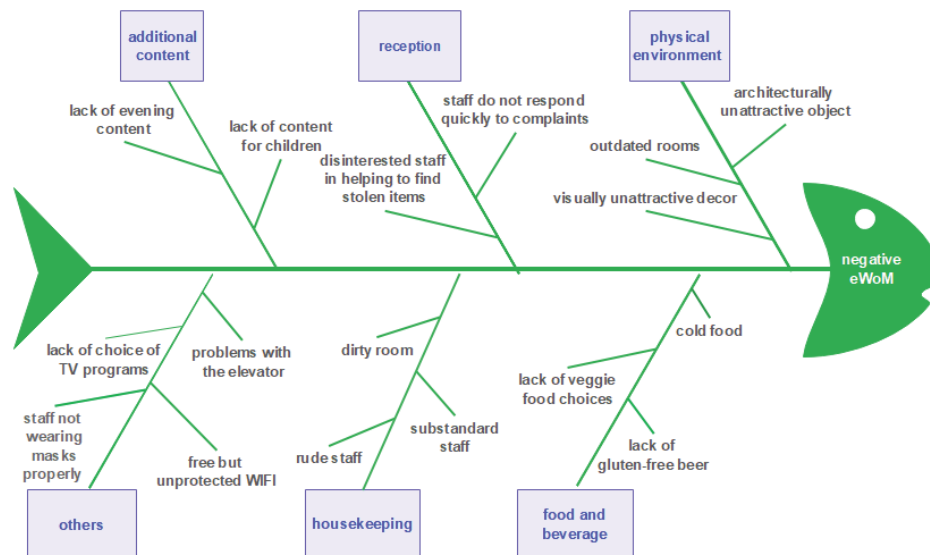
Source: author's research

Based on the sentimental analysis, it was determined that all three hotels have the most negative particles in the dimension "Other hotel services" (39.5%). On the other hand, most positive particles are included in the "Housekeeping" dimension (94.4%). Regardless of the fact that "Housekeeping" is the leading dimension in the overall ranking, by segmenting the share of positive particles according to the name of the hotel, it is evident that for Valamar Lacroma Dubrovnik Hotel the first place was taken by the "Reception" dimension (100%). The overall connotation analysis according to the name of the hotel shows that Valamar Argosy Hotel has the most positive particles (86.6%), followed by Dubrovnik President Valamar Collection Hotel (84.4%), while Valamar Lacroma Dubrovnik Hotel has the smallest share of positive particles (76.6%).



After the sentimental connotation analysis according to the dimensions shown in table 2, an additional analysis of the content of negative online reviews was performed, based on which a cause-and-effect diagram was created (figure 2).

Figure 2: Cause-effect diagram of the guest's hotel experience



Note: others = other hotel services

Source: author's research

By extracting the negative particles obtained from the sentimental analysis of the content of online reviews, a cause-and-effect diagram was created. For the purposes of this research, the negative particles were categorized according to the dimensions of the hotel experience, therefore they represent the fundamental indicators of the negative eWOM of former hotels guests. The biggest problems of negative eWOM from former guests were determined as: visual unattractiveness of the facility, lack of quick reaction of the reception staff in solving problems, lack of choice of vegetarian food and gluten-free beer, lack of evening and children's activities, etc.

## CONCLUSION

Despite enormous competition, the Valamar Riviera hotels and resorts corporation has successfully broken through and maintained itself on the dynamic tourist market in Croatia. It is a corporation that strives to provide its guests with a unique experience when staying in their hotel facilities. The fact that as many as 21 of their hotels received the Tripadvisor "Travels Choice" award in 2022 testifies to Valamar Riviera's business excellence. In the destination of Dubrovnik, the winners of the aforementioned award are as many as three Valamar Riviera hotels, namely: Dubrovnik President Valamar Collection Hotel (five stars), Valamar Argosy Hotel (4 stars) and Valamar Lacroma Dubrovnik Hotel (4 stars), for which an analysis was carried out online review. By synthesizing

the results, an insight into the socio-demographic characteristics of the former guests of the Dubrovnik Valamar Riviera hotels was obtained, as well as the structure of the representation of particles within the dimensions based on their hotel experience. The results of the research indicate that the largest number of analyzed online reviews were written by foreign guests, female, traveling during the summer season. The data on the greater share of women who commented on their hotel experience on Tripadvisor is not surprising, given that the results of the research by Lanin & Smirnova (2020) indicate that women tend to write more frequent and longer reviews compared to men.

Based on the opinions of former hotel guests about the overall quality of the hotel experience expressed in the content of online reviews, the largest number of positive particles was determined within the "Housekeeping" dimension, while the lowest number was determined within the dimension "Other hotel services". By comparing the results according to the name of the hotel, it was established that the highest number of positive particles is represented by the Valamar Argosy Hotel, while the lowest percentage is present at the Valamar Lacroma Dubrovnik Hotel. Taking into account the overall results shown in the cause-and-effect diagram, it is possible to distinguish as negative segments of the hotel business of the Dubrovnik Valamar Riviera hotels that affect the negative eWoM dilapidated rooms and unattractive architectural appearance of the facility. Similarly, Berezina et al. (2015) have found this in their analysis of online reviews. Specifically, they come to the conclusion that physical attributes such as room and furnishing are among the first three most frequently mentioned particles in online reviews that cause guests not to recommend the hotel where they stayed. Likewise, the results of the analysis of online hotel reviews by Barreda & Bilgihan (2013) point to the exceptional importance of tangible elements of a hotel room, such as its interior and bathroom.

Although the results of this study imply the existence of small problems regarding the efficiency of the hotel staff (for example: lack of quick reaction of the reception staff in solving problems), it is crucial for the hotel corporation Valamar Riviera to focus on improving this business segment in order to satisfy the wishes and needs of the guests. In this context, the findings of this study coincide with the findings identified in the study by Ekiz et al. (2012) that bad attitude, misbehavior and lack of knowledge, skill and passion of hotel staff have a negative effect on the attitude of hotel guests expressed through online reviews. The results of the research by Berezina et al. (2015) suggest that hotel employees are a key part of the hotel experience, and thus a driver of positive eWoM. Mohsin & Lockyer (2010) found in their research that the most important hotel attributes are the receptionists, that is, the employees who make the first contact with the guest. Accordingly, the share of negative particles within the "Reception" dimension is extremely worrying. For this reasons, Dubrovnik's Valamar Riviera hotels should adopt another method of staff training that would increase their efficiency in providing services to hotel guests.

There are certain limitations in this research that need to be taken into consideration when generalizing the results. The primary limitation is the short period of time covered in the research, namely from January 2020 to June 2022, so future research should

include all online reviews from Tripadvisor written by former guests of the hotel for better representativeness in the analysis. Another limiting factor is spatial coverage, due to the fact that only online reviews of Dubrovnik hotels of the Valamar Riviera group are included in the sample. In order to gain an in-depth insight into the quality of products and services of all Valamar Riviera hotels, future research is recommended to increase the geographic coverage of the sample, that is, to cover Valamar Riviera hotels from the northern to the southern Adriatic. Researchers are also advised to use other statistical quality control (SQC) tools, such as histograms, control tables, Pareto diagrams, scatter diagrams and control charts, in addition to the Herringbone. In order to expand knowledge and understanding of research concepts, it is also suggested to future researchers that apart from processing the content of online reviews, they also apply the technique of surveying hotel guests.

It is important to emphasize that the mentioned limitations do not reduce the scientific contribution of this research, but the presented results can be useful not only to academic experts, but also to experts from practice who deal with hotel business. The determined negative causes of eWoM allow the management of the Valamar Riviera Hotel to gain insight into the elements of the offer that require quality improvement in order to create long-term relationships with existing guests. In other words, based on the obtained results, the managers of Dubrovnik's Valamar Riviera hotels can get a better idea of the key factors that influence the dissatisfaction and negative eWoM of guests. Given that managers are limited in making certain decisions by budget plans, the results of this research show managers the business segments in which they are lagging, that is, the elements in which it is necessary to invest financial resources as soon as possible in order to raise the quality of the service. Thus, with such an effective understanding of priority elements, hotel managers can make strategic decisions on the use of limited financial resources with the aim of increasing business productivity. In conclusion, the improvement of the quality of the experience will ultimately be reflected in the higher level of satisfaction of the hotel guests, thus there is a possibility of increasing the representation of the positive eWoM of the guests on the Tripadvisor platform.

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