



DOCTORAL THESIS

**EWOM EFFECTS ON BUSINESS
PERFORMANCE IN RURAL TOURISM
ACCOMMODATION**

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Abstract

In the tourism industry, most customer feedback and searches for relevant information take place online. Besides that, information generated by market alone is not enough, as it does not ensure that it will be used or well used. Therefore, it is important to improve understanding of the business consequences of customers' online comments, market intelligence, businesses' online visibility, and management response.

The empirical context for these studies that this thesis comprises is the hospitality industry. For this study, the authors collected information about the establishment (customer comments, management responses, night prices, visibility data (advertising expenditures) on the infomediary website, web presence expertise, number of lodgings, capacity, and rental type) from a leading rural tourism infomediary website, related to French rural tourism establishments (RTE). A complementary survey provided information about the lodging establishments' performance (reputation and profitability) and the market intelligence.

This study assesses the effect of customers' reviews content and volume, market intelligence, and management responses volume on business performance enhancement within the rural tourism industry, and whether market intelligence moderates positively the way that customer reviews volume and management responses volume affect business performance. In addition, this study helps clarify customers' RTE position following their positive experience, reported by their positive online reviews, and to assess the impact of business strategy factors and entrepreneurial behavior factors on positive perceptions of experienced services.

The findings support aspects of previous research, but also provide new insights, on the one hand, by exploring customer online reviews, market intelligence, and

management response, revealing how these factors affect the performance of rural accommodation establishments and, on the other hand, exploring strategic business factors and entrepreneurial behavior factors, revealing how they affect the positive perceptions of services experienced by customers.

The results reveal that tourists' positive global service quality perceptions (GSQP), as reflected in their comments, depend on their dual perceptions of the lodging (LP) and the surroundings (SP). In turn, positive GSQP, market intelligence, and visibility on an infomediary website positively affect business performance. These findings have implications for tourism scholars as well as tourism entrepreneurs, public administrations and tourist accommodation platforms. Specifically, those who, to maximize business performance, track factors that affect tourism service ratings, proactively generate market intelligence and respond to customers, strategically define their business variables, and know how their customers position their business.

These studies identify a "virtuous circle" through the eWOM generated by the clients of rural tourism accommodation, enabling business results, which improves the ability to increase the number of customers and, consequently, the number of messages generated. As it seems logical, the entrepreneur has a key role to transform this source of market information into a continuous improvement of the competitiveness of his offer (relative product quality). The entrepreneurs who show the most interest in the market (Market Intelligence) are those who, thanks to eWOM, take advantage of the business opportunities that arise. If the business succeeds (and the entrepreneur is motivated), new growth opportunities will open with the opening of new accommodation, adding more customers and messages to the business.

Resumen

En la industria del turismo, la mayoría de los comentarios de los clientes y las búsquedas de información relevante se realizan online. Esta información es relevante en turismo tanto para los futuros viajeros como para las empresas turísticas, en particular para los alojamientos de turismo rural en los que se centra esta tesis. Nuestro objetivo es estimar el impacto de los mensajes publicados por los clientes en internet (eWOM) en los resultados de los alojamientos de turismo rural. Hay un efecto positivo del número de mensajes en los resultados empresariales, sobre todo de los mensajes que incluyen contenidos relacionados con la experiencia del cliente en el alojamiento. Este efecto es mayor cuando el empresario o gestor del alojamiento se caracteriza por su esfuerzo para disponer de información del sector y de la competencia a través de publicaciones y foros específicos (inteligencia de mercado) y dedicar tiempo a responder a los mensajes publicados en internet por sus clientes.

Para llevar a cabo esta investigación se recopiló información sobre el alojamiento proporcionada por una plataforma líder en este tipo de alojamientos (comentarios de clientes, respuestas de la gerencia, precios por persona y noche, datos de visibilidad en la plataforma del infomediario, tiempo de presencia en la plataforma, número de alojamientos gestionados, capacidad del alojamiento y modalidad de alquiler de la casa), sobre establecimientos de turismo rural franceses. Esta información se complementó con una encuesta online a los empresarios o gestores de estos alojamientos para conocer su percepción sobre los resultados empresariales alcanzados (reputación, crecimiento, satisfacción y rentabilidad) y su orientación a la inteligencia del mercado.

Este estudio evalúa el efecto del número de opiniones online de los clientes, las respuestas a estos mensajes por parte del gestor del alojamiento y la inteligencia de mercado en la mejora del rendimiento empresarial dentro de la industria del turismo rural. En concreto, si la inteligencia de mercado modera positivamente la forma en que las opiniones de los clientes y las respuestas a estos mensajes por parte del gestor de la empresa afectan el rendimiento empresarial. Además, este estudio ayuda a entender el posicionamiento que los clientes atribuyen a los alojamientos de turismo rural después de su experiencia en el alojamiento, a partir de sus mensajes online. Finalmente, se analiza el impacto de los factores de la estrategia comercial y de la implicación del

empresario o gestor en el número de mensajes positivos publicados por los clientes sobre dichos alojamientos.

Los resultados revelan que las percepciones positivas de calidad de servicio global (GSQP) de los turistas, reflejadas en sus comentarios, dependen de sus percepciones del alojamiento en sí (LP) y del entorno del alojamiento (SP). A su vez, las GSQP positivas, la inteligencia de mercado y la visibilidad en la plataforma del infomediario afectan positivamente a los resultados empresariales. Estos hallazgos tienen implicaciones para los académicos del turismo, así como para los empresarios del turismo, las Administraciones Públicas y las plataformas de alojamiento turístico. Específicamente, los gestores que obtienen los mejores resultados empresariales se caracterizan por rastrear los contenidos de los mensajes publicados que afectan a las calificaciones de los servicios turísticos, generar de manera proactiva inteligencia de mercado, responder a los mensajes publicados por los clientes y buscar de manera activa el aumento del número de mensajes en la plataforma turística.

La tesis identifica un "círculo virtuoso" a través del eWOM generado por los clientes de los alojamientos de turismo rural, que permite retroalimentar los resultados empresariales, lo que mejora las capacidades para aumentar el número de clientes y, en consecuencia, el número de mensajes generados. Como parece lógico, el empresario tiene un papel clave para transformar esta fuente de información del mercado en una mejora continua de la competitividad de su alojamiento (calidad relativa del producto). Los empresarios que muestran más interés por el mercado (Inteligencia de Mercado) son, a su vez, los que mejor aprovechamiento tienen de las oportunidades de negocio que surgen gracias al eWOM. Si el negocio tiene éxito (y el empresario tiene ánimo), se abrirán nuevas oportunidades de crecimiento a con la apertura de nuevos alojamientos, sumando con ello más clientes y mensajes al negocio.

Chapter 1. INTRODUCTION

1.1. Motivation

Both academic researchers and marketers have broadly agreed on the critical role of customer reviews in providing entrepreneurs with customer perceptions of service experiences, especially to improve business performance by enhanced provided services. Entrepreneurs and customers assess information about customer experiences to predict its quality, which affects their notions of their services delivered and their perceived value (Zeithaml, Varadarajan, and Zeithaml 1988). To attract tourists, owners of tourism accommodations must be entrepreneurs and their decisions must improve customer perceived quality and satisfaction, by having online visibility, high customer reviews volume, management responses volume to show that they care with customers perceptions (Pathak et al. 2010, Bronner and de Hoog 2011, Chen, Dhanasobhon, and Smith 2008, Jarvenpaa, Tractinsky, and Vitale 2000, Sweeney, Soutar, and Mazzarol 2012, Walker 2010, Wei, Miao, and Huang 2013, Rose and Blodgett 2016).

Tourists once relied on word of mouth (WOM) from their family, friends, and experts as suggestions to their choice; today they also turn to online or electronic word of mouth (eWOM). In today's social media landscape, customers are increasingly taking charge of creating and communicating information about goods and services. Customers around the world are taking advantage of this opportunity, which allows companies to increasingly use electronic channels to reach customers. With the declining credibility of traditional marketing, the evaluations of companies and their goods or services are becoming increasingly determined by their ability to generate electronic word of mouth (Shankar and Malhotra 2007, Sher and Lee 2009). Therefore, electronic word of mouth offers not only opportunities for customers, but also for businesses, but both parties must overcome the challenges to benefit from these opportunities.

Customers who purchase hospitality offerings thus suffer some anxiety, because they cannot experience the product beforehand (Reisinger 2009). In this context, customer feedback, as reflected in their online reviews, become significantly important, a primary source of information for consumption decisions (Zhang, Wu, and Mattila 2016, Gretzel and Yoo 2008, Murphy and Chen 2014), especially when customers cannot evaluate services before purchase, because accommodation buying process involve a high degree of

pre-purchase information scarcity, and require the customer to experience the offering to ascertain its quality (Wells, Valacich, and Hess 2011, Wirtz, Chen, and Lovelock 2013, Hyun and Han 2015). Thus, online reviews provide a large amount of product information that is perceived as up-to-date, reliable, and trustworthy (Gretzel and Yoo 2008, Bughin, Doogan, and Vetvik 2010, Pai et al. 2013, Sigala, Christou, and Gretzel 2012, Zhang, Wu, and Mattila 2016).

Customers are increasingly faced with the challenge of selecting the most useful and credible information amid the sheer amount of electronic word-of-mouth advertising from a growing number of information sources circulating on the Internet. Companies face the challenge of managing consumer articulations from electronic word-of-mouth. Given the importance of electronic word-of-mouth for consumers and businesses, these challenges are at the heart of this dissertation.

Despite the undeniable relevance in research theory and practice, a complete understanding of the determinants of business performance still constitutes a major challenge. The present research aims to contribute to marketing literature by exploring various determinants of business performance (business reputation and business profitability), like global service quality perceptions, lodging perceptions, surroundings perceptions, customer reviews volume, price, web visibility, web presence expertise, lodging number, capacity, rental type, market intelligence and management responses volume.

Business performance is a multidimensional concept and the relationship between entrepreneurship and performance may depend upon the indicators used to assess performance (Lumpkin and Dess 1996).

1.2. Research objectives

Drawing on the uncertainty reduction theory, consumers tend to gather information in variety of ways, one of which is online reviews, as a risk-reduction strategy when they need to deal with uncertainty regarding the outcome of a purchase decision (Berger and Calabrese 1975, Dellarocas 2003). The information theory (Akerlof, 1970) states that information availability can alleviate information asymmetry problems and in turn reduce consumers' uncertainty. Thus, signaling theory provides a framework for studying conditions of information asymmetry (Akerlof 1970). As a result, one of the first steps in the decision-making process is information search. Moreover, attribution theory predicts that the more product attributes a customer mentions in a review of a product's actual performance, the more credible this reviewer seems (Kelley 1971).

The increased possibility for customers to exchange their opinions, knowledge, and experience with unfamiliar people broadens the availability of eWOM beyond the immediate social circles of individual consumers (Chatterjee 2001). Through eWOM, people can obtain a large and diverse set of opinions from a myriad of customers with experience, or even expert knowledge, about goods or services (Willemssen 2013).

Aware that today's customers use eWOM as a key source of information to assist them in their purchase decisions (Lee and Cranage 2014), entrepreneurs may have the real perceptions of the customers and how they position the services provided.

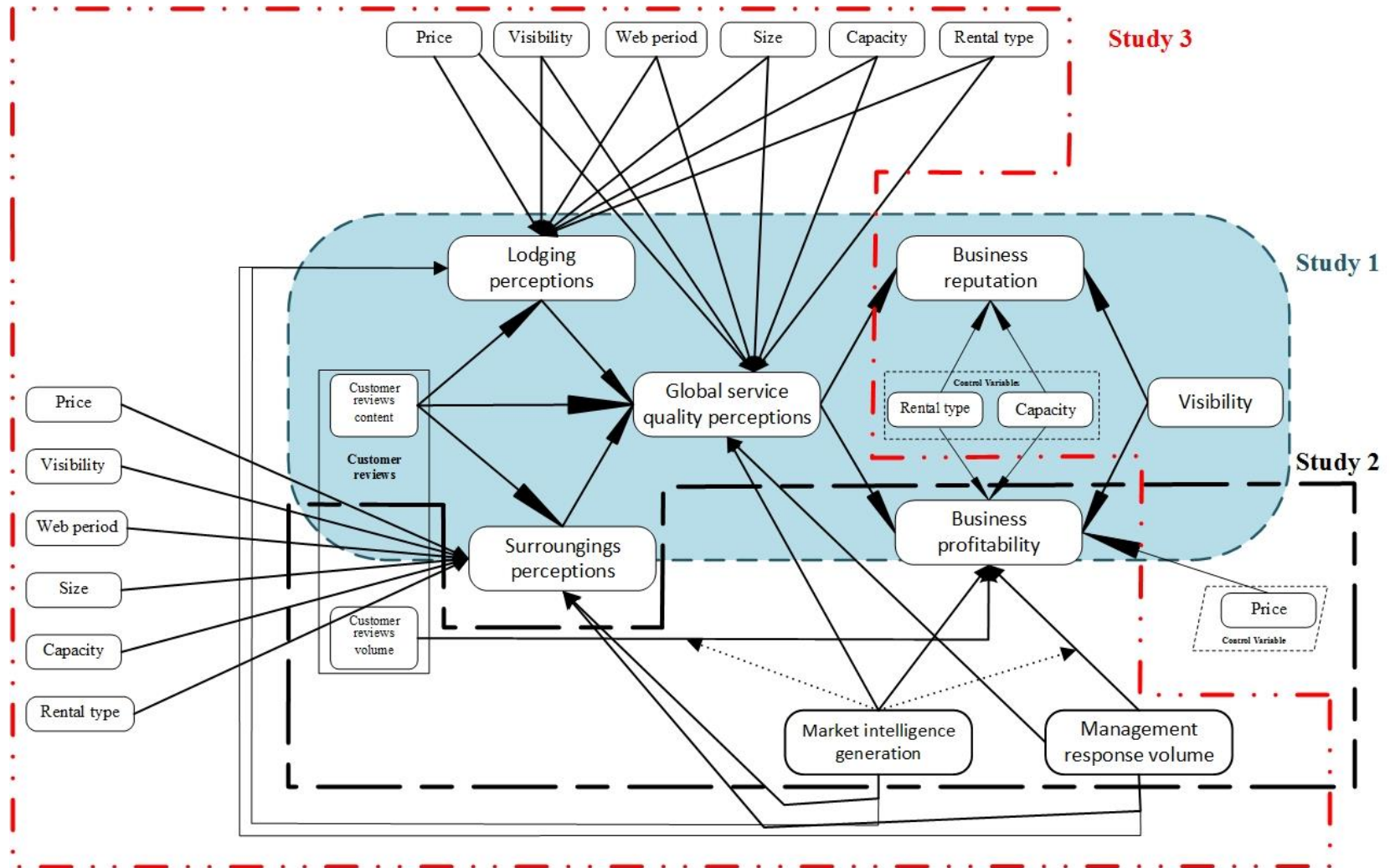
In this context, it is worthwhile to consider the following broad objectives:

1. Understand what drives tourists' positive online comments.
2. Identify which are the key elements that satisfied tourist's employ when evaluating the service delivery.
3. Identify how the tourists form their holistic perceptions of service quality.
4. Determine the influence of tourists' positive perceptions and firms' visibility on business performance.
5. Analyze the impact of customer reviews, management responses, and market intelligence generation on business profitability.

6. Examine the moderating role of market intelligence generation in the relationship between customer reviews and business profitability, and management responses volume and business profitability.
7. Determine the segmentation of rural tourism establishments (RTE) based on customer perceptions and their characterization.
8. Analyze the impact of entrepreneurs' skills variables (market intelligence generation and management response) and business variables (price, web visibility, web presence expertise, number of lodgings, capacity, and rental type) on customer reviews number (tourists' global service quality perceptions, lodging perceptions, and surroundings perceptions).
9. Understand the strategic approach that businesses must apply when dealing with different key service elements to adjust their service delivery decisions to match tourist's needs and wants.
10. Examine the influence of customer reviews on business performance in a dual perspective, namely, the point of view of the customer, as manifested in customer reviews comments, and the point of view of the owners of establishments (i.e., entrepreneurs), as evident in their decisions and ultimately their business performance.

The objectives 1, 2, 3 and 4 are covered in chapter 2 (Study 1), chapter 3 addresses the objectives 5 and 6 (Study 2), the objectives 7 and 8 are studied in chapter 4 (Study 3), finally the objectives 9 and 10 are covered in chapter 5 (general conclusions). Figure 1 shows the general model of this doctoral thesis.

Figure 1. Research general model



1.3. Summary of studies

This dissertation comprises three empirical studies, which are presented in the subsequent chapters. Each chapter is self-contained, with its own abstract, introduction, discussion, and reference list. A summary of each chapter is presented below.

Study 1 analyses the understanding of the business consequences of both customers' online comments and businesses' online visibility. For this study, the authors collected comments and visibility data (advertising expenditures) from a leading rural tourism infomediary website, related to 237 French RTE, as explained in the study methodology. A complementary survey provided information about the lodging establishments' performance (reputation and profitability). The results reveal that tourists' positive GSQP (Global Service Quality Perceptions), as reflected in their comments, depend on their dual perceptions of the LP (Lodging Perceptions) and the SP (Surroundings Perceptions). In turn, positive GSQP and visibility on an infomediary website positively affect business performance. These findings have implications for tourism scholars, as well as for establishment owners trying to track the factors that affect tourists' evaluations of their service provision.

Given this orientation in the first study, *Study 2* examines that market intelligence generation associates positively with taking advantage of feedback contained in customer reviews and maximizing the benefits of management responses. The authors analyze data regarding reviews, responses, market intelligence and business performance from a leading, international, rural tourism booking site, pertaining to the filtered sample of data received with 237 French RTE. The results show that review volume positively affects business performance, whereas the direct effect of management response volume is non-significant. Furthermore, market intelligence generation positively moderates the effects of both customer reviews and management responses.

Given that it is essential that RTE understand their positioning from the customers' perspective, the differentiating characteristics of RTE, as well as which indicators help to support customer satisfaction perceptions, *Study 3* focuses on identifying the RTE segmentation main factors that contribute to positive tourist perceptions (global service quality perceptions, lodging perceptions and surroundings perceptions), measuring the

impact of business variables (price, web visibility, web presence expertise, number of lodgings, lodging capacity and rental type) and entrepreneur variables (market intelligence and management responses volume) in the volume of positive customer reviews volume. For this study, the authors gather the perceptions measures of the satisfying experience of rural tourists in France, they used GSQP, LP and SP from Melo, Hernández-Maestro, and Muñoz-Gallego (2017) study. The results show that the tourists' perception of their satisfactory experience allowed them to position the RTE in two groups, those with *Less Engagement* (195) and those with *More Engagement* (42). With regard to tourist's perceptions, these two segments differed significantly by GSQP, LP, SP, price, web visibility, lodging number, and management responses volume. Moreover, this study reveals that lodging number and web presence expertise predicted all three perceptions dimensions, indicating potential as a useful management tool. However, room rental type and web predict just GSQP and LP.

1.4. Contribution

The aim of the present thesis was to contribute to the existing literature on customer satisfaction by gain a better understanding of the effects of positive customer reviews, management responses, market intelligence generation, and web visibility on business performance, and the effect of business and entrepreneurial variables on global service quality perceptions, lodging perceptions and surroundings perceptions. Specifically, the present research makes contribution to the marketing literature in several respects:

1. Although previous literature has widely studied the effect of customers online reviews, this research addresses a research gap associated with online reviews (comments) about rural lodging establishments; also respond to calls from rural lodging establishments for information about the key drivers of customers evaluations and thus their business performance (business profitability and business reputation).
2. We believe that this is the first work that clarifies how business performance (measured as profitability) depends on market intelligence, volume of positive reviews, and management responses volume, also revealing that the generation of market intelligence moderates both the effects of customer feedback volume and management response volume on business performance.
3. This study provides an exciting opportunity to reveal the existence of RTE segmentation based on customer perceptions and their characteristics, and the impact of the business and entrepreneurial variables on the global service quality perceptions, lodging perceptions and surroundings perceptions.
4. This research extends our knowledge of service industry, by identifying for the first time a “virtuous circle” starting with the message generation drivers that increase the number of customer reviews, improving competitiveness and consequently business results, which increase the number of customers and the inherent number of customer reviews.

From a practical point of view, this dissertation has important implications for the tourism entrepreneurs, public administrations and tourism accommodation platforms. This

research helps rural business owners understand what drives positive online comments and to learn what customers think about provided services. Furthermore, the positive relationship between positive overall perceptions of service quality and business results reveals a clear business opportunity for improvement. That is, businesses should devote special effort to obtaining online customer feedback (comments and ratings) in the pertinent categories, to reduce potential clients' uncomfortable perceptions of risk and increase purchase intentions, whether directly or through the lodging and surrounding categories that explain them. Entrepreneurs who generate market intelligence seem to know how to use collected information to produce better perceptions of and confidence in accommodations, manifested in the form of recommendations, new bookings, and, ultimately, better profitability. It is very important for managers to know how their customers position their RTE based on their perceptions of satisfying experiences. Moreover, it is crucial to know which business and entrepreneurial variables impact positive global service quality perceptions, lodging perceptions and surroundings perceptions.

1.5. Structure of the thesis

This doctoral thesis is structured as follows:

- The study empirical presented in Chapter 2 analyses the business consequences of both positive service quality perceptions, as reflected in customers' online comments, and business online visibility on business performance. Specially, to understand why it is important for scholars and for rural tourism entrepreneurs analyze eWOM customer messages to improve performance and how new technologies help to achieve this performance, through the information offered in their website and through the content of eWOM.
- Chapter 3 presents another empirical study that explores the maximization of the management responses benefits by the positive association of market intelligence generation with taking advantage of feedback contained in customer reviews. This study focuses on customer reviews, management responses and business performance.
- Chapter 4 focuses on the customers perceptions-based RTEs' segmentation and their characterization, and explores the relationship between market intelligence, management responses, and business performance with customer reviews. Finally, the thesis concludes with Chapter 5 which presents the insights gained from this research and provides additional details on the future research agenda.

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**Chapter 2. SERVICE QUALITY PERCEPTIONS, ONLINE
VISIBILITY, AND BUSINESS PERFORMANCE IN RURAL
LODGING ESTABLISHMENTS**

2.1. Introduction

Word of mouth has grown more powerful with the advent of the Internet (Hennig-Thurau et al. 2004, Mauri and Minazzi 2013). For tourism providers in particular, customer feedback and searches for relevant information largely take place online, on platforms such as infomediary websites, social networking sites, blogs, forums, or microblogs like Twitter (Nieto, Hernández-Maestro, and Muñoz-Gallego 2014, Racherla, Connolly, and Christodoulidou 2013, Tham, Croy, and Mair 2013, Xiang et al. 2015). Information provided through these channels tends to be accurate, critical, relevant, and timely, as well as reflective of customer voice, so rural tourism establishment owners should not underestimate its impact (Filieri and McLeay 2013, Xiang et al. 2015).

Although extensive analyses investigate online customer reviews of goods (Barnesa and Jacobsen 2014, Reichelt, Sievert, and Jacob 2014, See-To and Ho 2014, Tseng and Kuo 2013), and services (Kim and Hardin 2010, Litvin and Hoffman 2012, Nieto, Hernández-Maestro, and Muñoz-Gallego 2014), studies of tourists' online reviews remain relatively scarce. A better understanding of these interpersonal influences would have great value for the firms in this sector (Nieto 2014). Therefore, we seek to determine which factors drive comments in online reviews, using a content analysis codification. Then we analyze how such comments contribute to positive global evaluations and affect the business performance of French rural lodging establishments, in parallel with the influence of the rural lodging establishment's visibility on an infomediary website.

To (1) identify the main factors that contribute to positive tourist perceptions, (2) measure the contributions of these perceptions to business performance, and (3) assess the influence of visibility on an infomediary website on business performance, we gathered data about rural tourism establishments from Toprural, a rural tourism infomediary website (now part of HomeAway Spain, S.L.). We also conducted a survey to gather information about the business performance of each lodging establishment in the sample. The findings help fill the research gap associated with online reviews (comments) about rural lodging establishments; they also respond to calls from rural lodging establishments for information

about the key drivers of customer evaluations and thus their business performance. Our proposed model integrates customers' (online comments) and owners' (web visibility and business performance) input at the level of the lodging establishment; it accordingly offers the potential for replication outside the rural tourism industry, because the model variables can be applied to other services too.

After a brief discussion of rural tourism and rural lodging establishments in the next section, we outline the importance of extrinsic cues, and particularly online customer reviews (comments), for services and the rural tourism industry. Next, on the basis of our literature review, we derive hypotheses to detail the relationships among online comments about a particular establishment, its visibility on an infomediary website, and its business performance. We specify our database, sample profile, and measures, then outline the results. Finally, we present some conclusions, implications, study limitations, and possible research extensions.

2.2. Conceptual background

2.2.1. Tourism lodging establishments

In rural and low-income countries and regions that previously have relied heavily on agriculture and natural resource extraction, modern tourism provides the dual advantages of generating employment and income while also promoting local cultural heritage and traditions (WTTC 2016). That is, rural lodging establishments improve the quality of life and contribute to the economic rehabilitation of rural areas, because they help decrease underemployment in the rural sector and increase family incomes (Fotiadis, Vassiliadis, and Piper 2014, Hernández-Maestro and González-Benito 2014, Park, Doh, and Kim 2014, Santana-Jiménez et al. 2014).

Although no consensus definition of rural tourism exists, we consider it tourism located in rural areas, or the functional countryside, built on typical features of the rural world, such as small buildings and settlements, businesses owned by local families, open spaces, contact with nature and the natural world, an emphasis on varied cultural heritages and traditional practices, a traditional character, local controls, and a view toward the long-term benefits of the local community (Barbu 2013, Tolstad 2014). Therefore, rural tourism includes both tourism activities (e.g., accommodation, programs, basic services, supplementary services) and other economic activities (mainly agriculture, but also traditional occupations) (Aoki 2014, Kizos and Iosifides 2007). It develops in close connection with the local economy, which leads to interdependence between tourism activities and the local economy (Hernández-Maestro and González-Benito 2014). According to Pierret (2012), rural tourism provides visitors with authentic, traditional experiences that reflect the essence of rural life and integrate rural experiences and rural activities with human-made facilities and rural accommodations. The wide variety of rural lodging facilities includes hotels, hostels, and houses located on farms, in small towns or the countryside. We also note two general categories of facilities: those that rent individual rooms (houses, hostels, and hotels) and those that rent the entire facility or house (Hernández-Maestro, Muñoz-Gallego, and Santos-Requejo 2007).

2.2.1. Extrinsic cues in services

Services are dominated by intangible attributes that are difficult to assess prior to purchase, which creates a significant purchase risk (Wirtz, Chen, and Lovelock 2013). Information asymmetries arise due to prepurchase information scarcity and postpurchase information clarity (Kirmani and Rao 2000, Wells, Valacich, and Hess 2011). Customers who purchase hospitality offerings thus suffer some anxiety, because they cannot experience the product beforehand (Reisinger 2009). That is, from an information economics view, tourism services are experience products: They cannot be evaluated before purchase, involve a high degree of prepurchase information scarcity, and require the customer to experience the offering to ascertain its quality (Wirtz, Chen, and Lovelock 2013, Wells, Valacich, and Hess 2011). Customers thus search for information, which is relatively difficult and costly to obtain (Mudambi and Schuff 2010). To reduce their uncertainty (though it cannot be eliminated completely), they try to mitigate their information asymmetry, reduce transaction risks and search costs, and identify an offering that best fits their preferences (Ba and Pavlou 2002).

Signaling theory provides a framework for studying conditions of information asymmetry (Akerlof 1970). Customers use cues (i.e., signals) to make more accurate assessments of quality when faced with limited information about a product (Akerlof 1970, Shen, Chiou, and Kuo 2011, Biswas, Dutta, and Biswas 2009). If they have incomplete information (i.e., lack intrinsic cues), they make inferences based on extrinsic cues that are readily available and easy to evaluate (Zeithaml, Varadarajan, and Zeithaml 1988, Wells, Valacich, and Hess 2011). Extrinsic cues—that is, product-related attributes that are not inherent to the product being evaluated—are especially important to customers who search actively for information processing shortcuts or heuristics to help them evaluate experience goods (Baker, Grewal, and Parasuraman 1994). Particularly if they suffer from an information overload, customers use heuristic processing to reduce their cognitive strain when forming judgments (Malhotra et al. 1994, Mitra 1995, Lee, Law, and Murphy 2011, Zhang, Wu, and Mattila 2016). They thus rely on combinations of product information (i.e.,

intrinsic attributes) and signals (i.e., extrinsic attributes) to evaluate product quality (Richardson, Dick, and Jain 1994, Hu, Zhang, and Pavlou 2009).

Tourists can gather such signals and cues from others' behaviors, which they use to understand the decision frame (Matzat 2009). That is, they use a few attributes to infer perceived quality (Huertas-Garcia, Laguna García, and Consolación 2014). Of the various types of extrinsic cues available to tourists, we focus on online customer reviews.

2.2.2. Online customer reviews

Online customer reviews are informal communications that feature user-oriented information about the characteristics, ownership, or usage of a good or service (Pan, McLauren, and Crotts 2007, Park, Lee, and Han 2007). They describe customer experiences, evaluations, and opinions, driven by the customers' own perceptions and emotions (Hyun and Han 2015, Söderlund and Rosengren 2007). Tourists write their online reviews for various reasons, including concern for others (altruistic sharing of experiences), for social interaction (to gain social approval by demonstrating their good purchase decisions), for self-enhancement (recognition as an expert), to help the company (reciprocity for a good experience), or to exert collective power (negative comments to punish companies) (Chena, Fay, and Wang 2011, Gretzel, Yoo, and Purifoy 2007, Söderlund and Rosengren 2007, Tian 2013). Many people also enjoy sharing their rural tourism experiences and expertise with others, such that reviews represent one of the pleasures of tourism (Litvin, Goldsmith, and Pan 2008, Ring, Tkaczynski, and Dolnicar 2014).

Previous literature also suggests that online customer reviews are a primary source of information for consumption decisions (Gretzel and Yoo 2008, Murphy and Chen 2014, Zhang, Wu, and Mattila 2016), because they provide a large amount of product information that is perceived as up-to-date, reliable, and trustworthy (Bughin, Doogan, and Vetvik 2010, Gretzel and Yoo 2008, Pai et al. 2013, Sigala, Christou, and Gretzel 2012, Zhang, Wu, and Mattila 2016). The reviews that customers post online also are available for long periods of time and may be consulted by purchasers at any time (Breazeale 2009, Buttle 1998, Mauri

and Minazzi 2013). This trend is especially significant for tourism services (Öğüt and Onur Taş 2012), and specifically for rural tourism, which is a high-involvement purchase (Cantallops and Salvi 2014, Nieto, Hernández-Maestro, and Muñoz-Gallego 2014, Ye et al. 2011). Therefore, for rural tourists, online customer reviews can help mitigate their information asymmetry, reduce transaction risks, and encourage trust in sellers (Ba and Pavlou 2002). They also reduce the search costs associated with identifying a product that best fits the tourist's preferences (Chen and Xie 2004).

Attribution theory predicts that the more product attributes a customer mentions in a review of a product's actual performance, the more credible this reviewer seems. Credibility should increase confidence in the accuracy of the review, leading other consumers to believe that the product will have the attributes mentioned in the review. Such reviews also are more persuasive for the purchase decision process (Lee and Youn 2009, Mudambi and Schuff 2010). Several other elements of a review can provide important information to readers too, including the date it was posted, the reviewer's profile, rating methods (Likert scale, number of stars), the presence of pictures or videos, and comments. Comments are unstructured text, often with newly coined phrases (i.e., text speak), which tend to contain nuanced views of the services (from the writers' point of view) that cannot be expressed using just ratings (Ghose and Ipeirotis 2006).

Service providers need to analyze these comments themselves (Nonnecke, Andrews, and Preece 2006, Pai et al. 2013), because the content of the comments can affect performance. Prior studies have investigated the characteristics of online consumer reviews, including the elaborateness of the comments (e.g., counting words) (Chevalier and Mayzlin 2006, Mudambi and Schuff 2010) and their readability (Liu and Park 2015, Mauri and Minazzi 2013). Comments also may be analyzed to identify which service elements have driven the consumers' positive experiences (Barreda and Bilgihan 2013). This study focuses on that latter assessment.

2.2.3. Positive service quality perceptions as reflected in online comments

For services, online reviews, and thus online comments, are primary indicators of perceived service quality (Racherla, Connolly, and Christodoulidou 2013). They include both positive and negative aspects of the service experience (Stringam and Gerdes 2010). In a tourism setting, positive comments tend to refer to service elements such as sleep quality, cleanliness, amenities, or decoration (Barnesa and Jacobsen 2014, Barreda and Bilgihan 2013, Filieri and McLeay 2013). Furthermore, tourism research focused on perceived quality and satisfaction identifies two overriding, key dimensions: the establishment and the surroundings, including complementary offers, local infrastructure, and attractions (Hernández-Maestro and González-Benito 2014, Pandža Bajš 2015, Polo Peña et al. 2014). On the basis of this collected prior research, we propose:

Hypothesis 1: In the comments provided in online reviews, tourists' positive GSQP of a particular rural establishment reflect their perceptions of the (a) LP and (b) SP.

2.2.4. Positive service quality perceptions in online comments and their effects on performance

Perceived quality and satisfaction, usually strongly linked, are cornerstones of marketing, because of their capacity to generate positive effects for the organization, such as customer retention and profitability (COȚIU 2013). The well-established, positive relationship between perceived quality/satisfaction and profitability also applies in rural tourism. When customers perceive differences in the quality of rural tourism goods and services, those differences also affect the establishments' performance levels (Petroman et al. 2013).

For example, online reviews work as signals, so positive reviews increase readers' awareness and improve customers' attitudes and trust. Therefore, they enhance the firm's reputation, which enables it to charge price premiums and achieve increased sales and profitability (Chen, Dhanasobhon, and Smith 2008, Jarvenpaa, Tractinsky, and Vitale 2000, Sweeney, Soutar, and Mazzarol 2012, Vermeulen and Seegers 2009, Yacouel and Fleischer 2012, Ye, Law, and Gu 2009). We consider positive online reviews, and particularly positive comments, especially significant profitability determinants for rural tourism, which

is a niche product without large-scale marketing campaigns. In these settings, customers rely heavily on what other consumers have to say, to assess these experience products with their uncertain quality (Yang et al. 2012). The highest rated businesses also usually appear first in accommodation review lists online, and positioning on such lists is a strong predictor of tourists' use of information in the online comments. Therefore, rural establishment owners assert that positive comments are relevant for them, because "good comments lead to good sales" (Gössling and Lane 2014). In turn, we propose:

Hypothesis 2: Positive GSQP, contained in comments, positively influence a rural lodging establishment's (a) business reputation and (b) profitability.

2.2.5. Web Visibility and Business Performance

In our study setting, the rural lodging establishment's visibility on an infomediary website refers to how visible it is to readers of customer reviews sites, which the establishment can manipulate to influence buying behavior (Bronner and de Hoog 2011). That is, this visibility on an infomediary website depends directly on the amount of money an establishment owner allocates to ensure the company's appearance in the top results on an infomediary's website (Pergelova, Prior, and Rialp 2008, Tseng, Kuo, and Chen 2014). Higher online visibility, achieved through greater visibility on an infomediary website, should encourage tourists to pay more attention to the positive features of the establishment (Nieto, Hernández-Maestro, and Muñoz-Gallego 2014). Being well positioned in the results of an Internet search is often an important choice criterion for customers, similar to brand recognition (Smithson, Devece, and Lapiedra 2011). From a resource-based view, online visibility is also a differentiating factor that should lead to superior organizational performance, because it can attract new tourists and increase occupancy rates (Smithson, Devece, and Lapiedra 2011). Consequently, we propose:

Hypothesis 3: A rural lodging establishment's greater visibility on an infomediary website positively affects its (a) business reputation and (b) profitability.

2.3. Methodology

To identify factors that might explain the satisfying experience of rural tourists in France, and thus contribute insights for improving the business performance of establishments that provide rural tourism services, we combined qualitative and quantitative data analyses. We applied content analyses to categorize all online customer comments, using NVivo10 qualitative data analysis software. Thus, we discovered what kinds of thoughts satisfied rural tourists had about the rural tourism service provided, which can help rural tourism establishment owners improve the services they provide. To gather the business performance measures, we used an online questionnaire that revealed the establishment owners' perceptual measures. We analyzed these data with SPSS 21 quantitative data analysis software. Finally, for each rural lodging establishment, we merged information about the visibility on an infomediary website (provided by Toprural), the frequencies for each key comment category (from the qualitative analysis), and the performance measures (from the online questionnaire), then ran the model using SmartPLS 2.0.M3 (Ringle, Wende, and Will 2005).

2.3.1. Data collection

The data collection process consisted of three phases: in-depth interviews with rural tourism experts, analyses of rural tourists' online comments data published on Toprural, and an online survey of rural establishment owners to gather their perceptions of their business performance. First, with in-depth expert interviews, we sought to understand the sector, the role of the Internet, and what type of research would be most useful for rural tourism.

Second, we gathered data about the online comments, ordered by country and establishment, from Toprural (www.toprural.com), a specialized, leading site for independently owned rural accommodations in southern Europe (Spain, France, Portugal, Italy, and Andorra), which also has a strong presence in central Europe (Austria, Germany, the Netherlands, and Belgium). We chose to gather data for establishments in France, because it ranks highest in international tourism arrivals (UNWTO 2014). We selected and ordered the comments about French establishments, according to the ratings provided by

the customers (1–5) during the period 2008–2010. For this analysis, we note that customers with moderate opinions are less likely to express their opinions, and star ratings usually exhibit truncated distributions, such that most comments indicate positive assessments (Chevalier and Mayzlin 2006, Talwar, Jurca, and Faltings 2007, Racherla, Connolly, and Christodoulidou 2013, Dellarocas and Narayan 2006). Therefore, in line with prior literature (Chevalier and Mayzlin 2006, Hu, Zhang, and Pavlou 2009, Pathak et al. 2010, Nieto, Hernández-Maestro, and Muñoz-Gallego 2014, Racherla, Connolly, and Christodoulidou 2013, Stringam and Gerdes 2010), we selected customer perceptions of good service, as indicated by ratings (4–5), and identify positive customer comments.

Third, we used the owners' perceptions of their performance, measured on a seven-point agreement scale. Prior research on rural tourism shows that most rural lodging establishments are small, family businesses, located in areas that suffer economic and demographic constraints, often due to agricultural production declines, and they enter the tourism industry in response to government incentives (Hernández-Maestro, Muñoz-Gallego, and Santos-Requejo 2009). Because respondents represent small firms, whose entrepreneurship reflects the characteristics and choices of the establishment owner, we chose to use the establishment owners' perceptions of their performance (Buhalis 1996, 1999, Buhalis and Main 1998, Middleton and Clarke 2001, Nieto, Hernández-Maestro, and Muñoz-Gallego 2014, Narangajavana, Garrigos-Simon, and Gil-Pechuan 2013). This approach is reasonable, because it is difficult to obtain objective performance measures, and prior evidence cites a positive relationship between owners' perceptions of performance and customers' evaluations (Nieto, Hernández-Maestro, and Muñoz-Gallego 2014). The survey items were adapted from Cooper and Artz (1995), Covin, Prescott, and Slevin (1990), Hmieleski and Corbett (2008), and Walter, Auer, and Ritter (2006).

To collect performance data, we started with a pilot test with 10 randomly chosen establishments, using telephone surveys with establishment owners. We thus confirmed that establishment owners were appropriate respondents, ensured the discriminatory power of the questionnaire, and confirmed the comprehensibility of the questions. We also made a few minor adjustments to the questions, on the basis of their responses.

Our initial sample consisted of 10,047 comments about 2,275 rural lodgings, comprising 614,009 words, posted in 2008–2010. We filtered these data by eliminating any establishments that lacked complete information, duplicate comments, or blank comments, for a filtered sample of 1,618 establishments (71.12%), with a total of 8,628 comments (85.88%). As expected, the vast majority of those comments were positive (i.e., 8,224, or 95.32%). For this filtered sample, we created a separate website to collect survey data from the rural establishment owners. Specifically, we granted rural establishment owners’ access to an online questionnaire, through an e-mail that contained a password to enable them to access the website, between May 28–June 8, 2012. Following the filtering process of study 1, it was possible to use 237 of the responses received from rural establishment owners, which matched 3,490 positive comments, on which this research focuses. These data constitute our final sample.

Table 1. Sample characteristics

Number of rural lodging establishments	237
Customer review volume	3,490
Customer review volume per establishment	14.73
Average price per night and person (€)	26.96
Management response volume	196
Management response volume per establishment	0.83

Toprural also offers four levels of promotions that establishments can pay to ensure their appearance on the site: exclusive, prestige, gold, and silver. We excluded the exclusive level from this study, because it represents less than 1% of establishments in the database.

2.3.2. Measures

Four coders followed a method proposed by Miles and Huberman (1984) to select an initial sample of 50 online customer comments and identified recurring themes, keeping

an open mind but also relying on their knowledge of prior research and theory (O'Connor 2010). They iteratively evaluated and examined each comment, with codes allocated to each customer comment; during this process, the coders frequently examined any disparities in their judgments to reach consensus.

In this process, we also established a dictionary of terms in the eight languages (English, Portuguese, Spanish, French, German, Dutch, Italian, and Catalan) that appeared in the online customer comments, by relying on NVivo10 software. The coding assessment was content oriented, focused on the analysis of information provided in each customer comment. Then, we merged the codes into 16 overall categories, as detailed in Table 2.

Table 2. Category description

Categories	Description
Lodging perceptions (LP)	
Multimedia	If Internet and information was available for clients at the establishment, and if photos, movies, images, email, and videos were available on the Internet
Cleanliness	If the facilities are clean
Temperature	If the house has appropriate temperature
Information	If the information, suggestions, and indications are helpful, present, and sufficient, and complaints are resolved by the staff.
Decoration	If the establishment has good decoration
Equipment	If the establishment is well-equipped
Space	If the establishment has adequate space
Surroundings perceptions (SP)	
Activities	If there are activities in the area
Environment	The nature, the environment in which the property is located
Seasonality	If the season is suitable to visit the property, climate
Access	If the roads are good, easy access
Distance	If the accommodation is at an adequate distance
Global service quality perceptions (GSQP)	

Host	Feeling welcomed, cared for by the owners and other staff
Satisfaction	Feeling satisfied with the rural lodging
Rest	Feeling tranquility, possibility to rest, sleep quality
Comfort	Feeling comfortable in the establishment

In turn, the coding method supported further evaluations of the relationships among categories, how these relationships link in a hierarchical order, and their relations to the business performance perceptions expressed by the rural establishment owners. We present these variable measures in Table 3.

Table 3. Variable definitions

Variable		Measure
Online customer comments (content categories)		For each establishment, number of online customer reviews in each of the 16 categories (Table 2) rated 4 or 5 on a 5-point Likert scale. Ratings represent individual scores assigned by customers, taken from Toprural
	Business reputation	Owner's perception, 7-point Likert scale (1 = "very bad," 7 = "excellent"): <ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Customer satisfaction with the establishment - Establishment's public image
Business Performance	Business profitability	Owner's perception, 7-point Likert scale (1 = "very bad," 7 = "excellent"): <ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Establishment's profitability - Establishment's reservation growth 7-point scale (1 = "strongly disagree," 7 = "strongly agree"): <ul style="list-style-type: none"> - I am satisfied with the income obtained by the business.
	Web Visibility	Expenditures by establishment owner for a promotion on Toprural: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Prestige (most expensive) - Gold - Silver (least expensive)
Control Variables	Capacity	Number of beds
	Rental type	Dichotomous variable: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> - 1 for rooms rental type (houses, hotels, and hostels)

To determine establishment owners' performance perceptions, we requested that they indicate the status of their rural lodging establishment on a 1–7 scale (1 = “very bad” to 7 = “excellent”) in terms of profitability, growth in the number of reservations, customer satisfaction, and public image of the establishment. They also responded to a 1–7 agreement scale (1 = “strongly disagree” to 7 = “strongly agree”) regarding whether they were satisfied with their income from the business. We conducted an exploratory factor analysis (EFA) to consolidate the questions and facilitate their interpretation. All the questions achieved discriminant validity and loaded well in the EFA (as we show subsequently in Table 4), so we retained two constructs: reputation and profitability.

We also included two control variables: rural tourism establishment capacity, measured as the number of beds, and type of rental, which is a dichotomous variable (rental of a room or of the whole house).

Finally, at the establishment level, we combined owners' perceptions of their business performance with visibility on the infomediary website, the control variable (establishment capacity and rental type) data retrieved from the Toprural database, and the number of positive comments posted on Toprural for each establishment in each category.

2.4. Results

First, with the qualitative content analysis, we identified the 16 main themes that tourists mention when they evaluate their rural establishment experiences positively in online comments. These 16 categories can be further grouped hierarchically into three latent variables: LP (seven categories), SP (five categories), and GSQP (four categories) (Figure 2). LP pertain to information (quality of the information provided by the establishment and attention to complaints), temperature (appropriateness of the temperature at the establishment), cleanliness, decoration, and multimedia (Internet availability and intensity of the establishment's online presence). SP involve seasonality, environment (where the establishment is located), and access (good and easy). These factors in turn determine the tourists' GSQP (host/feeling welcomed, satisfaction/feeling satisfied, comfort/feeling comfortable, rest/feeling tranquil, possibility to rest, sleep quality).

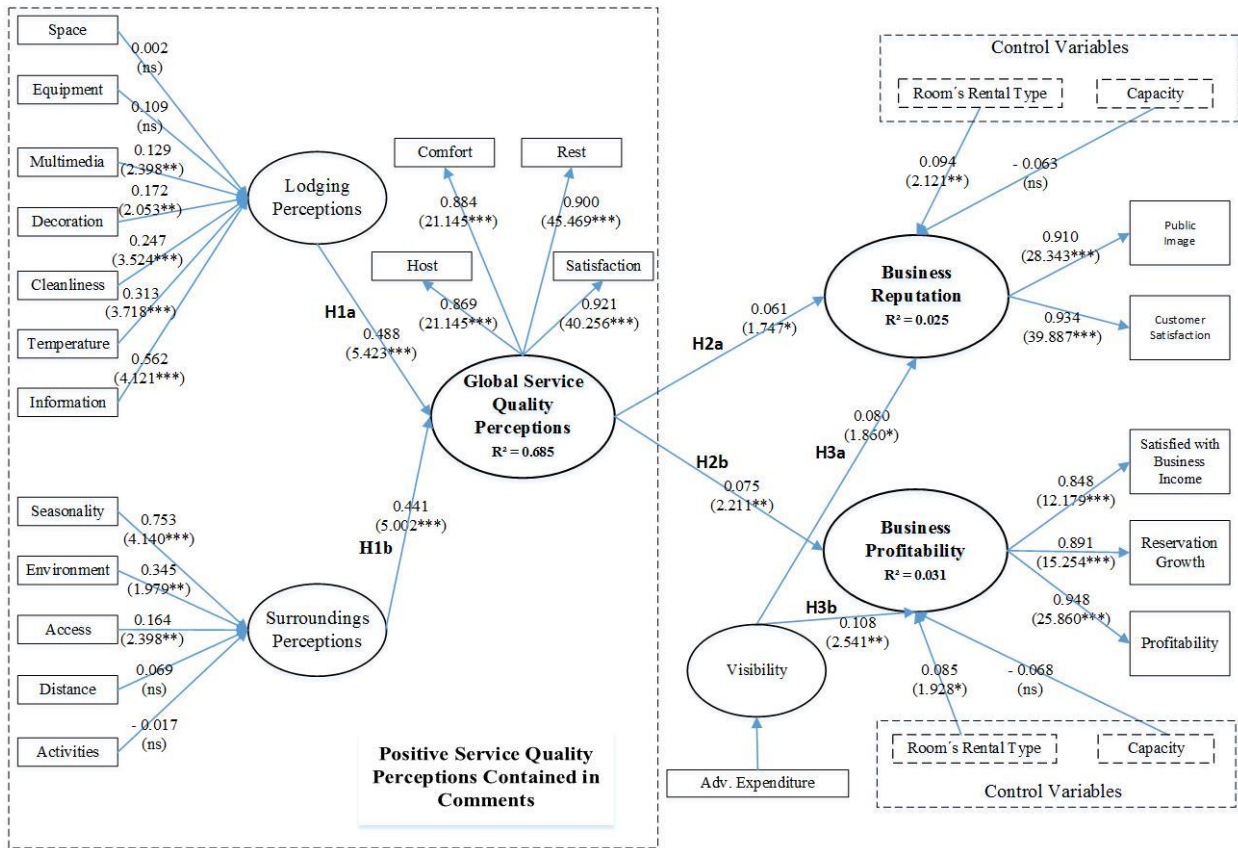
Surprisingly though, tourists' LP exhibited a non-significant relationship with the space and equipment categories, and SP did not have a significant relationship with the distance and activities categories. In detail, tourists' LP explained variability in the five major categories to the following extents: 0.562 for information, 0.313 for temperature, 0.247 for cleanliness, 0.172 for decoration, and 0.129 for multimedia. Their SP explained variability in three major categories: 0.753 for seasonality, 0.345 for environment, and 0.164 for access.

Second, our analysis of the positive evaluations in the online customer comments reveals a global construct, GSQP, that reflects perceptions resulting from a global evaluation of the establishment and indicates that the establishment fulfills basic requirements. Regarding the effects of LP and SP on GSQP, we found that both have similar and significant positive influences, 0.488 (5,423) and 0.441 (5,002), respectively, consistent with H1a and H1b. In the proposed model, from tourists' perspective, SP and LP explain 68.5% of the variance in GSQP.

Third, the business performance factors we identified can be classified as business reputation and business profitability. Both exhibited excellent composite reliability, of

0.919 and 0.925, respectively (Table 4 and Figure 2). Tourists' GSQP also achieved excellent composite reliability (0.941), and they positively affected business performance, measured as both business reputation (H2a) and profitability (H2b). Visibility on the infomediary website positively affected business performance too, such that business reputation and profitability both increased with greater visibility on the infomediary website, in support of H3a and H3b (Figure 2).

Figure 2. Model 1 with standardized path estimates



Notes: Significance of path estimates is shown in parenthesis.

* $p < .1$. ** $p < .05$. *** $p < .01$. ns = non-significant.

Among the control variables, we confirmed prior suggestions that a rooms rental type (vs. whole house rental type) achieves better performance. This outcome might arise because owners who rent single rooms in their establishments, compared with those who rent the whole house, devote more time and effort to their businesses. Capacity instead has a non-significant effect on both reputation and profitability.

Finally, the results of the reflective construct assessment in Table 4, apart from revealing composite reliability ($\rho_c > .7$), they show average variance extracted $> .5$, significance of the outer loadings, and discriminant validity. That is, the square root of each construct's average variance extracted is greater than its highest correlation with any other construct (Hair, Hult, et al. 2014). Therefore, we confirm the reliability and validity of the construct measures and affirm the suitability of including them in the model (Hair, Hult, et al. 2014). Regarding the formative constructs, when we executed formal detection tolerance and variance inflation factor analyses, we found no multicollinearity among the indicators. The model thus achieved predictive relevance.

Table 4. Reflective construct assessment

Latent variable	Indicators	Outer loadings	t-Value	Average variance extracted	Composite reliability	Indicator reliability	Cronbach's Alpha	Discriminant validity
GSQP	Host	0.900232	21.145	0.799239	0.940895	0.81041765	0.916256	Yes
	Satisfaction	0.893538	40.256			0.79841016		
	Comfort	0.883587	21.663			0.78072599		
	Rest	0.891533	45.470			0.79483109		
Business Profitability	Profitability	0.955070	25.860	0.804021	0.924709	0.9121587	0.880204	Yes
	Reservation growth	0.882503	15.254			0.77881155		
	Income	0.847992	12.179			0.71909043		
Business Reputation	Customer satisfaction	0.921959	28.343	0.849797	0.918787	0.8500084	0.824218	Yes
	Public image	0.922489	39.887			0.85098596		

2.5. Discussion

Prior analyses of online reviews tend to take two different approaches. On the one hand, some research uses quantitative measures of online reviews (e.g., number, rank, ranking variance, number of letters or words in the comment) to explain consumers' purchase willingness or business performance. On the other hand, studies that employ content analyses seek to find key terms or different information categories (e.g., content categories) and the links among different types of information. With this study, we attempt to span both approaches, with the understanding that we might gain better explanations of performance by considering the number of online reviews in each key content category (rather than the number of total reviews), because consumers' sensitivity varies with the category to which the online reviews refer. Similarly, business owners and entrepreneurs might not assign the same importance to a particular type of information when strategizing about ways to improve their offers. Therefore, we consider it necessary to assess actual links between specific contents provided in review comments and business performance. In the lodging industry, the content categories that appear on infomediary websites reflect customers' service evaluations, but most infomediary websites define these categories intuitively, rather than undertaking an empirical analysis. Another point of departure for this study is that we combine data from customers, entrepreneurs, and the businesses, namely, online reviews by customers, investments made by entrepreneurs to gain visibility on the infomediary's website, and entrepreneurs' perceptions of their performance (through an online survey).

From a theoretical perspective, our results thus address a research gap pertaining to the analysis of content categories in word-of-mouth comments and their impacts on business performance. Our theoretical model helps clarify how performance, measured by reputation and profitability, depends on key service elements mentioned in positive online comments, as well as online visibility. The model also specifies that positive GSQP result from particular perceptions of the LP and the SP.

From a managerial perspective, this research helps rural business owners understand what drives positive online comments. It is strategically meaningful to explore which key elements tourists use when evaluating a service. In particular, the content analysis identified 12 key factors that drive positive online customer comments, as well as 4 factors with non-significant influences. That is, we show that tourists' GSQP are composed of feeling welcome, satisfied, comfortable, and tranquil. Tourists form these holistic perceptions of service quality on the basis of two main groups of perceptions: those related to the LP and those related to the SP.

We also demonstrate that, when dealing with different categories in online comments, the approach should be an aggregated one, to reflect the way most people interpret and bind these contents. This approach also reduces the complexity associated with dealing with such abundant information. A group of categories can reflect positive perceived service quality, so they should be primary considerations for controlling the quality of service, from the perspective of both entrepreneurs and infomediaries. Furthermore, the positive relationship between positive overall perceptions of service quality and business results reveals a clear business opportunity for improvement. That is, businesses should devote special effort to obtaining comments and ratings in the pertinent categories, whether directly or through the lodging and surrounding categories that explain them. The result is likely to involve the two effects we discuss herein: (1) generating positive expectations among the target audience that enhance customer attraction and (2) obtaining useful information for guiding improvements to the entrepreneur's offer.

With this knowledge, businesses gain a better understanding of what satisfied tourists think about the service delivery, which should help them improve their own provision of appropriate, necessary, higher quality services. They should pay particular attention to online customer reviews and monitor them, to learn what drives customers' positive perceptions and what they think about service quality, then adjust their service delivery marketing decisions to match tourists' needs and wants. Due to the dynamic nature of tourists' perceptions, managers should track the factors that affect tourist evaluations continuously.

In addition, rural lodging establishments and infomediary websites should use these results as motivation to attend closely to how they ask for information about the key categories on their own websites. The companies should ask tourists to evaluate the establishments according to the most relevant elements that other tourists, seeking information, prefer in ratings and comments. Doing so should facilitate the provision of such information.

Government agencies and rural tourism associations that periodically evaluate the service quality of the establishments in their regions also should note these relevant categories and use them to build their own evaluation frameworks. The categories highlighted in this study should be adequately represented and evaluated independently, to confirm that local establishments adapt to meet customers' current demands.

On the basis of our finding that perceptions of LP and SP contribute similarly to GSQP, we recommend that rural lodging establishment owners assess both controllable, key factors, related to their own lodgings, and uncontrollable factors associated with the surroundings. For example, establishments might try to help promote the surroundings, through alliances or cooperative efforts with other local organizations to host special (artistic, cultural, recreational, sports, or culinary) events. In addition, they should provide tourists with appealing information about the surroundings.

This research adopts a demand-driven perspective and identifies which factors lead to better business results. Therefore, it establishes how owners can improve their business performance (reputation and profitability) by making better, more appropriate service delivery decisions. According to the results of this study, tracking comments is a worthwhile endeavor to improve service delivery, provided that the efforts of the establishment owners lead to more positive future comments that influence potential tourists' expectations and decisions. Rural tourist establishment owners must realize that through online reviews, rural tourists can become co-marketers, influencing both other tourists' decisions and the owners' business performance.

With regard to the results pertaining to online visibility, which depends on the rural tourism establishment's online advertising expenditures, our study empirically informs

owners that greater website visibility enhances their business's reputation and profitability. Therefore, it is worthwhile to devote some resources and money to online advertising to improve visibility (e.g., presence on main page, better search engine positioning, more attractive presentation), because it will lead to greater customer awareness and better business performance. This effect of increased spending on visibility might proceed through two paths: as a result of the increased number of people who receive the offer, or due to the greater credibility that the offer, as an extrinsic signal of quality, provides for interested individuals (as reflected in their online reviews). Customers generally believe that an establishment that invests capital in increasing its visibility (and thus appears in top positions on the web) is confident of its offer quality, because otherwise, it could not recoup its investment in the medium term.

Finally, some limitations of this research suggest ideas for further studies. First, improved business performance might produce the funds necessary to achieve greater online visibility and thus generate more positive comments. Accordingly, in different models, business performance might be either the antecedent or the cause. Second, we include information posted on Toprural's website. It is the leading infomediary for rural tourism in Europe, but it is a specific site, so these results cannot be generalized to other information sources without careful consideration. Third, this study referred to rural tourism establishments in just one country, France. It is the top destination for international tourism (UNWTO 2014), but again, the generalization of the results to other countries may be limited. It would be interesting to replicate this study using several countries and platforms simultaneously, such as other infomediary or destination websites, blogs, forums, social networking sites, and microblogs, to determine if similar results arise. Another line of research might try to identify "moments of truth" in tourists' experiences. Furthermore, an insightful analysis might review how customers express themselves through the use of adjectives, first-person voice, or grammatical context. Finally, it would be interesting to investigate the inclusion of photos and videos in reviews and comments, as well as the effects of responses posted by the establishment owner.

2.6. References

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Chapter 3. THE EFFECT OF MARKET INTELLIGENCE GENERATION, CUSTOMER REVIEWS, AND MANAGEMENT RESPONSE ON BUSINESS PERFORMANCE: THE CASE OF RURAL LODGING ESTABLISHMENTS IN FRANCE

Eliminado por incompatibilidad con el proceso de publicación de un artículo en revisión

**Chapter 4. RURAL TOURISM POSITIONING STRATEGIES BASED
ON CUSTOMER PERCEPTIONS**

4.1. Introduction

The rural tourism business, like many other services, is people intensive, and characterized by intangibility, simultaneity of production and consumption, heterogeneity of service performance, and perishability (Parasuraman, Zeithaml, and Berry 1985). These characteristics along with the critical need for direct person-to-person interactions imply that the service quality perceptions in the tourism industry involve a higher level of customization relative to manufacturing firms (Anderson, Fornell, and Rust 1997).

The customer experience with hospitality services is going to resonate far beyond the duration of their stay. Customers can be the most powerful marketing tool for rural lodging establishments or their biggest detractors. If customers have a good experience, they are going to share that on social media, as well as recommend the services to their friends and family members. An increasing number of consumers trust and use online consumer reviews to assess the quality of the goods and services they consider purchasing (Filiari et al. 2018). Reviews determine which alternatives to include in their ‘consideration sets,’ from which they make their final choice (Peter and Olson 1993). Therefore, customers are the final arbitrators who determine which companies are competitors.

At a fundamental level, their choice depends upon their particular preferences and needs and their perceived utility of the product. Consumers make product comparisons on the basis of product performance characteristics or quality, (Helfat and Peteraf 2003). What drives consumer choice is not simply *whether or not* a product can satisfy a given need, but *how well he/she perceives* it can do so. Degree of satisfaction matters (Behling and Lenzi 2019).

Although wide research has approached online customer comments of goods (Barnesa and Jacobsen 2014, Reichelt, Sievert, and Jacob 2014, See-To and Ho 2014, Tseng, Kuo, and Chen 2014) and services (Kim and Hardin 2010, Litvin and Hoffman 2012, Nieto, Hernández-Maestro, and Muñoz-Gallego 2014, Melo, Hernández-Maestro, and Muñoz-Gallego 2017), studies of tourists’ online reviews in RTE remain relatively scarce. A better understanding of these interpersonal influences would have great value for the firms in this sector (Nieto, Hernández-Maestro, and Muñoz-Gallego 2014, Melo, Hernández-Maestro, and Muñoz-Gallego 2017).

The concept of service experience has become one of the most important references for consumer decision making (Bansal & Voyer, 2000; Gruen, Osmonbekov, & Czaplewski, 2006), and more and more researchers are paying attention to the issue of how to effectively extract valuable information from it. For a customer, one of the most common ways of expressing the nature of a service experience is by writing an online review, which represents feedback without any business purpose (Bone, 1995). These opinions reflect consumers' service experience, which is defined as their appraisals after using a good or service.

Since consumer reviews provides a rich source of information, it has become one of the major sources of good and services information for consumers (Cheung, Luo, Sia, & Chen, 2009; Dellarocas, 2003; Kim & Gupta, 2009; Zacharia, Moukas, & Maes, 2000).

Customer reviews can thus contribute to raise the credibility of a good or service (Bickart & Schindler, 2001). Therefore, promoting them can help companies stay competitive, as it certainly influences their consumers in terms of decision making. (Brown, Broderick, & Lee, 2007; Hennig-Thurau & Walsh, 2003; Hu, Bose, Gao, & Liu, 2011; Lin, Li, Janamanchi, & Huang, 2006; Zhang, 2006).

Complementarily, the efficient gathering and analysis of consumer appraisal and opinion can also help companies' competitiveness. Consumer comments has much to offer to RTE in terms of customer-focused assessments with detailed analysis of customer benefits within end-use segments and work backward from customer to the RTE to identify the actions needed to improve performance (Day, Foz, and Huszagh 1988). This "market back" orientation is found in service-intensive industries such as tourism where new services are easily imitated, costs are the same, and entry is easy. Customer-focused approaches have the advantage of examining the full range of competitive choices in light of customers' wants, needs and perceptions of superiority (Day, Foz, and Huszagh 1988).

Consequently, it is essential that RTE understand their positioning from the customers' perspective, and in this regard segmentation is a key technique used of subdividing a heterogeneous market into homogeneous subgroups (Berry, Parasuraman, and Zeithaml 1991).

In this work we try: To (1) identify the positioning of rural lodging establishments from the perspective of their positive online reviews volume and their characteristics, and

(2) examine the impact of three blocks of variables: business results, lodging business strategy, and entrepreneurs' behavioral skills on positive online reviews volume, we gathered data about RTE from Toprural, a rural tourism infomediary website (now part of HomeAway Spain, S.L.). We also conducted a survey to gather information about the business performance of each lodging establishment in the sample. The findings help fill the research gap associated with rural lodging establishments segmentation based on their customer online comments; they also respond to requests from RTE entrepreneurs for information on their position in relation to competition from the customers' point of view. Our proposed model integrates customers variables (online reviews number), business variables (price, web visibility, web presence expertise on infomediary website, lodging capacity, number of managed establishments, rental type), entrepreneurs' behavioral skills variables (market intelligence generation, management response), and business performance variables.

The remainder of the paper is organized as follow. After a brief interdisciplinary literature review of market positioning, online customer reviews, business variables (price, web visibility, web presence expertise, number of managed establishments, lodging capacity, and rental type), we outline the importance of entrepreneur behavioral skills, and particularly, market intelligence generation and management response for the rural tourism services. Subsequently, the research methodology is outlined. Finally, we present the results of our empirical analysis and round off with a discussion, conclusions, recommendations for researchers and practitioners, and limitations of the study.

4.2. Conceptual background

4.2.1. Market positioning

The rise of the digital age has allowed many customers to share their opinions through specialized websites, providing a dynamic and constantly updated evaluation of the market (Rodríguez-Díaz et al. 2017). The importance in understanding tourists' perceptions cannot be understated, particularly in the context of increasingly informed, discerning and demanding tourist cohorts (Dryglas and Rózycki 2017).

Today, there is an intensive exchange of information, and lodgings' image on the Internet is a critical factor in their competitiveness (Therkelsen 2003). Opinions shared by customers on specialized pages build an online reputation that is the basis for many customer purchasing decisions (Yacouel and Fleischer 2012, Chun 2005, Hernández-Estárico, Fuentes-Medina, and Morini-Marrero 2012). This information also determines the competitive positioning of lodgings (Hernández-Estárico, Fuentes-Medina, and Morini-Marrero 2012).

Segmentation is an effective strategic approach to marketing that can assist businesses in identifying its positioning from the positive customers perceptions to boost customer satisfaction and revenues (Liu et al. 2019, Day and Wensley 1988, Smith 1956, McCleary 1995). Moreover, refers to classifying customers into groups subject to their particular requests, characteristics, perceptions or behaviors so as to identify and match groups to distinct good and/or service offerings (Kucukusta and Denizci Guillet 2016, Kotler and Armstrong 2010).

What has become clear in recent years is that the Internet has made a great deal of quantitative and qualitative information available to users and managers, which can be used to determine the competitive positioning of hosting companies and their marketing mix proposals in a customer-oriented way (Rodríguez-Díaz et al. 2017). To create an effective positioning proposal, you must know what is important to the consumer. The perceived image of your property does not belong to the product; it is a subjective positioning related to the consumer's mental processes (Lewis 1990). This subjective positioning created on the basis of a set of attributes considered important by the clients (Lovelock and Wright 2001)

help the service companies to determine their market position in a customer-oriented way. Identifying that lodgings' unique market position is an essential element in determining the effectiveness of a hotel marketing strategy from the perspective of its customers.

4.2.2. Customers' online reviews

Services differ from goods because services can be evaluated only after purchasing and consuming the service due to its experience attributes (Nelson 1970, Wirtz, Chen, and Lovelock 2013, Reisinger 2009, Wells, Valacich, and Hess 2011). Moreover, some services cannot be evaluated even after purchase and consumption due to their credence attributes (Darby and Karni 1973).

Literature review has shown that customers' online comments has been successfully applied to study such aspects of tourism and hospitality operations as service quality and satisfaction (Au, Buhalis, and Law 2009, Jeong and Jeon 2008, Ye et al. 2014, Racherla, Connolly, and Christodoulidou 2013, Melo, Hernández-Maestro, and Muñoz-Gallego 2017), destination image and reputation (Choi, Lehto, and Morrison 2007, Lim, Chung, and Weaver 2012), experiences and behavior (Capriello et al. 2013, Crofts, Mason, and Davis 2009), eWOM (Arsal et al. 2010, Lee, Law, and Murphy 2011, Melo, Hernández-Maestro, and Muñoz-Gallego 2017), tourists' willingness to pay (Nieto-García, Muñoz-Gallego, and González-Benito 2017), and tourists' mobility patterns (Hawelka et al. 2014, Liu et al. 2014).

Consumers may search for service information due to uncertainty regarding potential service quality and difficulty in evaluating it (Murray and Schlacter 1990, Klein 1998). The decision to consume a service is often based on information gathered from the service provider and its consumers. Taken together, the influence of reviews written by service providers and consumers is not negligible in consumer decisions (Ha and Lee 2018).

Therefore, marketers in the hospitality industry should pay more attention to the content users share through the internet (social media, infomediary sites, etc.) and encourage them to post positive personal experiences (van Doorn et al. 2010). Thus, services companies can take advantage of information on the internet about their services

(Ha and Lee 2018). Nath, Devlin, and Reid (2018) research shows that online reviews are an important source of information that consumers use to develop expectations towards an unknown service vendor.

For services, online reviews, and thus online comments, are primary indicators of perceived service quality (Racherla, Connolly, and Christodoulidou 2013) and present previously unattainable opportunities to obtain the most current and rich analytic information about tourists' perceptions, visitation patterns, and the ways tourists “consume” what the hospitality industry has to offer. Thus, rural tourism lodging managers are now able to explore online social interactions and adopt two-sided communication strategies with approaches that promote customer interactivity online so as to enhance their customer relationships (Shin, Song, and Biswas 2014).

Because online comments are seen by many consumers as predictors of a successful consumption experience, they are often viewed as an important guide influencing purchase decisions (Fagerstrøm, Ghinea, and Sydnes 2016). The dual process theory postulates that individuals are influenced by others because they are dependent on them either for information that removes ambiguity and thus establishes subjective validity (informational influence) or for reasons of social approval and social acceptance (normative influence) (Deutsch and Gerard 1955, Hogg and Vaughan 2014, Zhang et al. 2014). Important informational influences include the content, the source, and the receiver of information (Man Yee et al. 2009, Cheung and Thadani 2012, Hong et al. 2017). The uncertainty reduction theory, also known as initial interaction theory, asserts the notion that, when interacting, people need information about the other party in order to reduce their uncertainty (Berger and Calabrese 1975).

When customers perceive differences in the quality of rural tourism goods and services, market positioning, those differences also affect the establishments' performance levels (Petroman et al. 2013). For example, online reviews work as signals, so positive reviews increase readers' awareness and improve customers' attitudes and trust. Therefore, they enhance the firm's public image, which enables it to charge price premiums and achieve increased sales and profitability (Chen, Dhanasobhon, and Smith

2008, Jarvenpaa, Tractinsky, and Vitale 2000, Sweeney, Soutar, and Mazzarol 2012, Vermeulen and Seegers 2009, Yacouel and Fleischer 2011, Ye, Law, and Gu 2009).

Given the importance of customers' online reviews, service providers increasingly take a proactive approach in their business strategy to drive customer reviews (Ye, Gu, and Chen 2010).

4.2.3. Lodging business strategic variables

The notion of customer focus as a valuable strategic approach has been proposed, implemented, and debated since the 2000s. Sheth, Sisodia, and Sharma (2000) focus on customer-centric marketing, an approach that centers on understanding and delivering value to individual customers rather than mass markets. Managers are aware that consumers' evaluations of their stay at a lodging establishment are a function of prior expectations and perceptions of service received (Nath, Devlin, and Reid 2018). Prior research has suggested that the customer's assessment of an experience influences key outcomes such as customer satisfaction and word of mouth (Lemon and Verhoef 2016). Previous studies define consumer satisfaction as a post consumption evaluation that measures if the chosen option exceeds or meets expectations (Palacio and Martín-Santana 2004). Customer satisfaction is classically defined as "the individual's perception of the performance of the good or service in relation to his or her expectations" (Schiffman and Kanuk 2004).

Nowadays, information is exchanged over the Internet through reviews (rating, comments, pictures, etc.). These reviews define expectations (Hernández-Estárico, Fuentes-Medina, and Morini-Marrero 2012, Litvin, Goldsmith, and Pan 2008, Mudambi and Schuff 2010). Because information is freely transmitted over the Internet, companies lose much of their control over communication. Therefore, they need to develop dynamic tools to implement corrective measures where business variables such as price, web visibility, web presence expertise, number of lodgings, capacity, and rental type are crucial between clients and companies, creating an image of the service offered (Vermeulen and Seegers 2009, Pantelidis 2010, Ryu and Han 2010, Zhang et al. 2010, Gössling, Hall, and Andersson 2018).

Heung, Wong, and Qu (2000) emphasized that meeting customers' expectations or going beyond their expectations is essential for business success, providing a competitive advantage.

4.2.3.1. Price

As a psychological component, price serves as an informational cue to the consumer (Curry and Riesz 1988, Theysohn et al. 2013). Previous literature has documented a relationship between price and consumers' perceptions of quality and value (Chang and Wildt 1994, Dodds, Monroe, and Grewal 1991, Monroe 1973, Zeithaml 1988). Additionally, price can play an important role in the formation of consumers' quality perceptions, whereby a higher price increases perceived quality (Chang and Wildt 1994, Dodds, Monroe, and Grewal 1991, Lewis and Shoemaker 1997, Ye et al. 2014).

Prices in the tourism industry are critical for defining the competitive strategy and obtaining the results proposed by firms (Abrate and Viglia 2016, Kim and Park 2017). Kleinsasser and Wagner (2011) and Masiero and Nicolau (2012) analyzed tourism prices in relation to customer perceptions. The relationship between price and quality is an important topic in tourism and hospitality studies. There has been significant interest among tourism and hospitality researchers regarding the impact of price on customers' pre and post purchase perceptions and satisfaction (Beldona and Kwansa 2008, Drèze and Nunes 2004, Heo and Lee 2011, Lockyer 2003, Nusair et al. 2010). Such work generally shows that price not only influences customers' pre purchase perceptions but also their post purchase satisfaction. Price is fundamental in the competitive strategy of lodgings, the analysis of the lodging price generates expectations for future users (Ye et al. 2014). Tourist lodging managers, therefore, have to constantly monitor the evolution of their prices in relation to the competition and determine whether they match customer expectations in relation to perceived value and quality of service (Rodríguez-Díaz et al. 2018, Rodríguez-Díaz et al. 2017). In turn, we propose the following:

Hypothesis 9: Higher rural lodging prices positively affect the number of tourists' positive (a) GSQP, (b) LP, and (c) SP.

4.2.3.2. Web visibility

Currently, the Internet makes a large amount of quantitative and qualitative information available to users and managers that can be used to determine the competitive positioning of lodgings (Rodríguez-Díaz and Espino-Rodríguez 2008). This information collected in specialized databases generate a state of opinion that shapes the competitive positioning of hospitality firms, which is made up of a series of evaluations, opinions, images, or videos about the goods or services, if they are analyzed individually, when analyzing lodging offer as a whole. As a result, the performance of companies and tourist destinations increasingly depends on the public image generated by the social media visibility.

Visibility is defined as the extent to which a user is likely to come across a reference to a lodging's website or to a third-party expert, an infomediary (online intermediary) that provide reliable information regarding lodgings' services, in his or her online or offline environment (Drèze and Zufryden 2004, Yacouel and Fleischer 2012).

Higher online visibility, achieved through greater visibility on an infomediary website, should encourage tourists to pay more attention to the positive features of the establishment (Nieto, Hernández-Maestro, and Muñoz-Gallego 2014). Being well positioned in the results of an Internet search is often an important choice criterion for customers, similar to brand recognition (Smithson, Devece, and Lapiedra 2011). From a resource-based view, online visibility is also a differentiating factor that should lead to superior organizational performance, because it can attract new tourists and increase occupancy rates. Therefore, meeting expectations of more customers and going beyond their predictive expectations are essential for business success because they provide a competitive advantage (Heung, Wong, and Qu 2000). Consequently, we propose the following:

Hypothesis 10: Greater web visibility of a rural lodging establishment on an infomediary website positively affects number of tourists' positive (a) GSQP, (b) LP, and (c) SP.

4.2.3.3. Web presence expertise

Knowledge and skills acquired by the entrepreneur through training and work experience are a resource that will promote business performance (Beck and Wiersema 2013, Storey 2000, Wiklund and Shepherd 2005). Repeated practice is an important learning mechanism for the development of dynamic capabilities (Eisenhardt and Martin 2000). Practice helps people to understand processes more fully and so develop more effective routines. The efficacy of such experience has been demonstrated in numerous empirical studies, including the vast literature on learning curves in manufacturing and bank acquisitions (Argote 1999, Zollo and Winter 1999). Given this orientation we proposed the following:

Hypothesis 11: Longer presence of a rural lodging establishment on an infomediary website positively affects number of tourists' positive (a) GSQP, (b) LP, and (c) SP.

4.2.3.4. Number of lodgings, capacity and rental type

Size is an important characteristic of hotels and can be a potential competitive advantage due to economies of scale. Smithson, Devece, and Lapiedra (2011) research noted that the hotel resources and size can still play an important role concerning the significance of the correlation between size and Internet reservation rate. Claver-Cortés, Pereira-Moliner, and Molina-Azorin (2009) report higher performance levels achieved by hotels with a certain combination of strategic characteristics, including (a large) size. Since larger organizations may be more likely than small ones to have well-developed human resources practices (Youndt et al. 1996).

There is something indescribably lovely about being a part of a group of people who share something they feel passionately about, this is essential to human well-being. Moreover, being part of a group is important because it favors that people interact with others, share experiences, develop valued relationships and work toward a common goal whose fulfillment is pleasurable. In tourist and entertainment services where the customer to customer interaction is an integral part of the service experience, these interactions reflect a certain social activity in the customer's life (Martin and Pranter 1989, Zgolli and Zaiem 2017, Parker and Ward 2000, Camelis et al. 2013). Decrop (2010)s' research shows that shared entertainment activities put the customer to customer interaction under the spotlight. That is, participating in boat trips, tours (e.g. village, coffee, tea or wine tours), workshops (e.g. cooking, handicraft or tasting wines), landscape sceneries, wildlife, archaeological, or heritage sites favor interaction. Customer to customer interaction creates memories to be told later as anecdotes or unforgettable moments. Price and Arnould (1999) showed that, when the customers share friendly feelings, affection, and intimacy with the personnel, their desire to spend more time there will increase. Goi, Kalidas, and Zeeshan (2014) says that if a person develops a positive feeling for another person through the service meeting, they will have positive emotions increasing their desire to stay in the service place. The friendliness of the service and the multiplicity of physical and social interactions are positively proportional to the time the customer spends in the service experience and, even, to their desire to stay in the service place (Clauzel and Riché 2015). Thus, this positive feelings of contentment, joy or satisfaction generation are reasons to customers post positive online reviews. Larger organizations serving more customers increase the number of customer-to-customer interactions, increasing their positive perceptions and, consequently, increasing the number of customer reviews online. On the basis of this collected prior research, we propose the following:

Hypothesis 12: Owning a higher number of RTE positively affects tourists' positive number of (a) GSQP, (b) LP, and (c) SP.

Hypothesis 13: Higher RTEs' capacity positively affects tourists's positive number of (a) GSQP, (b) LP, and (c) SP.

Hypothesis 14: Room rental type positively affects tourists' positive number of (a) GSQP, (b) LP, and (c) SP.

4.2.4. Entrepreneur skills

Many years ago, Levitt (1960) made a notable contribution to the field of marketing by observing that businesses compete not on the basis of similar products, but by similarities in resource functionality. Much resource-based research has focused on intangible assets, which include information (Sampler 1998), knowledge (Spender 1996), and dynamic capabilities (Teece, Pisano, and Shuen 1997).

The role of the entrepreneur seems vital, especially when the enterprise is small, since the entrepreneurs of smaller enterprises with few employees must manage directly. The influence of the entrepreneur is more decisive, since most rural lodging establishments are operated by individuals (Kalleberg and Leicht 1991). Therefore, the smaller the enterprise, the more prominent the role of the entrepreneur. Small ventures such as rural lodging establishments are formed around the personality of an individual owner / manager, close to the customer, with innovative capacity and delivering superior customer value (Hills and Hultman 2011, Roach, Ryman, and White 2014, Cooper, Gimeno-Gascon, and Woo 1994). Such operations tend to be reflections of the entrepreneur and cannot be understood without reference to the entrepreneur's role in the business (Hambrick and Mason 1984). For Sánchez (2012), entrepreneurship competencies make individuals more alert to environmental conditions and enhance their ability to adapt internal resources to gain competitive advantage.

In small rural businesses, the potential to generate sustainable competitive advantage is contingent upon the human capital of the entrepreneur, is considered to be the primary resource, thus manifesting the human capital of the enterprise (Barney 1991). According to human capital theory, the skill set, experience and know-how of the entrepreneur is likely to be a prime source of critical resources that influence organizational outcomes (Pennings, Lee, and Witteloostuijn 1998).

Previous research in the hospitality context suggests that human capital is one of the most important resources available to industry practitioners (Kim et al. 2012, Kumar, Kumar, and de Grosbois 2008, Lee, Hallak, and Sardeshmukh 2016, Nieves and Quintana Déniz 2016, Sainaghi, Phillips, and Corti 2013). Human capital has been linked to performance (Gimeno et al. 1997) and it is also likely to be linked to the gathering and dissemination of market intelligence and responsiveness to it. For instance, a deeper awareness of industry specific challenges, customer service requirements, and service recovery strategies, as well as the ability to effectively address and resolve service-related issues should lead to the identification and exploitation of opportunities in the hospitality context.

4.2.4.1. Market intelligence generation

Market intelligence generation strategy focuses on acquiring information about customers expressed and latent needs, and competitors' capabilities and strategies (Narver and Slater 1990, Day 1994b, Kohli and Jaworski 1990). This intelligence provides a focus for the business's product development and enables the business to develop strong relationships with key customers, providing insights into opportunities for market development. Market-driven organizations develop new intelligence about market requirements and how best to meet or exceed them through superior capabilities at market sensing, customer linking, and channel bonding (Day 1994a).

Hospitality managers have been urged to become more customer oriented to better satisfy customer preferences and needs and achieve their business performance objectives (Lee et al. 2015, Wang, Chen, and Chen 2012). Entrepreneurs which strive to create and maintain superior value for their customers on the basis of knowledge derived from customer and competitor analyses can benefit in attaining expert performance in enhanced alertness to business opportunities (Kandemir, Yaprak, and Cavusgil 2006, Ericsson, Krampe, and Tesch-Roemer 1993). New information and new knowledge (exogenous or endogenous) can create opportunities, as emphasized by Schumpeter (1934). Thus, to identify and shape opportunities, enterprises must constantly scan, search, and explore markets (March and Simon 1958, Nelson and Winter 1982). The ability to recognize

opportunities depends in part on the individual's capabilities and extant knowledge (or the knowledge and learning capacities of the organization to which the individual belongs) particularly about user needs in relationship to existing as well as novel solutions (Teece 2007). This requires the specific ability to understand customers' decision making, and practical wisdom (Nonaka and Toyama 2007). One must accumulate and then filter information from a large personal network, professional and social contacts to create a conjecture or a hypothesis about the likely evolution of technologies, customer needs, expressed and latent, and marketplace responses (Jaworski and Kohli 1993, Narver and Slater 1990, Teece 2007).

Organizations that are more market-focused and that are able to collect, disseminate, and respond to market intelligence consistently achieve significantly higher performance levels, such as product success, satisfied customers, and financial returns, than their less market-focused peers (Kirca, Jayachandran, and Bearden 2005, Kumar et al. 2011, Hall et al. 2017). In simple words, the marketer gathers data from all the available sources and process it into meaningful information that can be used to make critical business decisions, satisfying customers and thereby generating positive customer reviews. Then, based on prior research, we propose the following:

Hypothesis 15: Market intelligence generation positively affects tourists' positive number of (a) GSQP, (b) LP, and (c) SP.

4.2.4.2. Management response

In the current decade, the major movement in customer management has been on customer and brand engagement (Lemon and Verhoef 2016). Customer engagement is a motivational state that leads customers to identify themselves with firms, and van Doorn et al. (2010) defined it as "the customer's behavioral manifestation toward a brand or firm, beyond purchase, resulting from motivational drivers". This approach has widely extended as the digital and social media revolution has strengthened the importance of customer engagement behavior, as customers become active co-producers of value or destroyers of

value for firms (Bolton 2016, Leeflang et al. 2014, van Doorn et al. 2010, Verhoef et al. 2010).

Management responses to customer engagement behaviors, or “engagement in customer engagement” is a fairly recent phenomenon. While previous literature has predominantly focused on word-of-mouth communication and its impact on sales (Brown, Broderick, and Lee 2007, Ridings, Gefen, and Arinze 2002) . Social media platforms offer hospitality firms substantial opportunities to communicate with their customers at a much more individual level than in the past. Customer engagement management should be treated as a critical component of service management of a hospitality firm in today’s business environment that has been dramatically shaped by advancements in information technology.

As customer perceptions of managements’ responses are regarded as an indicator of how RTE care about services (Lee and Hu 2005), RTE need to develop appropriate response strategies toward user-generated reviews (Roehm and Tybout 2006). Potential customers are expected to be more motivated to engage in additional information search (Chen and Chaiken 1999) and to evaluate a RTE’s management responses. Management responses to customer engagement behaviors, or “engagement in customer engagement” is a fairly recent phenomenon, while previous literature has predominantly focused on word-of-mouth communication and its impact on performance (Brown, Broderick, and Lee 2007, Ridings, Gefen, and Arinze 2002).

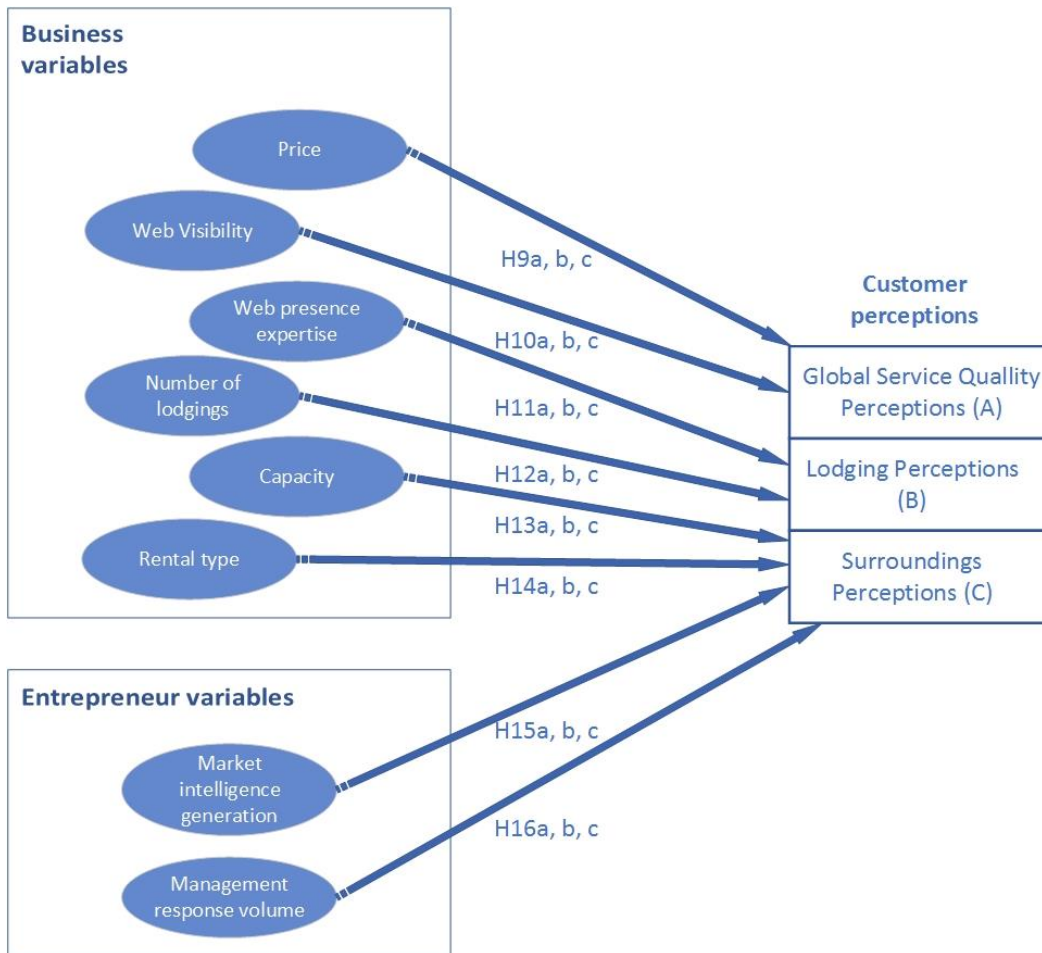
Management responses to online customer reviews not only affect customers who receive the responses but also influence the behavior of subsequent customers who observe the responses. This externality arises because of the public nature of management responses.

According to the results of Ye, Gu, and Chen (2010) study, management responses could significantly influence subsequent customer eWOM behavior. RTE need to be actively engaged in the customer engagement activities by frequently tracking user-generated comments and diligently responding to these comments through online platforms. Being “interactive” can generate far more positive firm-level outcomes than simply being “responsive” (Wei, Miao, and Huang 2013). By responding to customer reviews, tourism managers can signal that they care about customers, which should both

reduce customers' risk perceptions (Walker 2010, Rose and Blodgett 2016) and enhance the firm's image (Wei, Miao, and Huang 2013, Rose and Blodgett 2016). Thus, the firm gains a competitive advantage. Studies that investigate the factors that customers evaluate when choosing hospitality products indicate that management responses to customer reviews are relevant (Park and Allen 2013, Ye, Gu, and Chen 2008). In particular, responses that address service-related issues or recover from service failures may increase a customer's likelihood of recommending the lodging (Barsky and Frame 2009, Levy, Duan, and Boo 2013). These management responses also can be seen by others, due to the transparency of the Internet, so they signal to both review writers and readers that the manager cares about providing good service (Xie, Zhang, and Zhang 2014). The volume of management responses should have significant effects on lodging firms' performance (Xie, Zhang, and Zhang 2014). Responses to positive comments can help establish a warm human connection with reviewers, such that the lodging establishment can learn from and build goodwill with its most active customers (Park and Allen 2013). Potential customers then may be more willing to book the lodging in the future (Min, Lim, and Magnini 2015b). In this context, it is worth considering that this opportunity to strengthen the relationships with customers and prospects increases the likelihood that customers will recommend RTE, be more willing to book, build goodwill toward RTE and, for these reasons, may lead to more positive reviews. Accordingly,

Hypothesis 16: Management responses volume positively affects tourists' positive number of (a) GSQP, (b) LP, and (c) SP.

Figure 3. Proposed Model 3 (A, B, C)



4.3. Methodology

To gather the perceptions measures of the satisfying experience of rural tourists in France, we used GSQP, LP and SP from Melo, Hernández-Maestro, and Muñoz-Gallego (2017) study. Regarding the business performance measures, we used an online questionnaire that revealed the establishment owners' perceptual measures. For each rural lodging establishment, we merged information about the visibility on an infomediary website, management responses volume, and the business characteristics (provided by Toprural), as well as the performance and market intelligence measures (from the online questionnaire). Then, we analyzed these data with SPSS 25.

4.3.1. Data Collection

The data collection process consisted of three phases: in-depth interviews with rural tourism experts, analyses of rural tourists' online comments data published on Toprural, and an online survey of rural establishment owners to gather their perceptions of their business performance. First, with in-depth expert interviews, we sought to understand the sector, the role of the Internet, and what type of research would be most useful for rural tourism. Second, we gathered data for establishments in France about the online reviews volume, management responses volume, and business variables, ordered by establishment, from Toprural (<http://www.toprural.com>), a specialized, leading site for independently owned rural accommodations in southern Europe (Spain, France, Portugal, Italy, and Andorra), which also has a strong presence in central Europe (Austria, Germany, the Netherlands, and Belgium). In line with prior literature (Stringam and Gerdes 2010, Melo, Hernández-Maestro, and Muñoz-Gallego 2017, Racherla, Connolly, and Christodoulidou 2013, Pathak et al. 2010, Nieto, Hernández-Maestro, and Muñoz-Gallego 2014, Hu, Zhang, and Pavlou 2009, Chevalier and Mayzlin 2006), we selected customer perceptions of good service, as indicated by ratings (4 - 5), and identify positive customer comments. The customer reviews refer to stays in France from 2008 to 2010.

Third, we used the owners' perceptions of their performance, measured on a seven-point agreement scale. Prior research on rural tourism shows that most rural lodging establishments are small, family businesses, whose entrepreneurship reflects the characteristics and choices of the establishment owner, we chose to use the establishment owners' perceptions of their performance (Miller 2011, Buhalis 1996, 1999, Buhalis and Main 1998, Middleton and Clarke 2001, Narangajavana, Garrigos-Simon, and Gil-Pechuan 2013, Nieto, Hernández-Maestro, and Muñoz-Gallego 2014, Melo, Hernández-Maestro, and Muñoz-Gallego 2017).

We conducted a pilot tests with 10 randomly chosen establishments from France, using telephone surveys of establishment owners, to confirm that they were appropriate respondents, ensure the discriminatory power of the questionnaire, and establish the comprehensibility of the questions. We made a few minor adjustments based on their responses. The data were collected through a website that we created for the French data. The rural tourism owners' perceptions were measured with items adopted and partly modified from Nieto, Hernández-Maestro, and Muñoz-Gallego (2014).

This approach is reasonable, because it is difficult to obtain objective performance measures, and prior evidence cites a positive relationship between owners' perceptions of performance and customers' evaluations (Nieto, Hernández-Maestro, and Muñoz-Gallego 2014, Melo, Hernández-Maestro, and Muñoz-Gallego 2017). The subjective approach has also been widely used (Kropp, Lindsay, and Shoham 2006, Avci, Madanoglu, and Okumus 2011, Hallak, Assaker, and Lee 2015). The items to measure owners' perceptions of their business performance and their behavioral skills were adapted from Cooper and Artz (1995), Covin, Prescott, and Slevin (1990), Walter, Auer, and Ritter (2006), Hmieleski and Corbett (2008), Nieto, Hernández-Maestro, and Muñoz-Gallego (2014), and Melo, Hernández-Maestro, and Muñoz-Gallego (2017).

In line with Melo, Hernández-Maestro, and Muñoz-Gallego (2017) we use tourists holistic perceptions of service quality on the basis of three main groups of perceptions: those related to the GSQP, to the LP and to the SP (table 9).

Table 5. Categories description

Categories	Description
Global service quality perceptions	
Satisfaction	Feeling satisfied with the rural lodging.
Rest	Feeling tranquility, possibility to rest, sleep quality.
Comfort	Feeling comfortable in the establishment.
Host	Feeling welcome, cared for by the owners and other staff.
Lodging perceptions	
Information	If the information, suggestions, and indications are helpful, present, and sufficient, and complaints are resolved by the staff.
Temperature	If the house has appropriate temperature.
Cleanliness	If the facilities are clean.
Decoration	If the establishment has good decoration.
Multimedia	If Internet and information was available for clients at the establishment, and if photos, movies, images, email, and videos were available on the Internet.
Surroundings perceptions	
Seasonality	If the season is suitable to visit the property, climate.
Environment	The nature, the environment in which the property is located
Access	If the roads are good, easy access.

Source: Extracted from Melo, Hernández-Maestro, and Muñoz-Gallego (2017)

4.3.2. Sample Profile

The sample populations of interest include rural tourists who have stayed in RTE and posted reviews in the Toprural infomediary website, as well as the rural tourism owners who serve them, in France. We had data about 2,275 French rural establishments, which prompted 10,047 customer reviews. To filter these data, we eliminated any establishments that lacked complete information and duplicate or blank customer reviews. We thus solicited responses from 1,618 French rural tourism operators, whose establishments garnered 8,628 customer reviews. The short, structured, online questionnaire comprised six elements; an e-mail provided the password that enabled them to access the website. We also sent a reminder e-mail. We collected responses between May 28–June 8, 2012. Table 10 contains the sample characteristics. After the study 3 filtering process, it was possible to use 237 of the responses received French rural tourism operators.

We present the variable measures in Table 11. In line with prior literature (Chevalier and Mayzlin 2006, Hu, Zhang, and Pavlou 2009, Nieto, Hernández-Maestro, and Muñoz-Gallego 2014, Pathak et al. 2010, Racherla, Connolly, and Christodoulidou 2013, Stringam and Gerdes 2010), we measured customer perceptions by the volume of customer reviews. We focused on 4- and 5-star reviews, and we noted that only 4.6 % of reviews were negative (1–3 stars).

Table 6. Sample characteristics

RTE number	237
Price per night and person (average, €)	26.96
Web visibility	
– Prestige (most expensive)	20
– Gold	96
– Silver (less expensive)	93
– Without	28
Web presence expertise (average in months)	62
Number of lodgings (average)	1.17
Capacity (average, beds)	10.44
Number of establishments by type of rental	
– Rural house (full rental)	79
– Rural house (rooms)	151
– Rural hotel (rooms)	4
– Rural hostel (rooms)	3
Management response volume (average, number)	0.83

4.3.3. Data analysis

Various analyses were employed to answer the research questions guiding this study. All analyses were conducted using Excel and SPSS 25. To begin, basic descriptive statistics were used to obtain a general overview of the sample and the responses to the different survey items. Also, all sampling frames were compared along a series of variables using one-way analysis of variance (ANOVA), Welch, and chi-square tests.

Common to many market studies in tourism is the use of clustering methodology to find a segmentation solution (Kastenholz, Davis, and Paul 1999, Molera and Pilar

Albaladejo 2007, Frochot 2005, Park and Yoon 2009, Pesonen 2012). According to Dolnicar (2002), clustering has become a very popular way of identifying market segments based on survey data.

Subsequently, a cluster analysis involving the 3 perceptual items (GSQP, LP and SP) was undertaken. Prior to conducting the cluster analysis, multicollinearity was assessed by verifying that no clustering variables exhibited correlations above 0.9 (Sarstedt and Mooi 2014). The cluster analysis employed the two-stage cluster approach (aPunj and Stewart 1983) that has been used widely by tourism researchers (Chang 2006, Prayag and Hosany 2014). The two-stage cluster approach involves initially conducting a hierarchical cluster analysis and subsequently entering some of the resulting parameters into a k-means analysis. The *k*-means clustering algorithm (Hartigan 1975) was applied because it is widely used in tourism research according to Dolnicar (2002). One thousand pairs of bootstrap samples were used. Wards' method with squared Euclidean distance was used for the agglomerative hierarchical clustering.

The percentage change in heterogeneity within clusters in subsequent clustering stages, as indicated by the agglomeration coefficient, was initially examined for guidance on the optimal number of clusters to specify for the k-means analysis (Hair, Black, et al. 2014). Following the k-means analysis, the variance ratio criterion (Sarstedt and Mooi 2014) and hit ratios from discriminant analyses were used for guidance on the final number of clusters.

A variety of profiling variables then were used to compare the segments.

In order to ascertain the accuracy level of classification of the positioning, a discriminant analysis was performed on the two clusters with positive perceptions of tourists as discriminant variables to determine the predictor variables (GSQP, LP and SP) that contribute most to the distinction between clusters (Pearce and Lee 2005).

The business performance scale came from Kropp, Lindsay, and Shoham (2006), as adapted by Hallak, Brown, and Lindsay (2012). To determine business performance, we asked the owners to indicate the status of their rural lodging establishment on a 1–7 scale (1 = “very bad” to 7 = “excellent”) in terms of profitability and growth in the number of reservations. They also completed a 1–7 agreement scale (1 = “strongly disagree” to 7 = “strongly agree”) in response to the prompt, “I am satisfied with business income.”

Subjective measures of business performance correlate strongly with objective measures and are common in research into small enterprises (Chandler 1962, Dess and Davis 1984). Accordingly, we asked the rural tourism operators to assess their own business performance and market intelligence. For this study, we used EP (entrepreneur perception) public image, EP (entrepreneur perception) customer satisfaction, and business profitability.

The scale to measure market intelligence contained three items. Miller (1983) developed the original scale, which has been modified by Covin and Miller (2014) and Covin, Prescott, and Slevin (1990), as well as applied by Balabanis and Katsikea (2003), Etchebarne, Geldres, and García-Cruz (2010), Hernández-Perlines (2016), and Zhang, Ma, and Wang (2012). The owners indicated their agreement on a 1–7 scale (1 = “strongly disagree” to 7 = “strongly agree”) with three items: “I always attend fairs or important meetings on rural tourism,” “I am very attentive to news media and specialized papers on rural tourism,” and “I am always aware about available online information of other rural houses proposals.”

Table 7. Variable definitions

Variable	Measure
Global service quality positive perception	Annual average number of categories mentioned in the positive customer online comments (Satisfaction, Rest, Comfort, and Host).
Lodging positive perceptions	Annual average number of categories mentioned in the positive customer online comments (Information, Temperature, Cleanliness, Decoration, and Multimedia).
Surroundings positive perceptions	Annual average number of categories mentioned in the positive customer online comments (Seasonality, Environment, and Access).
Business profitability	<p>Owner's perception, 7-point Likert scale (1 = very bad, 7 = excellent):</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Establishment's profitability - Establishment's reservation growth <p>Owner's perception, 7-point Likert scale (1 = "strongly disagree," 7 = "strongly agree"):</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> - I was satisfied with the income obtained by the business.
EP Customer satisfaction	<p>Owner's perception, 7-point Likert scale (1 = very bad, 7 = excellent):</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Customer satisfaction with the establishment
EP Public image	<p>Owner's perception, 7-point Likert scale (1 = very bad, 7 = excellent):</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Establishment's public image
Price	Average price per night and person (€).
Web visibility	<p>Expenditures by establishment owner for a promotion on Toprural:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Prestige (most expensive) • Gold • Silver (least expensive) • Without
Web presence expertise	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Toprural presence in months
Number of lodgings	<p>Dichotomous variable:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> - 0 for one establishment - 1 for two or more establishments
Capacity	Number of beds
Rental type	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - 0 for entire house rental type - 1 for room rental type (houses, hotels, and hostels)
Market intelligence generation	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - I always attend fairs or important meetings on rural tourism. - I am very attentive to news media and specialized papers on rural tourism - I am always aware about available online information of other rural houses proposals.
Management response volume	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - For each establishment, number of management responses to customer reviews.

The other variable metrics are shown in table 3 (chapter 2). The bivariate significance and correlation of the items in the research model are shown in table 12.

Table 8. Bivariate correlations of items in the research model.

	Global service quality perceptions	Lodging perceptions	Surroundings perceptions	Business profitability	EP Customer satisfaction	EP Public image	Price	Web visibility	Web presence expertise	Number of lodgings	Capacity	Rental type	Market intelligence generation	Management response volume	
Global service quality perceptions	Correlação de Pearson	1	,597**	,542**	-0,119	0,106	0,047	0,058	-,142*	0,124	,183**	0,012	0,090	-0,019	0,061
	Sig. (2 extremidades)		0,000	0,000	0,068	0,103	0,471	0,374	0,029	0,057	0,005	0,852	0,167	0,771	0,348
	N	237	237	237	237	237	237	237	237	237	237	237	237	237	237
Lodging perceptions	Correlação de Pearson	,597**	1	,364**	-0,037	0,060	0,070	,154*	-,214**	,137*	,181**	0,050	0,088	-0,032	0,083
	Sig. (2 extremidades)	0,000		0,000	0,567	0,361	0,285	0,018	0,001	0,035	0,005	0,446	0,175	0,622	0,204
	N	237	237	237	237	237	237	237	237	237	237	237	237	237	237
Surroundings perceptions	Correlação de Pearson	,542**	,364**	1	-0,022	0,120	0,053	0,027	-,133*	,192**	,280**	0,064	0,017	-0,015	0,055
	Sig. (2 extremidades)	0,000	0,000		0,738	0,064	0,413	0,676	0,040	0,003	0,000	0,327	0,798	0,820	0,400
	N	237	237	237	237	237	237	237	237	237	237	237	237	237	237
Business profitability	Correlação de Pearson	-0,119	-0,037	-0,022	1	-0,049	-0,026	0,066	-0,122	-0,052	0,043	0,042	0,015	-0,001	-0,008
	Sig. (2 extremidades)	0,068	0,567	0,738		0,452	0,692	0,314	0,060	0,424	0,512	0,519	0,821	0,994	0,907
	N	237	237	237	237	237	237	237	237	237	237	237	237	237	237
EP Customer satisfaction	Correlação de Pearson	0,106	0,060	0,120	-0,049	1	,710**	-0,029	-0,074	-0,008	0,068	-0,069	0,114	0,036	0,049
	Sig. (2 extremidades)	0,103	0,361	0,064	0,452		0,000	0,662	0,259	0,900	0,298	0,292	0,081	0,580	0,448
	N	237	237	237	237	237	237	237	237	237	237	237	237	237	237
EP Public image	Correlação de Pearson	0,047	0,070	0,053	-0,026	,710**	1	0,039	-0,061	0,014	0,053	-0,046	0,120	-0,028	0,058
	Sig. (2 extremidades)	0,471	0,285	0,413	0,692	0,000		0,549	0,352	0,831	0,418	0,480	0,065	0,667	0,378
	N	237	237	237	237	237	237	237	237	237	237	237	237	237	237
Price	Correlação de Pearson	0,058	,154*	0,027	0,066	-0,029	0,039	1	-,177**	0,041	0,001	-0,003	0,017	0,057	-0,013
	Sig. (2 extremidades)	0,374	0,018	0,676	0,314	0,662	0,549		0,006	0,531	0,988	0,961	0,789	0,379	0,843
	N	237	237	237	237	237	237	238	238	238	238	238	238	237	238
Web visibility	Correlação de Pearson	-,142*	-,214**	-,133*	-0,122	-0,074	-0,061	-,177**	1	-0,114	-0,125	-,134*	-0,093	-0,018	-,135*
	Sig. (2 extremidades)	0,029	0,001	0,040	0,060	0,259	0,352	0,006		0,080	0,054	0,040	0,149	0,783	0,038
	N	237	237	237	237	237	237	238	241	238	238	238	241	237	238
Web presence expertise	Correlação de Pearson	0,124	,137*	,192**	-0,052	-0,008	0,014	0,041	-0,114	1	-0,002	0,003	-0,002	-0,043	0,005
	Sig. (2 extremidades)	0,057	0,035	0,003	0,424	0,900	0,831	0,531	0,080		0,981	0,958	0,971	0,507	0,942
	N	237	237	237	237	237	237	238	238	238	238	238	238	237	238
Number of lodgings	Correlação de Pearson	,183**	,181**	,280**	0,043	0,068	0,053	0,001	-0,125	-0,002	1	,998**	,993**	0,052	,985**
	Sig. (2 extremidades)	0,005	0,005	0,000	0,512	0,298	0,418	0,988	0,054	0,981		0,000	0,000	0,429	0,000
	N	237	237	237	237	237	237	238	238	238	238	238	238	237	238
Capacity	Correlação de Pearson	0,012	0,050	0,064	0,042	-0,069	-0,046	-0,003	-,134*	0,003	,998**	1	,993**	0,039	,985**
	Sig. (2 extremidades)	0,852	0,446	0,327	0,519	0,292	0,480	0,961	0,040	0,958	0,000		0,000	0,553	0,000
	N	237	237	237	237	237	237	238	238	238	238	238	238	237	238
Rental type	Correlação de Pearson	0,090	0,088	0,017	0,015	0,114	0,120	0,017	-0,093	-0,002	,993**	,993**	1	0,049	,980**
	Sig. (2 extremidades)	0,167	0,175	0,798	0,821	0,081	0,065	0,789	0,149	0,971	0,000	0,000		0,457	0,000
	N	237	237	237	237	237	237	238	241	238	238	238	242	237	238
Market intelligence generation	Correlação de Pearson	-0,019	-0,032	-0,015	-0,001	0,036	-0,028	0,057	-0,018	-0,043	0,052	0,039	0,049	1	-0,063
	Sig. (2 extremidades)	0,771	0,622	0,820	0,994	0,580	0,667	0,379	0,783	0,507	0,429	0,553	0,457		0,332
	N	237	237	237	237	237	237	237	237	237	237	237	237	237	237
Management response volume	Correlação de Pearson	0,061	0,083	0,055	-0,008	0,049	0,058	-0,013	-,135*	0,005	,985**	,985**	,980**	-0,063	1
	Sig. (2 extremidades)	0,348	0,204	0,400	0,907	0,448	0,378	0,843	0,038	0,942	0,000	0,000	0,000	0,332	
	N	237	237	237	237	237	237	238	238	238	238	238	238	237	238

** . A correlação é significativa no nível 0,01 (2 extremidades).
* . A correlação é significativa no nível 0,05 (2 extremidades).

4.4. Results

4.4.1. Cluster analysis

A K-mean cluster analysis generated a two-cluster solution based on the rural tourism customer perceptions on the French rural tourism lodging.

The two clusters were named Less Engagement and More Engagement (Table 13) according to their positive experience perceptions for staying on the French rural tourism lodgings (LP and SP). We note differences in cluster size, *Less Engagement* cluster includes 195 rural tourism businesses and *More Engagement* cluster includes 42 rural tourism businesses.

With regards to tourist's perceptions, the segments differed significantly in GSQP, LP, SP, EP customer satisfaction, web visibility, web presence expertise, number of lodgings, and management response volume (Table 14). But not in business profitability, EP public image, price, capacity, rental type, and market intelligence generation (Table 14).

Table 9. End cluster centers

	Less Engagement	More Engagement	Cluster		Error			
Cases	195	42	Medium Square	df	Medium Square	df	Z	Sig.
LP	-0,274	0,840	42,881	1	0,392	1	109,513	0,000
SP	-0,320	1,445	107,730	1	0,313	1	343,850	0,000

The F-Tests should be used for descriptive purposes only because the clusters have been chosen to maximize the differences between cases in different clusters. The significance levels observed are not corrected for this and, therefore, cannot be interpreted as tests of the hypothesis that the cluster means are equal.

A variety of profiling variables were used to better understand the differences between the different segments, the results of which can be seen in Table 14

Cluster 1: Less Engagement

The Less Engagement RTE were distinguished by higher expenditures in web visibility (Table 14). The Less Engagement cluster that includes 82.28% of RTE has a lower number of positive online reviews per RTE, 12.79.

Cluster 2: More Engagement

Tourists who experienced the services of RTE included in More Engagement cluster significantly posted more positive comments (Table 14) on the three perceptual dimensions (GSQP, LP and SP). The More Engagement cluster significantly present relatively higher prices, the establishments have more than one lodging, and more management responses to positive reviews from the tourists. The More Engagement cluster includes 17.72% of RTE and has a higher number of positive online reviews per RTE, 23.74.

Table 10. Range of characteristics by number of lodgings cluster

Variables		CLUSTERS	
		Less Engagement	More Engagement
Positive perceptions variables	Global service quality perceptions	-0,22	0,55**
	Lodgings perceptions	-0,27	0,84**
	Surroundings perceptions	-0,32	1,45**
Performance variables	Business profitability	-0,09	0,01
	EP Customer satisfaction	6,12	6,38*
	EP Public image	6,08	6,31
Business variables	Price	26,47	29,23
	Web visibility	2,63**	2,17
	Web presence expertise	58,869	65,02**
	Number of lodgings	1,11	1,45**
	Capacity	10,46	10,36
	Rental Type	1,70	1,74
Entrepreneur variables	Market intelligence generation	-0,04	0,04
	Management response volume	0,79	1,48*

*Significant differences among clusters are at the 0.10 level. **Significant differences among clusters are at the 0.05 level. Bilateral tests assuming equal variances. Bonferroni correction.

4.4.2. Discriminant analysis

The results of the discriminant analysis are summarized in tables 15 and 16. One canonical discriminant function was computed using discriminant analysis of lodging and surroundings perception dimensions (LP and SP). The function is statistically significant. Therefore, the results of discriminant analysis showed that all perception dimensions used statistically contribute to the discriminant function.

The classification results were used to evaluate how customer perceptions are correctly classified into the two clusters (table 16). Almost all (97.5%) of the 237 grouped cases were correctly classified. Particularly, 1 (100.0%) and 2 (85.7%) were correctly classified into their respective groups. These results indicated that the two clusters are valid and reliable.

Table 11. Results of discrimination analysis

	Discriminant function	Eigenvalue	Canonical correlation	Wilks' λ	Significance
	1	2.189	0.829	0.314	0,000
	<u>Standardized canonical discriminant function coefficients</u>				
LP		0.581			
SP		0.895			

Note: 97.5% of original grouped cases correctly classified.

Table 12. Evaluation of cluster formation by classification results (discrimination analysis).

Cluster case	Predicted group membership		
	1 (%)	2 (%)	Total (%)
1	195 (100.0)	0 (00.0)	195 (100.0)
2	6 (14.3)	36 (85.7)	42 (100.0)

4.4.3. Models

Multivariate analysis of variance (MANOVA) was conducted to examine the effect of each predictor group on the three tourist perceptions items as a whole. Table 17 presents the model fit statistics of each of the predictor items and the final models. The all-inclusive

models' goodness-of-fit statistics were also better than those of the models with individual predictor groups in all three perceptions dimensions, suggesting that the added predictors improved the models fit beyond random chance.

In the models A.1, B.1 and C.1 we introduced the business-related variables (price, web visibility, web presence expertise, number of lodgings, capacity and rental type). In A.2, B.2 and C.2 models we introduced all variables at the same time, business-related variables and entrepreneur-related variables. All models presented VIF values less than 1.5.

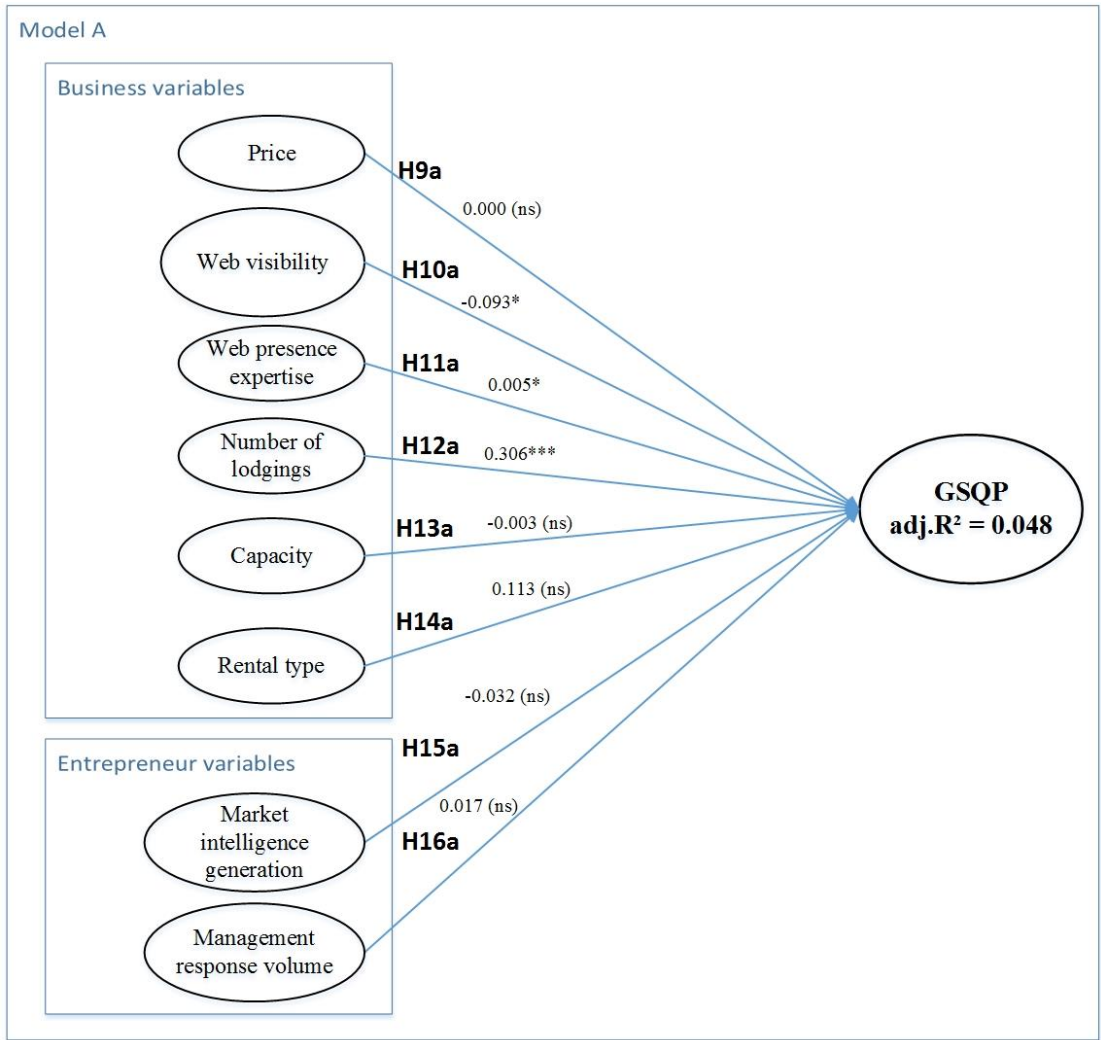
Table 13. Multivariate multiple regression results of final models.

Models A, B and C		Global service quality perception (A)		Lodging perceptions (B)		Surroundings perceptions (C)	
		MA.1	MA.2	MB.1	MB.2	MC.1	MC.2
(Constante)		-0.770***	-0.656**	0.017 (ns)	-0.740**	-1.445***	-1.207***
Business variables	Price		0.000 (ns)		0.006 (ns)		-0.002 (ns)
	Web visibility		-0.093*	-0.183***	-0.156**		-0.088 (ns)
	Web presence expertise	0.005**	0.005*		0.006*	0.011***	0.011***
	Number of lodgings	0.319***	0.306***	0.317**	0.321**	0.663***	0.644***
	Capacity		-0.003 (ns)		-0.001 (ns)		0.001 (ns)
	Rental type		0.113 (ns)		0.105 (ns)		0.043 (ns)
Entrepreneur variables	Market Intelligence generation		-0.032 (ns)				
	Management Response Volume		0.017 (ns)				
R^2_{adj}		0.042	0.048	0.063	0.079	0.112	0.104
N		237					

*p < .1. **p < .05. ***p < .01. ns = non-significant.

The results indicate that web visibility ($F = -0.093$, $p < 0,1$), web presence expertise ($F = 0.005$, $p < 0,1$), and number of lodgings ($F = 0.306$, $p < 0,01$) showed a statistically significant effect in GSQP, (model A.2, table 17). With regard to LP, web visibility ($F = -0.156$, $p < 0,05$), web presence expertise ($F = 0.006$, $p < 0,1$), and number of lodgings ($F = 0.321$, $p < 0,01$) showed a statistically significant effect (model B.2, table 17).

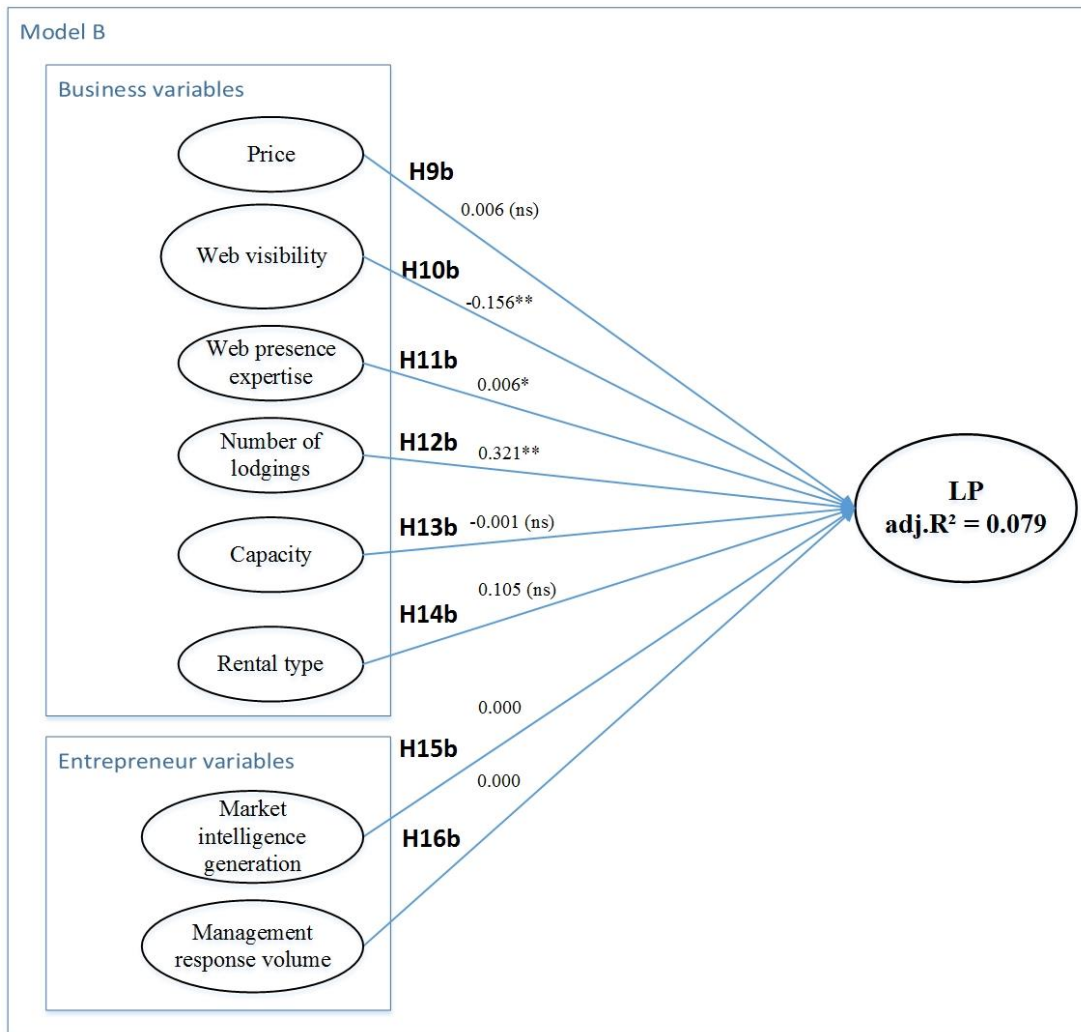
Figure 4. Outline results from the proposed research model A



Note: Standardized coefficients. * $p < .1$. ** $p < .05$. *** $p < .01$. ns = non-significant.

Finally, web presence expertise ($F = 0.011$, $p < 0.01$), and number of lodgings ($F = 0.644$, $p < 0.01$) showed a statistically significant effect on SP (model C.2, table 17).

Figure 5. Outline results from the proposed research model B

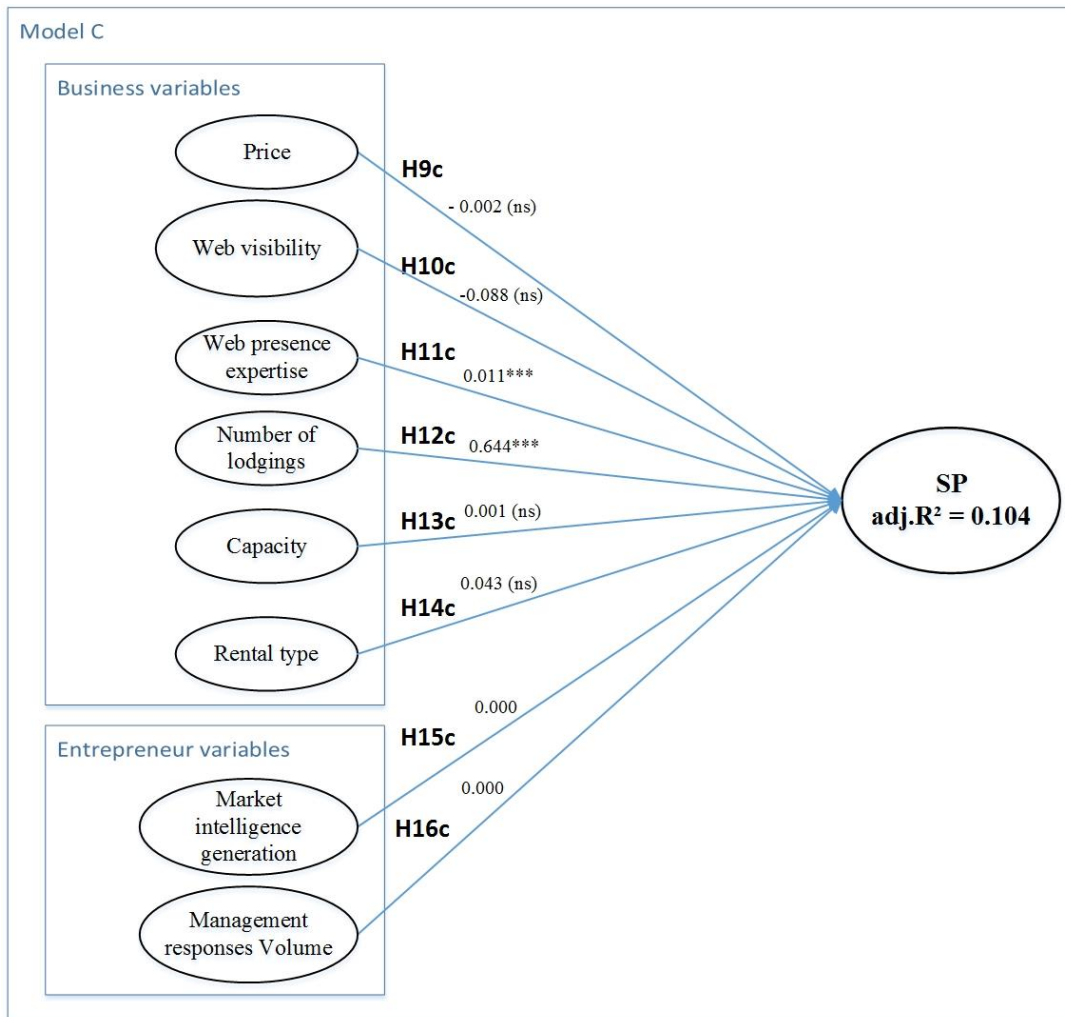


Note: Standardized coefficients. * $p < .1$. ** $p < .05$. *** $p < .01$. ns = non-significant.

A close look at the predictors yielded interesting insights number of lodgings and web presence expertise predicted all three perception dimensions, indicating potential as a useful management tool. Surprisingly, web visibility shows a negative effect in all three perception dimensions.

Web visibility predict GSQP and LP. Capacity and rental type don't show a statistically significant effect in none of the three dimensions considered. Consequently, capacity and rental type were transformed via logarithm and square root, which is a recommended transformation in such circumstances (Hair, Black, et al. 2014), and results remain the same for the three dimensions considered.

Figure 6. Outline results from the proposed research model C



Note: Standardized coefficients. * $p < .1$. ** $p < .05$. *** $p < .01$. ns = non-significant.

4.5. Discussion

With this study, we attempt to identify the RTEs' positioning from the perspective of positive perceptions of tourists (global service quality, lodging and surroundings perceptions) and examine the profile of each RTE segment based on three blocks of variables: business performance, lodgings' strategic variables, and entrepreneurs' behavioral skills. Business entrepreneurs might not assign the same importance to a particular type of business variable and customer behavior when strategizing about ways to improve their offers. Therefore, we consider it necessary to assess actual links between customer specific RTE positioning based on their perceptions, provided in review comments, the defined business strategy and entrepreneurial behavioral skills.

Another starting point for this study is that we combine customers', entrepreneurs', and business data. Specifically, positive customers perceptions (global service quality, lodging and surroundings perceptions), entrepreneurs' perceptions of their performance (through an online survey), entrepreneurs' behavioral skills (market intelligence and management response), and lodgings' strategic variables (price, web visibility, web presence expertise, number of lodgings, capacity, and rental type).

From a theoretical perspective, our results thus address a research gap pertaining to the analysis of RTE positioning based on customer positive perceptions and their characteristics. In this context, it is worthwhile considering another major research gap that our results address related to a deeper understanding of the process of increasing the volume of positive customer messages through strategic business variables and entrepreneurial behavioral skills. Our theoretical model helps clarify how customers position RTE based on their positive perceptions of experience, lodging strategic variables and the entrepreneurs' skills that increase the volume of positive customer messages.

From a managerial perspective, this research helps rural business owners understand what drives customers position RTE based on their positive perceptions and what are their characteristics. For managers, it is very important to know the end results of the services delivered from the customer perspective. It is strategically meaningful to explore which strategic variables and entrepreneurs' skills are key elements that drive tourists' positive online reviews volume when evaluating their service. In particular, the results we have

obtained allow highlighting two business variables that lead to the generation of a greater number of messages in each of the three categories of messages mentioned above: the number of managed lodgings establishments (only one or more than one) and, to a lesser extent, the time period of presence (months) of RTE on the infomediary's website.

Furthermore, we show that of all the variables considered in our analysis, the variable that represents the entrepreneur who has more than one competing lodging in the market, is the variable that most influences the number of messages. There are no RTE chains in this business, although it is possible to find entrepreneurs with two or three lodgings. According these study results, we may think that a manager with more than one accommodation manages his business more professionally, from the point of view of their behavioral skills, as well as the use of computer services that generate greater involvement and greater desire among users to post messages about their tourist experiences. On the other hand, the period of presence on the platform is an indicator of the time of presence in the market and, therefore, of the number of customers served, which will generate a higher number of messages.

Specifically, the number of messages in lodging perceptions is related to higher spending on promoting the RTE on the infomediary platform, but surprisingly the sign is negative. These arguments suggest that having a better visualization of the RTE offer in the infomediary platform, reduces the number of RTE reviews. Possibly, when an RTE is seen at the top of the infomediary platform in potential customer searches, RTE expectations are higher, especially in the most tangible attributes such as the characteristics that describe the RTE. Therefore, it appears that customers' post-experience perceptions are not as good as pre-experience perceptions when choosing the RTE.

As the most important effects, we highlight the following:

- RTE with more than one accommodation are managed in a more professional manner and are possibly more professional entrepreneurs or managers, which allows them to better explore the possibilities of

relationship with the client; among them, the desire to publish an online review that includes comments about their tourist experience.

- The time of presence in the market, measured from time to time in the infomediary platform, helps to generate a feedback effect, since they have a greater number of customers served, from the reviews published by the clients, which attract new clients, generating more publications. Being present for a longer time on the platform is also an indicator of business continuity and, therefore, that your offer is in demand to support it, which is an indicator of the quality of your offer.
- Surprisingly, the price of RTE does not influence the number of online customer reviews and the (higher) promotion expense has a negative effect. The price and promotion have a lot to do with the expectations that the client sets at the time of hiring. Expectations about the tourist experience generated by the higher-priced RTE and the tourist experience do not seem to influence the greater spirit of publishing a review of an online client, as we could anticipate at the beginning. Even with promotional spending on the infomediary platform, the expectations of enjoyment generated by being at the top of the platform may not be sufficiently confirmed, which will not encourage publication.

As this study is still in the pre-article phase, it is worth considering the use of other statistical techniques, such as structural equations, in order to deepen our understanding of this process.

Finally, some limitations of this research suggest ideas for further studies. First, improved business performance might produce the funds necessary to achieve greater online visibility and thus generate more positive comments. Accordingly, in different models, business performance might be either the antecedent or the cause. Second, we include information posted on Toprural' s website. It is the leading infomediary for rural tourism in Europe, but it is a specific site, so these results cannot be generalized to other information sources without careful consideration. Third, this study referred to rural

tourism establishments in just one country, France. It is the top destination for international tourism (UNWTO 2014), but again, the generalization of the results to other countries may be limited. It would be interesting to replicate this study using several countries and platforms simultaneously, such as other intermediary or destination websites, blogs, forums, social networking sites, and microblogs, to determine if similar results arise. Another line of research might try to identify “moments of truth” in tourists’ experiences. Furthermore, an insightful analysis might review how customers express themselves through the use of adjectives, first-person voice, or grammatical context. Finally, it would be interesting to investigate the inclusion of photos and videos in reviews and comments, as well as the effects of responses posted by the establishment owner.

4.6. References

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Chapter 5. CONCLUSIONS, IMPLICATIONS AND LIMITATIONS

5.1. Introduction

Hospitality managers strive to perform up to customers' expectation and deliver an exceptional service to achieve the highest levels of business performance. Nevertheless, a customers' experience is an experiential product that involves the intricacy and resiliency of subjectivity (Torres, Fu, and Lehto 2014). Across the entire spectrum of service experience, the peak moments largely shape customers' retrospective evaluation (Gilmore and Pine 1999, Varey and Kahneman 1992). Therefore, entrepreneurs constantly seek to gain insights on service quality through investigation on customers' experience, such as on what customers like and what they dislike (Crotts, Pan, and Raschid 2008); on the competitive situation of the market through research on competitors, such as on competitors proposals and how customers see them; and on best practices in the hospitality industry, such as going to important trade shows or meetings and reading the press and expert reports on important trade shows or meetings. Thus, this market-oriented focuses on exogenous and internal factors when analyzing the business environment, generates market intelligence that enhance competitive advantage (Sánchez 2012). Moreover, according to human capital theory, the skill set, experience and know-how of the entrepreneur is likely to be a prime source of critical resources that influence organizational outcomes (Pennings, Lee, and Witteloostuijn 1998, Hitt et al. 2001).

Businesses must orchestrate memorable and differentiated experiences for their customers, engage them emotionally, because customers can then retrieve them from their memory and increase their propensity to repurchase and recommend to others (Hosany and Witham 2010, Gilmore and Pine 1999). A highly satisfactory service that impresses customers is unlikely to be easily replicated by competitors (Crotts, Pan, and Raschid 2008). In other words, highly satisfied customers can be a strategic resource in competitiveness. Therefore, to maintain and enforce on areas that are already warmly embraced by customers is more strategically sound. In light of the present knowledge on this subject, the present study explored positive customer experiences, reported by online reviews, in a rural lodging experience, their consequences in business performance (business reputation and business profitability) and finally, the factors (business

configuration strategy and entrepreneurial behavioral skills) that can improve positive customers reviews volume.

5.2. Theoretical contributions

Tourism companies are aware that their business performance hinge on the customers' perceived level of satisfaction (Galati and Galati 2019). In this context, it is worthwhile to consider that is because customer satisfaction plays a fundamental role in encouraging customers to return, that is, making recommendations to their friends, making positive reviews and improving the entrepreneur's knowledge of the level of service, affecting business performance (Sparks and Browning 2011, Baka 2016, Berezina et al. 2016, Guo, Barnes, and Jia 2017, Gavilan, Avello, and Martinez-Navarro 2018, Radojevic et al. 2018).

The literature addressing consumers' reactions to online information is vast. Previous studies have substantially examined the effects of consumers' access to online information on their subsequent attitudes and intentions (Chatterjee 2001, Park, Lee, and Han 2007, Schlosser, White, and Lloyd 2006, Cantallops and Salvi 2014, Ladhari and Michaud 2015, Kim, Lim, and Brymer 2015, Melo, Hernández-Maestro, and Muñoz-Gallego 2017, Nieto-García, Muñoz-Gallego, and González-Benito 2017, Filieri et al. 2018, Luan et al. 2019). Yet, this research is the first empirical effort to investigate these business performance effects in the context of rural tourism services and which factors potentiate these effects.

The general purpose of our thesis is to analyze the impact of positive customers' reviews on the RTE results and how managers can increase these reviews volume. In this context, a better understanding of customer perceptions will facilitate the adjustment of strategic business variables as well as entrepreneur's behavior, which will improve positive customer perceptions and, as a result, the volume of positive reviews from tourists.

This thesis helps bridge an important gap in academic research on the effects of positive customer reviews online and how we can increase them. Our results thus address a research gap pertaining the analysis of content categories in online comments and their impacts on business performance. In addition, they address another research gap related to business characteristics, defined by the entrepreneur, his entrepreneurial behavior and its effects on the volume of positive reviews. Most of the research focuses on the impact of the online customer reviews on the knowledge, predisposition and contracting of tourist accommodation by the readers of these online customer reviews, that is, of the potential clients (Au, Buhalis, and Law 2009, Jeong and Jeon 2008, Ye et al. 2014, Lim, Chung, and Weaver 2012, Capriello et al. 2013, Arsal et al. 2010, Lee, Law, and Murphy 2011, Hawelka et al. 2014, Liu et al. 2014, Cantallops and Salvi 2014, Filieri et al. 2018, Melo, Hernández-Maestro, and Muñoz-Gallego 2017). In contrast little attention has been devoted to the impact that online customer reviews have on the results of the companies as well as the impact of entrepreneurial business decisions and entrepreneurs' behavior on the volume of online customer reviews.

RTE online customer reviews reflect their entire experience before, during and after their stay at the accommodation. A very important part of tourist trips generates reviews in electronic media. The results of a recent survey of rental apartment users in Spain indicate that around 50% of trips using this type of accommodation generate at least one review on the Internet (HomeAway 2019).

Our research findings suggest some interesting relationships:

First, one of the main contributions of these studies is to be the first empirical effort to span the both different approaches taken by prior analyses of online reviews, the use of content analysis seeking to find key terms or different categories of information and the link between different types of information sources, and the use of quantitative online review measures to explain the effects in terms of business performance (business profitability and business reputation), with the central role of customers' perceptions reflected in online reviews. We attempt to gain better explanations of performance by

considering the number of online reviews in each key content category, because consumers' sensitivity varies with the category to which the online reviews refer. Hence regarding the analysis carried out with the content categories, it is important to remember that online reviews may contain information related to more than one category. We show that the number of online reviews that refer to comments on the accommodation (LP) and the surrounding area (SP) explain the number of online reviews that refer to the holistic user experience (GSQP) and it is this general experience that explains the business results. Therefore, online reviews that talk about both the accommodation itself and the environment generate reviews that refer to the overall experience; which implies that through the same review or different reviews, having more customer reviews online with any type of content ends up generating comments about the overall experience.

Second, another point of departure for these studies is that we combine data from customers, entrepreneurs, and the businesses, namely, online reviews by customers, night prices, investments made by entrepreneurs to gain visibility on the intermediary's website, web presence expertise, number of lodgings, business capacity, rental type, management responses, market intelligence and business performance. On the one hand, in the first study, for content categories, an eight-languages dictionary was used (French, English, Dutch, Portuguese, German, Spanish, Italian and Catalan) and 1,635 words to analyze the 3,034 positive comments from 237 French rural tourism establishments. On the other hand, in the second study, we adopt a demand-driven perspective and we use a quantitative approach to identify factors (review volume, management response volume, and market intelligence generation) that positively influence business results.

Third, different measures of business results are used, which enriches the research. Although all of them are perceptual measures, aspects that have to do with both the reputation of the business and the economic and financial results are covered.

Fourth, another main contribution is that it analyzes, in the third study, how customers position RTE with the three dimensions of perceptions (perceptions of overall quality of service, perceptions of accommodation and perceptions of the environment),

reflected in the online reviews. As a result, there is evidence of two RTE segments based on customer perceptions. In this regard, the use of these customer perceptions to investigate differences between service evaluations and distinguish a specific group of service providers from others is not verified in the literature. People can perceive the same good or service differently (Galati and Galati 2019), so managers need to know more and more the point of view of their customers about the services they offer to improve the performance of their business. The third empirical study allowed us to see that most of the RTE have a relatively small number of online customer comments and that a minority receives a relatively larger number. In addition, study 3 reveals that the profiles of the two accommodation groups (clusters) differ in terms of performance variables (EP customer satisfaction), business marketing strategy (web visibility, web presence expertise), business configuration (number of managed accommodations) and entrepreneurs' skills (number of management responses to online customer reviews).

Fifth, the importance of online reviews as a source of information for today's consumers raises concerns. However, not much attention has been devoted to examining how companies can improve the satisfactory experience they provide and that is reflected in online reviews. Thus, the third study jointly analyzes elements related to the business (price, visibility on the infomediary website, experience in web presence, number of accommodations, capacity and type of rental) and factors related to the entrepreneur (generation of market intelligence and volume of responses of the company) in terms of its influence on the volume of online reviews. Thus, among the most influential variables, the following stand out: the possession of more than one RTE simultaneously and the presence time of the RTE with the infomediary.

Specifically, our theoretical model helps to clarify how the company's results, measured by its reputation and its economic-financial results, depend on the key elements of the service mentioned in the positive online reviews, as well as on online visibility. The model also specifies that positive GSQP results from the perceptions of LP and SP, and all separately have a significant and positive impact on business performance. In addition, in light of the results of this research, we address another research gap regarding the analysis

of the relationship between the volume of online reviews, the volume of response of the company, the generation of market intelligence and the profitability of the business. Theoretically, our model helps clarify how business results are influenced by the volume of online reviews and the generation of market intelligence. Even so, there is evidence that the model stipulates that both online reviews and management responses have stronger positive effects on business results in the presence of market intelligence generation. In this context, it is worth considering that this intelligence seems to be associated with a better use of the information available in customer reviews, as well as with more effective management responses. An important feature of our research model is that it emphasizes the understanding that market intelligence helps explain the impact of online reviews on the rural tourism accommodation sector. In addition, the model covers another gap, when analyzing the RTE position based on the perceptions of the clients, as they appear in their online reviews, and the relationship between the positive perceptions of the clients of experienced services, business and commercial strategy factors and behavioral factors. Consequently, the question of how customers use their positive perceptions of the services experienced to position RTE is answered, and how these segments of the RTE market are characterized. Moreover, it is examined what business-related factors and the factors related to the entrepreneur emerge as key factors to increase the volume of positive perceptions of customers, measured by perceptions of quality of global service, perceptions of accommodation and perceptions of the surroundings.

From the perspective of customer experience management, it is strategically significant to explore what these key drivers are, since evaluation with different components of an experience can have markedly different impacts on the overall assessment. In the client's mind, an area with poor performance may not be the deciding factor for the hosting experience. And the whole experience can be damaged if it is perceived that some of the key areas do not work well. Very few studies have been devoted to empirically examining this phenomenon and no study that the author knows has explored it in the tourist accommodation sector (Torres, Fu, and Lehto 2014, Loureiro and Kastenholz 2011, Ramkumar and Ellie Jin 2019).

At least there are two fundamental aspects that allow us to relate the reviews published by customers with the results perceived by the RTE:

1. The number and content of the online customer reviews:

The content of the online customer reviews is valuable information about the tourist experience, whether they deal with aspects of accommodation, of the environment with which the tourist interacts during their stay, as of the last results of their general enjoyment. Thus, the entrepreneur has information about the most outstanding aspects of his offer, those that are not mentioned, as well as their assessment (online customer reviews). Systematically monitoring the online customer reviews helps to have a better orientation for the continuous improvement of their offer. The availability of information must be understood, from the point of view of the theory of resources and capabilities, as a resource of the company.

Therefore, our approach is that a greater number of online customer reviews allows for better information from which improvements will be established that will end up having an impact on business results. In addition, it is not only about the total number of online customer reviews, but also whether the different content of the online customer reviews (on the lodging, on the surroundings, and on the global experience) has a different impact on business results.

2. The willingness and ability of the manager to consider the content of these online customer reviews to improve their tourism offer:

This predisposition is what makes it possible to move from information (number of online customer reviews, content) to competitive improvement (decisions to improve RTE offerings) and, consequently, to improved business results. From the point of view of resource and capacity theory, it must be understood as a capacity linked to the organization, in this type of micro-enterprise, to the entrepreneur himself.

We consider two indicators of this predisposition (and capacity), on the one hand, market intelligence and, on the other, the intensity of management's response to online reviews. Both refer to behaviors rather than mere capabilities. It is understood that this approach is closer to the use of this information to improve the company's competitiveness.

Market intelligence, understood as the active pursuit of up-to-date external information (demand, competitors, regulation) affecting business (opportunities and threats). It should be understood that an entrepreneur who systematically searches actively for new information will also be a manager who values information coming from his own customers; specifically, customer reviews posted on the internet. We assume that entrepreneurs or managers who are more interested in knowing the market information (customers, competitors, public policies, etc.) will surely be more aware of the value of the information provided by their clients' messages, will make better use of the same, which will lead to greater possibilities to improve your offer and results. Thus, a good indicator of the entrepreneur's interest in external information is the generation of market intelligence (eg participating in fairs, seminars, consulting specialized publications or published information of other reference accommodations). Our results confirm this argument. Entrepreneurs or managers with more market intelligence get a stronger relationship between the number of online reviews and business profitability.

Regarding the second of the aforementioned indicators, the responses that the accommodation manager gives to online reviews send a signal to the market about the manager's interest in receiving online customer reviews and their consideration to improve the offer. This encourages future clients to access these customer reviews and responses online, and to publish their own customer reviews online when using the hosting. In relation to the company's responses, although the expected direct effect on the results is not revealed, we do find a moderating effect exerted by market intelligence on the relationship between the number of management responses and the profitability of the business. Therefore, managers

who make a greater effort to be aware of market developments also seem to proceed more effectively in their responses. In summary, we should consider that a greater number of management responses to online customer reviews is a reinforcement of the effect on the results of the number of online customer reviews received.

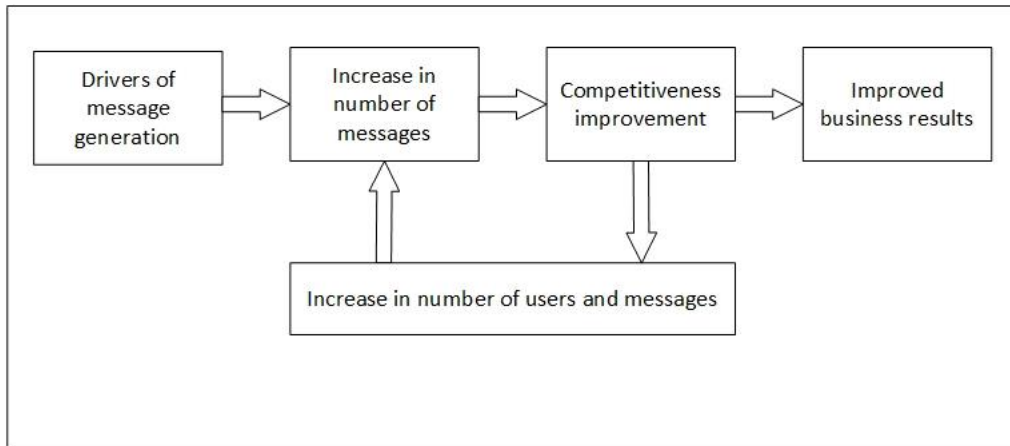
On the other hand, the RTE entrepreneur who is aware of this positive relationship between reviews number and results, will want to know what he needs to do to increase that amount of online reviews. This is where the study comes in. 3. This third empirical investigation should be understood as a ongoing research because we understand that it still needs to be improved in terms of theoretical justification and the comparison between our results and those of other published empirical research.

We group the factors that could potentially increase the volume of online reviews in two groups of variables:

- Those that have to do with the business configuration strategy,
- Those that have to do with the manager's or entrepreneur's behavioral skills.

The underlying hypothesis is that the RTE entrepreneur could influence the number of online reviews through these two sources. Indeed, the empirical analysis reveals that some of these variables influence the number of online reviews, which indicates that the entrepreneur can effectively be a stimulator of the generation of online reviews and, as a result, can create a circle in his business that drives best results.

Figure 7. Business virtuous circle



The RTE with more reviews will have valuable information about the clients' tastes and also about the suitability of the offer to meet those expectations, and this will allow the RTE to maintain an updated and competitive offer at all times. It is possible that an increase in the number of online customer reviews may not always have a linear effect, as we have obtained here, but there may be diminishing returns in the sense that increases above a certain threshold of number of online reviews may not significantly facilitate competitive improvements. However, the average number of online reviews received by the RTE, approximately 14,73 in our sample, leaves no room to prove non-linear relationships, although there may be.

It is also important to consider that it is the good offer that will attract the most customers, which would result in more online customer reviews. No doubt this sense of relationship also exists, but it is not inconsistent with the logic that these online customer reviews always help to improve the competitiveness of the RTE; what would generate the virtuous circle that we mentioned before. Therefore, it does not matter what the beginning of the circle is, but its ability to feedback. It should be remembered, at this point, that this result is obtained from two different sources of information: infomediary platform (online customer reviews) and RTE entrepreneurs survey (perception of results), which eliminates any bias due to the use of a single data source.

5.3. Practical implications

From a managerial perspective some implications can be derived. We will divide these practical implications according to the agents to which they are directed: tourism entrepreneurs, public administrations and tourist accommodation platforms.

5.3.1. Tourism entrepreneurs

Thinking about **tourism entrepreneurs**, the main use for them of our research is to demonstrate that there is a relationship between the messages that customers post about an RTE and the business results obtained by the RTE.

In this regard, there are two sources of feedback from customer message results:

Firstly, Customer messages are part of the promotion and positioning of the RTE offer in the market, what makes its number, valence, heterogeneity, content or its proximity in time, influence the desire of potential customers to use the RTE. This higher RTE-adjusted demand is expected to contribute to improved RTE outcomes. There is a lot of research demonstrating the positive incidence of the number of messages in the acquisition of new customers, but very few have proven their impact on business results. Something we can intuit but about which little evidence has been provided.

We have shown that increasing the number of messages improves business results. To increase the number of positive messages, the company has two sources:

On the one hand, the autonomous desire of the client: customer experience exceeds customer expectations, which will generate an implication (*engagement*) stronger with the establishment and will cause the desire to transfer this experience to the entrepreneur and to the other customers.

On the other hand, RTE's efforts to generate messages:

- Invest to maintain the offer continuously over time at least in a specialized platform, increase the number of messages. Our results indicate that maintaining presence is enough, hiring the most expensive promotions on

the platform doesn't seem to contribute to increasing the number of messages, but on the contrary.

- Facilitate messaging at customer touch points, for example, including an app in the satisfaction survey that posts, prior authorization, comments or ratings on the RTE website or platform.

- There is one business configuration decision that have a major impact on the number of messages: owning more than one lodging managed by the RTE. This last aspect is, by far the most important of all efforts that an RTE can make to generate positive messages. This configurational variable can be interpreted as indicator of increased resource involvement (investments, time, knowledge, people...) by the entrepreneur. The entrepreneurs with more than one lodging will have a more professional management structure, for example outsourcing web maintenance or positioning on social networks and platforms. Therefore, the greater the professionalization, the greater the number of messages and the better the business performance. Deciding on professional management is the most powerful tool for generating messages.

Secondly, the contents of the messages are a source of improvement of the competitiveness of the company. Customers talk about their travel experience in the messages they post on the internet. Entrepreneurs who are aware of this content can find evidence about the strengths and weaknesses of their business or about market threats and opportunities. Entrepreneurs who are more attentive to the messages are also attentive to any market change (competitor tracking, reading periodicals, attending trade shows) and they are active responding to customer messages, thanking them or taking note of what has not been well valued.

Our results tell us that the entrepreneurs most involved in their business (Market intelligence) they make better use of message content, which makes them have better business results. On the other hand, the mere response to customer messages by the employer does not affect the results, for example because for many accommodations it has just become a routine, but when the entrepreneur is more involved in his business (Market

intelligence), take better advantage of its contents, probably respond in a more personalized and appropriate way, which generates a greater interest of potential customers for their RTE, as a more conscious use of the improvements that can be implemented.

In this regard, we also propose that special attention be given to messages that include comments on the customer's emotional experience (satisfaction, rest, comfort, host, ...) since it is these contents that we have proven to be the ones that directly affect the improvement of results.

5.3.2. Public administrators

Our results also interest **Public Administrations**. If they want to improve the sector's competitiveness, its results and the quality of RTE offer, some actions should be promoted:

- Focus primarily on investments for companies looking to increase their size from opening new lodgings to acquiring existing lodgings.
- In their support of the industry, favorably discriminate against entrepreneurs who show interest and involvement in the industry on the basis of participation in fairs, monitoring competitors or subscribing to industry publications.
- Facilitate the training of these microentrepreneurs in techniques for monitoring and analyzing the messages they receive. Even partially and temporarily, the financing of hiring these services from ICT companies. It's not just about improving the ability of RTE to keep up with what is posted on their tourist platform or on their own website, but also on Twitter and Tripadvisor.
- Finally, it would be convenient to have a public observatory on clients' perceptions of the quality of RTE in a country, in a region, province, locality or municipality, by periodically analyzing the messages left on the main platforms. As we have already pointed out, analyzing the number of messages or their content is a reliable indicator of the industry's economic health.

5.3.3. Accommodation platforms

Finally, our results should interest **specialized tourist platforms**:

- RTE with fewer messages are less likely to stay on the platform unless they are newly created RTE, because they have worse results than those with more messages and therefore will either hire fewer platform services or do so for less time.
- On the other hand, RTE with multi-lodging may have greater interest for the platform. This is due to the greater opportunities of permanence in the platform and for helping to prestige the offer of the platform among the users, since, as we have pointed out, the best results come in part from the competitive improvement the company gets from the number and analysis of message content.

Therefore, our proposal is to segment the RTE (customers) based on these indicators, which, in short, are indicators of the business results that are probably getting. It is very likely that the demand for services offered by the platform and the price elasticity of these services, be different if we are facing RTE with few or many messages.

5.4. Limitations and future research agenda

There are a number of implications of this research for future research projects. First, it would be interesting to extend these findings to other types of tourist accommodation, such as hotels and tourist apartments, and to other contexts beyond the accommodation sector. In this research we include information posted on Toprural's website (now part of HomeAway Spain, S.L.). It is the leading infomediary for rural tourism in Europe, but it is a specific site, which may limit the generalization of our results. It would be interesting to replicate this study including more than one e-hiring platform and incorporate such as other infomediary or destination websites, blogs, forums, social networking sites, and microblogs, to determine if similar results arise. This study referred to rural tourism establishments in just one country, France. It is the top destination for international tourism (UNWTO 2019), but the generalization of the results to other countries may be limited. It would be interesting to replicate this study using several countries and platforms simultaneously.

Second, this research also illuminates the need for additional insights on the identification of the “moments of truth” in tourists’ experiences. Furthermore, an insightful analysis might review how customers express themselves through the use of adjectives, first-person voice, or grammatical context. It would be interesting to investigate the inclusion of photos and videos in reviews and comments, as well as the effects of responses posted by the establishment owner. Analyzing the content of responses may provide additional insights, thus search should be extended to analyze the particular content of managerial responses.

Third, it is worth considering further investigation the distinction in messages between country resident and non-resident tourists. The same logic underlies the differentiation of countries of origin from non-resident tourists in the messages. Understanding the potential differences in terms of customer perceptual positioning could also prove insightful.

To conclude, it's important to note that this research provides interesting insights related to positive online customer feedback and their impact on business results. Future research could address the proposed relationships in an offline context. Specifically, it would be relevant to understand how consumers balance internal information and external offline information. In this regard, external offline information could be commercial (i.e., information provided by tourism operators through offline information channels) or non-commercial (i.e., word of mouth). Such an intent will result in a more complete understanding of consumer purchasing decisions, their impact on business results, and how business management can impact those decisions. Furthermore, an insightful analysis could use a longitudinal study in which a panel data model could identify the optimal level of online reviews. Finally, it will be very interesting to improve the models’ accuracy in terms of RTE results, using for example occupancy rates and the revenue.

5.5. Introducción

Los gerentes en el sector de los alojamientos se esfuerzan por cumplir con las expectativas de los clientes y ofrecer un servicio excepcional para alcanzar los más altos

niveles de rendimiento empresarial. Sin embargo, la experiencia de un cliente implica subjetividad (Torres, Fu y Lehto 2014).

En todo el espectro de la experiencia de servicio, los momentos pico configuran en gran medida la evaluación retrospectiva de los clientes (Gilmore y Pine 1999, Varey y Kahneman 1992). Por lo tanto, los empresarios buscan constantemente obtener información sobre la calidad del servicio a través de la investigación de la experiencia de los clientes, como lo que les gusta y lo que no les gusta (Crotts, Pan y Raschid 2008); sobre la situación competitiva del mercado a través de la investigación de competidores, cuáles son las propuestas de los competidores y cómo las ven los clientes; y sobre las mejores prácticas en la industria hotelera, como ir a ferias o reuniones importantes y leer la prensa y los informes de expertos sobre ferias o reuniones importantes. Por lo tanto, esta orientación al mercado se centra en factores exógenos e internos al analizar el entorno empresarial, generando inteligencia de mercado que mejora las capacidades de los empresarios para obtener una ventaja competitiva (Sánchez 2012). Además, según la teoría del capital humano, es probable que el conjunto de habilidades, la experiencia y los conocimientos del emprendedor sean una fuente principal de recursos críticos que influyen en los resultados de la organización (Pennings, Lee y Witteloostuijn 1998, Hitt et al. 2001).

Las empresas deben conseguir crear experiencias memorables y diferenciadas para sus clientes, involucrarlos emocionalmente, porque los clientes pueden recuperar estas experiencias en su memoria y aumentar su propensión a recomprar y recomendar a otros (Hosany y Witham 2010, Gilmore y Pine 1999). Es poco probable que los competidores puedan replicar fácilmente un servicio altamente satisfactorio que impresione a los clientes (Crotts, Pan y Raschid 2008). En otras palabras, los clientes altamente satisfechos pueden ser un recurso estratégico en competitividad. Por lo tanto, mantener y hacer cumplir las áreas que ya son acogidas por los clientes es más estratégico. A la luz del conocimiento actual sobre este tema, el presente estudio exploró experiencias positivas de los clientes en alojamientos de turismo rural, tal y como constatan las revisiones en línea, sus consecuencias en el desempeño comercial (reputación comercial y rentabilidad del negocio) y finalmente, los factores (estrategia de configuración comercial y habilidades de comportamiento empresarial) que pueden mejorar el volumen de comentarios positivos de los clientes.

5.6. Contribuciones teóricas

Las empresas turísticas son conscientes de que el rendimiento de su negocio depende del nivel de satisfacción percibido por los clientes (Galati y Galati 2019). En este contexto, vale la pena considerar que esto se debe a que la satisfacción del cliente desempeña un papel fundamental para alentarles a hacer recomendaciones a sus amigos, publicar reseñas positivas, repetir, etc., lo que, en último término, influirá en los resultados empresariales del negocio (Sparks and Browning 2011, Baka 2016, Berezina et al.2016, Guo, Barnes y Jia 2017, Gavilan, Avello y Martinez-Navarro 2018, Radojevic et al.2018).

La literatura que aborda las reacciones de los consumidores ante la información online es muy amplia. Estudios anteriores han examinado sustancialmente los efectos del acceso de los consumidores a la información online sobre sus actitudes e intenciones (Chatterjee 2001, Park, Lee y Han 2007, Schlosser, White y Lloyd 2006, Cantallops y Salvi 2014, Ladhari y Michaud 2015, Kim, Lim y Brymer 2015, Melo, Hernández-Maestro y Muñoz-Gallego 2017, Nieto-García, Muñoz-Gallego y González-Benito 2017, Filieri et al.2018, Luan et al.2019). Sin embargo, esta investigación es el primer esfuerzo empírico para investigar los efectos de las reseñas online sobre el rendimiento empresarial en el contexto de los alojamientos de turismo rural, ahondado en los factores que potencian estos efectos.

El propósito general de nuestra tesis es analizar el impacto de las reseñas positivas de los clientes en los resultados de RTE y cómo los gerentes pueden aumentar el volumen de estas reseñas. En este contexto, una mejor comprensión de las percepciones de los clientes facilitará el ajuste de las variables comerciales estratégicas, así como del comportamiento de los empresarios, lo que mejorará las percepciones positivas de los clientes y, como resultado, el volumen de comentarios positivos de los turistas.

Esta tesis ayuda a cerrar una brecha importante en la investigación académica sobre los efectos de las reseñas online positivas y cómo es posible aumentarlas. Por lo tanto, nuestros resultados abordan una brecha en la investigación relacionada con el análisis de categorías de contenido en las reseñas online y sus impactos en el rendimiento del negocio. Además, abordan otra brecha de investigación relacionada con las características del negocio, el comportamiento del empresario y sus efectos en el volumen de reseñas positivas. La mayor parte de la investigación se centra en el impacto de las reseñas online sobre el conocimiento, la predisposición y la contratación de alojamiento turístico por parte de los lectores de estas reseñas, es decir, de los clientes potenciales (Au, Buhalis y Law 2009, Jeong y Jeon 2008, Ye et al. 2014, Lim, Chung y Weaver 2012, Capriello et al. 2013, Arsal et al. 2010, Lee, Law y Murphy 2011, Hawelka et al. 2014, Liu et al. 2014, Cantalops y Salvi 2014, Filieri et al. 2018, Melo, Hernández-Maestro y Muñoz-Gallego 2017). Por el contrario, se ha prestado poca atención al impacto que las reseñas tienen en los resultados de las compañías, así como al impacto que las decisiones y el comportamiento empresarial tienen en el volumen de reseñas.

Las reseñas online de los clientes de RTE reflejan toda su experiencia, es decir, la referida al antes, al durante y al después de su estancia en el alojamiento. Una parte muy importante de los viajes turísticos genera reseñas en medios electrónicos. Los resultados de una encuesta reciente de usuarios de apartamentos de alquiler en España indican que alrededor del 50% de los viajes que utilizan este tipo de alojamiento generan al menos una reseña en Internet (HomeAway 2019).

Nuestra investigación supone algunas contribuciones interesantes:

Primera, una de las principales contribuciones de estos estudios es ser el primer esfuerzo empírico para abarcar los dos enfoques diferentes tomados por análisis previos de reseñas online, el uso de análisis de contenido que busca encontrar términos clave o diferentes categorías de información y el vínculo entre diferentes tipos de fuentes de información, y el uso de medidas cuantitativas de reseñas online para explicar los efectos

en términos del desempeño comercial (resultados económico-financieros y reputación empresarial), con el papel central de las percepciones de los clientes reflejadas en las reseñas online. Intentamos obtener mejores explicaciones del rendimiento considerando el número de revisiones en línea en cada categoría de contenido clave, porque la sensibilidad de los consumidores varía con la categoría a la que se refieren las reseñas online. A este respecto, en cuanto al análisis realizado con las categorías de contenido, es importante recordar que las reseñas online pueden contener información relativa a más de una categoría. Mostramos que el número de reseñas online que se refieren a comentarios del alojamiento (LP) y de los alrededores (SP) explican el número de reseñas online que se refieren a la experiencia holística del usuario (GSQP) y es esta experiencia general la que explica los resultados comerciales. Por lo tanto, las reseñas online que hablan tanto sobre el alojamiento en sí como sobre el entorno generan reseñas que se refieren a la experiencia turística general; lo que implica que a través de la misma reseña o de diferentes reseñas, tener más revisiones de clientes en línea con cualquier tipo de contenido termina generando comentarios sobre la experiencia general.

Segunda, otro punto de partida para estos estudios es que combinamos datos de clientes, empresarios y empresas, a saber, reseñas online, precios, inversiones realizadas por empresarios para ganar visibilidad en el sitio web del infomediario, experiencia en presencia web, número de alojamientos, capacidad comercial, tipo de alquiler, respuesta online de la empresa a las reseñas de los clientes, inteligencia de mercado y desempeño empresarial. Por un lado, en el primer estudio, para las categorías de contenido, se utilizó un diccionario de ocho idiomas (francés, inglés, holandés, portugués, alemán, español, italiano y catalán) y 1.635 palabras para analizar los 3.034 comentarios positivos de 237 establecimientos de turismo rural franceses. Por otro lado, en el segundo estudio, adoptamos una perspectiva basada en la demanda y utilizamos un enfoque cuantitativo para identificar factores (volumen de reseñas, volumen de respuestas de la empresa y generación de inteligencia de mercado) que influyen positivamente en los resultados del negocio.

Tercera, se utilizan distintas medidas de resultados empresariales, lo que enriquece la investigación. Si bien todas ellas son medidas perceptuales, se cubren aspectos que tienen que ver tanto con la reputación del negocio como con los resultados económico-financieros.

Cuarta, otra contribución principal consiste en que se analiza, en el estudio tercero, cómo los clientes posicionan los RTE con las tres dimensiones de percepciones (percepciones de calidad de servicio global, percepciones de alojamiento y percepciones del entorno), reflejadas en las reseñas online. Como resultado, hay evidencia de dos segmentos RTE basados en las percepciones de los clientes. A este respecto, en la literatura no se constata la utilización de estas percepciones de los clientes para investigar las diferencias entre las evaluaciones del servicio y distinguir un grupo específico de proveedores de servicios de otros. Las personas pueden percibir el mismo bien o servicio de manera diferente (Galati and Galati 2019), por lo que los gerentes necesitan conocer cada vez más el punto de vista de sus clientes sobre los servicios que ofrecen para mejorar el rendimiento de su negocio. El tercer estudio empírico nos permitió ver que la mayoría de los RTE tienen un número relativamente pequeño de comentarios de clientes en línea y que una minoría recibe un número relativamente mayor. Además, el estudio 3 revela que los perfiles de los dos grupos de alojamientos (clusters) difieren en términos de los resultados empresariales (percepción del empresario de la satisfacción del cliente), estrategia de marketing empresarial (promoción en la web, experiencia de presencia en la web), configuración empresarial (número de alojamientos gestionados) y habilidades del empresario (número de respuestas de la gerencia a las revisiones en línea de los clientes).

Quinta, la importancia de las reseñas online como fuente de información para los consumidores de hoy plantea inquietudes. Sin embargo, no se ha dedicado tanta atención a examinar cómo las empresas pueden mejorar la experiencia satisfactoria que brindan y que se refleja en las reseñas online. Así, el estudio tercero analiza conjuntamente elementos relacionados con el negocio (precio, visibilidad en el sitio web intermediario, experiencia en presencia web, número de alojamiento, capacidad y tipo de alquiler) y factores relacionados

con el emprendedor (generación de inteligencia de mercado y volumen de respuestas de la empresa) en cuanto a su influencia en el volumen de reseñas online. Así, entre las variables más influyentes, destacan: la posesión de más de un RTE simultáneamente y el tiempo de permanencia del RTE con el infomediario.

En concreto, nuestro modelo teórico ayuda a aclarar cómo los resultados de la empresa, medidos por su reputación y sus resultados económico-financieros, dependen de los elementos clave del servicio mencionados en las reseñas positivas online, así como de la visibilidad online. El modelo también especifica que GSQP positivo resulta de las percepciones de LP y de SP, y todos por separado tienen un impacto significativo y positivo en el desempeño del negocio. Además, a la luz de los resultados de esta investigación, abordamos otra brecha de investigación con respecto al análisis de la relación entre el volumen de reseñas online, el volumen de respuesta de la empresa, la generación de inteligencia de mercado y la rentabilidad del negocio. Teóricamente, nuestro modelo ayuda a aclarar cómo los resultados empresariales se ven influidos por el volumen de reseñas online y por la generación de inteligencia de mercado. Aún así, existe evidencia de que el modelo estipula que tanto las reseñas online como las respuestas de la administración tienen efectos positivos más fuertes en los resultados del negocio en presencia de la generación de inteligencia de mercado. En este contexto, vale la pena considerar que esta inteligencia parece estar asociada con un mejor uso de la información disponible en las revisiones de los clientes, así como con respuestas de gestión más efectivas. Una característica importante de nuestro modelo de investigación es que acentúa la comprensión de que la inteligencia de mercado ayuda a explicar el impacto de las reseñas online en el sector de alojamientos de turismo rural. Además, el modelo cubre otra brecha, al analizar la posición RTE a partir de las percepciones de los clientes, tal y como constan en sus reseñas online, y la relación entre las percepciones positivas de los clientes de servicios experimentados, factores de estrategia comercial y empresarial y factores de comportamiento. En consecuencia, se responde a la pregunta de cómo los clientes usan sus percepciones positivas de los servicios experimentados para posicionar los RTE, y cómo se caracterizan estos segmentos del mercado de RTE. Además, se examina qué factores

relacionados con el negocio y los factores relacionados con el emprendedor emergen como factores clave para aumentar el volumen de percepciones positivas de los clientes, medidas por las percepciones de calidad del servicio global, las percepciones de alojamiento y las percepciones del entorno.

Desde la perspectiva de la gestión de la experiencia del cliente, es estratégicamente significativo explorar cuáles son estos impulsores clave, ya que la evaluación con diferentes componentes de una experiencia puede tener impactos notablemente diferentes en la evaluación general. En la mente del cliente, un área con bajo rendimiento puede no ser el factor decisivo para la experiencia de alojamiento. Y toda la experiencia se puede estropear si se percibiera que alguna de las áreas clave no funciona bien. Muy pocos estudios se han dedicado a examinar empíricamente este fenómeno y ningún estudio que el autor conozca lo ha explorado en el sector de los alojamientos turísticos (Torres, Fu y Lehto 2014, Loureiro y Kastenholz 2011, Ramkumar y Ellie Jin 2019).

Al menos hay dos aspectos fundamentales que nos permiten relacionar las reseñas publicadas por los clientes con los resultados percibidos del RTE:

1. El número y el contenido de las reseñas online de los clientes:

El contenido de las reseñas en línea de los clientes es información valiosa sobre la experiencia turística, ya sea que aborden aspectos del alojamiento, del entorno con el que el turista interactúa durante su estadía, como de los últimos resultados de su disfrute general. Por lo tanto, el empresario tiene información sobre los aspectos más destacados de su oferta, aquellos que no se mencionan, así como su evaluación (comentarios de clientes en línea). El monitoreo sistemático de las opiniones de los clientes en línea ayuda a tener una mejor orientación para la mejora continua de su oferta. La disponibilidad de información debe entenderse, desde el punto de vista de la teoría de los recursos y capacidades, como un recurso de la empresa.

Por lo tanto, nuestro enfoque es que un mayor número de reseñas online permite una mejor información a partir de la cual se establecerán mejoras que terminarán teniendo un impacto en los resultados comerciales. Además, no se trata solo del número total de reseñas online, sino también de si el contenido diferente de los comentarios online (sobre el alojamiento, el entorno y la experiencia global) tiene un impacto diferente en los resultados comerciales.

2. La disposición y la capacidad del gerente para considerar el contenido de estas reseñas de clientes online para mejorar su oferta turística:

Esta predisposición es lo que hace posible pasar de la información (número de comentarios de clientes online, contenido) a la mejora competitiva (decisiones para mejorar las ofertas de RTE) y, en consecuencia, a mejores resultados comerciales. Desde el punto de vista de la teoría de los recursos y la capacidad, debe entenderse como una capacidad vinculada a la organización, en este tipo de microempresa, al propio emprendedor.

Consideramos dos indicadores de esta predisposición (y capacidad), por un lado, la inteligencia de mercado y, por otro, la intensidad de respuesta de la administración a las reseñas online. Ambos se refieren a comportamientos en lugar de meras capacidades. Se entiende que este enfoque está más cerca del uso de esta información para mejorar la competitividad de la empresa.

Inteligencia de mercado, entendida como la búsqueda activa de información externa actualizada (demanda, competencia, regulación) que afecta a las empresas (oportunidades y amenazas). Un emprendedor que busca activamente de manera sistemática nueva información también será un gerente que valora la información que proviene de sus propios clientes; específicamente, comentarios de clientes publicados en internet. Asumimos que los empresarios o gerentes que estén más interesados en conocer la información del mercado (clientes, competidores, políticas

públicas, etc.) seguramente serán más conscientes del valor de la información proporcionada por los mensajes de sus clientes, harán una mejor utilización de los mismos, lo que dará lugar a mayores posibilidades para mejorar su oferta y resultados. Así, un buen indicador del interés del emprendedor en la información externa es la generación de inteligencia de mercado (ej. participando en ferias, seminarios, consultando publicaciones especializadas o información publicada de otros alojamientos de referencia). Nuestros resultados confirman esta argumentación. Los empresarios o gerentes con más inteligencia de mercado obtienen una relación más sólida entre el número de reseñas online y la rentabilidad del negocio.

Respecto al segundo de los indicadores mencionados, las respuestas que el gerente del alojamiento da a las reseñas online envían una señal al mercado sobre el interés del gerente en recibir las reseñas de clientes en línea y su consideración para mejorar la oferta. Esto alienta a los futuros clientes a acceder a estas reseñas y respuestas de clientes en línea, y a publicar sus propias reseñas de clientes en línea al usar el alojamiento. En relación con las respuestas de la empresa, aunque no se revela el efecto directo esperado sobre los resultados, sí encontramos un efecto moderador ejercido por la inteligencia de mercado sobre la relación entre el número de respuestas de la administración y la rentabilidad del negocio. Por lo tanto, los gerentes que realizan un mayor esfuerzo por estar al tanto de los desarrollos del mercado también parecen proceder de forma más eficaz en sus respuestas. En resumen, debemos considerar que un mayor número de respuestas de la administración a las revisiones de clientes en línea es un refuerzo del efecto sobre los resultados de la cantidad de revisiones de clientes en línea recibidas.

Por otro lado, el emprendedor RTE que es consciente de esta relación positiva entre las reseñas positivas y los resultados, querrá conocer qué necesita hacer para aumentar esa cantidad de reseñas online. Aquí es donde entra el estudio 3. Esta tercera investigación empírica debe entenderse como una investigación en curso porque entendemos que aún

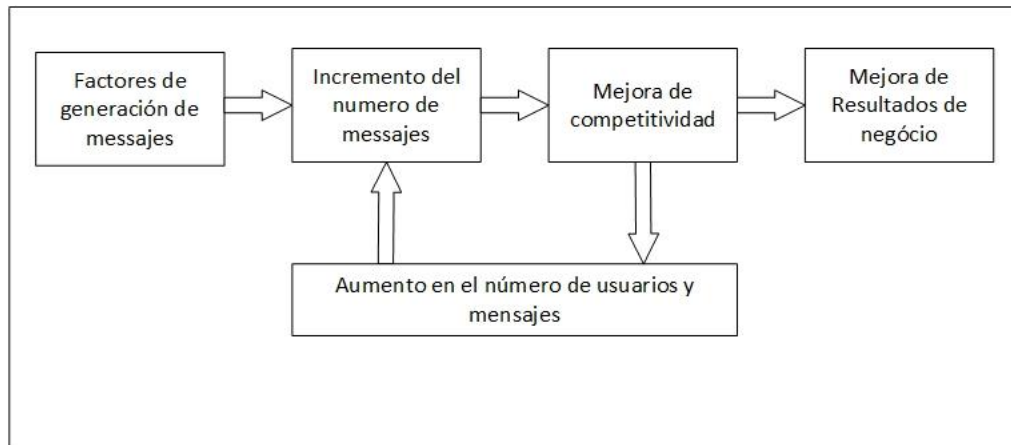
debe mejorarse en términos de la justificación teórica y la comparación entre nuestros resultados y los de otras investigaciones empíricas publicadas.

Agrupamos los factores que potencialmente aumentarían el volumen de reseñas online en dos grupos de variables:

- Las que tienen que ver con la estrategia de configuración empresarial.
- Aquellas que tienen que ver con las habilidades de comportamiento del gerente o empresario.

La hipótesis subyacente es que el empresario RTE podría influir en el número de reseñas online a través de estas dos fuentes. Efectivamente, el análisis empírico desvela que algunas de estas variables influyen en el número de reseñas online, lo que indica que el empresario puede ser efectivamente un estimulador de la generación de reseñas online y, como resultado, puede crear un círculo virtuoso en su negocio que impulse mejores resultados.

Figura 8. Círculo virtuoso empresarial



El RTE con más reseñas tendrá información valiosa sobre los gustos del cliente y también sobre la idoneidad de la oferta para cumplir con esas expectativas, y esto permitirá que el RTE mantenga una oferta actualizada y competitiva en todo momento. Es posible

que un aumento en el número de revisiones de clientes en línea no siempre tenga un efecto lineal, como lo hemos obtenido aquí, pero puede haber rendimientos decrecientes en el sentido de que aumentos por encima de cierto umbral de número de reseñas online pueden no facilitar significativamente mejoras competitivas. Sin embargo, el número promedio de reseñas online recibidas por el RTE, 14.73 en nuestra muestra, no deja espacio para probar relaciones no lineales, aunque podría haberlas.

También es importante tener en cuenta que es la buena oferta la que atraerá a la mayoría de los clientes, lo que daría como resultado más reseñas online. Sin duda, este sentido de relación también existe, pero no es inconsistente con la lógica de que estas reseñas siempre ayudan a mejorar la competitividad del RTE, lo que generaría el círculo virtuoso que mencionamos antes. Por lo tanto, no importa cuál sea el comienzo del círculo, sino su capacidad de retroalimentación. Debe recordarse, en este punto, que este resultado se obtiene de dos fuentes diferentes de información: plataforma infomediaria (revisiones de clientes en línea) y encuesta de empresarios RTE (percepción de resultados), que elimina cualquier sesgo debido al uso de una sola fuente de datos.

5.7. Implicaciones prácticas

Desde una perspectiva gerencial, se pueden derivar algunas implicaciones. Dividiremos estas implicaciones prácticas según los agentes a los que se dirijan: empresarios turísticos, administraciones públicas y plataformas de alojamiento turístico.

5.7.1. Empresarios turísticos

Pensando en los empresarios turísticos, nuestra investigación muestra que existe una relación entre los mensajes que los clientes publican sobre un RTE y los resultados comerciales obtenidos por el RTE.

En este sentido, hay dos fuentes de comentarios de los resultados de los mensajes del cliente:

1. Los mensajes de los clientes son parte de la promoción y el posicionamiento de la oferta de RTE en el mercado, lo que hace que su número, valencia, heterogeneidad, contenido o su proximidad en el tiempo influyan en el deseo de los clientes potenciales de usar el RTE. Se espera que este mayor deseo contribuya a mejorar los resultados de RTE. Hay muchas investigaciones que confirman la incidencia positiva de la cantidad de mensajes en la adquisición de nuevos clientes, pero muy pocos han demostrado su impacto en los resultados empresariales. Algo que podemos intuir, pero sobre lo que se ha proporcionado poca evidencia.

Hemos demostrado que aumentar el número de mensajes mejora los resultados empresariales. Para aumentar la cantidad de mensajes positivos, la compañía tiene dos fuentes:

a) El deseo del propio cliente: si la experiencia del cliente excede sus expectativas, se generará una implicación (compromiso) más fuerte con el establecimiento y provocará el deseo de transferir esta experiencia al emprendedor y a otros clientes.

b) Esfuerzos del RTE para generar mensajes.

- Invertir para mantener la oferta a lo largo del tiempo al menos en una plataforma especializada, lo que aumentará el número de mensajes. Nuestros resultados indican que mantener la presencia es suficiente, contratar las promociones más caras en la plataforma no parece contribuir a aumentar el número de mensajes, sino todo lo contrario.

- Facilitar la publicación de reseñas en los puntos de contacto con el cliente, por ejemplo, incluyendo una aplicación (app) con la encuesta de satisfacción que publique, previa autorización, comentarios o calificaciones en el sitio web o plataforma de RTE.

- Hay una decisión de configuración empresarial que tiene un impacto importante en la cantidad de mensajes: disponer de más de un alojamiento administrado por un empresario. Este aspecto es, con mucho, el más importante de todos los esfuerzos que un RTE puede hacer para generar mensajes positivos. Esta es una medida de configuración estructural o comercial y el empresario puede interpretarla como indicador de un mayor compromiso de recursos (inversiones, tiempo, conocimiento, personas, etc.). Los

empresarios con más de un alojamiento tendrán una estructura de gestión más profesional, no solo en lo que tiene que ver con el emprendedor en sí, sino también con la red de empresas proveedoras con las que se relaciona; por ejemplo, externalización de mantenimiento web o posicionamiento en redes sociales y plataformas. Por lo tanto, una mayor profesionalización, parece que derivará en un mayor número de mensajes y mejores resultados comerciales. Disponer de una gestión profesional es la herramienta más poderosa para generar mensajes.

2. Los contenidos de los mensajes son una fuente de mejora de la competitividad de la empresa. Los clientes hablan sobre su experiencia de viaje en los mensajes que publican en Internet. Los empresarios que conocen este contenido pueden encontrar evidencia sobre las fortalezas y debilidades de su negocio o sobre las amenazas y oportunidades del mercado. Los empresarios que están más atentos a los mensajes también están atentos a cualquier cambio del mercado (seguimiento de la competencia, lectura de publicaciones periódicas, asistencia a ferias comerciales) y se muestran activos respondiendo a los mensajes de los clientes, agradeciéndoles o tomando nota de lo que no ha sido bien valorado.

Nuestros resultados indican que los empresarios más involucrados en su negocio, es decir, los que generan mayor inteligencia de mercado, hacen un mejor uso del contenido del mensaje, lo que les hace tener mejores resultados empresariales. Por otro lado, el mero hecho de responder a los mensajes de los clientes por parte de la empresa no afecta los resultados (esto puede deberse, por ejemplo, a que para muchas empresas se ha convertido en una rutina), pero cuando el empresario está más involucrado en su negocio (mayor inteligencia de mercado), parece que responde de forma más adecuada, probablemente responda de una manera más personalizada y profesional, lo que genera un mayor interés de los clientes potenciales por su RTE, como un uso más consciente de las mejoras que se pueden implementar.

En este sentido, también proponemos que los empresarios de alojamientos de turismo rural presten especial atención a los mensajes que incluyen comentarios sobre la

experiencia emocional del cliente (satisfacción, descanso, comodidad, acogida, etc.), ya que estos son los contenidos que afectan directa y positivamente a los resultados empresariales.

5.7.2. Administraciones públicas

Nuestros resultados también interesan a las Administraciones Públicas. Si desean mejorar la competitividad del sector, sus resultados y la calidad de la oferta de RTE, se deben promover algunas acciones:

- Centrarse en inversiones para empresas que buscan aumentar su tamaño desde la apertura de nuevos alojamientos hasta la adquisición de alojamientos existentes.
- En su apoyo a la industria, discriminar favorablemente a los empresarios que muestran interés y participación en la industria sobre la base de la participación en ferias, el seguimiento de la competencia o la suscripción a publicaciones de la industria.
- Facilitar la capacitación de estos microempresarios en técnicas para monitorear y analizar los mensajes que reciben. Incluso parcial y temporalmente, la financiación de la contratación de estos servicios de empresas de TIC. No se trata solo de mejorar la capacidad de RTE para mantenerse al día con lo que se publica en su plataforma turística o en su propio sitio web, sino también en Twitter y Tripadvisor.
- Finalmente, sería conveniente contar con un observatorio público sobre las percepciones de los clientes sobre la calidad de RTE en un país, región, provincia, localidad o municipio, analizando periódicamente los mensajes que se dejan en las plataformas principales. Como ya hemos señalado, analizar la cantidad de mensajes o su contenido es un indicador confiable de la salud económica de la industria.

5.7.3. Plataformas turísticas

Finalmente, nuestros resultados deberían interesar a las plataformas turísticas especializadas:

- Los RTE con menos mensajes tienen menos probabilidades de permanecer en la plataforma, a menos que sean RTE recién creados, porque tienen peores resultados que aquellos con más mensajes y, por lo tanto, contratarán menos servicios de plataforma o lo harán por menos tiempo.

- Por otro lado, RTE con varios establecimientos pueden tener mayor interés para la plataforma. Esto se debe a las mayores oportunidades de permanencia en la plataforma, ayudando a reforzar la oferta de la plataforma entre los usuarios, ya que, como hemos señalado, los mejores resultados provienen en parte de la mejora competitiva que el establecimiento obtiene del número y análisis del contenido del mensaje.

Por lo tanto, nuestra propuesta implica segmentar los RTE en función de estos indicadores relacionados con el boca-oído electrónico, que, en resumen, son indicadores de los resultados empresariales. Es muy probable que la demanda de servicios ofrecidos por la plataforma y la elasticidad precio de estos servicios sean diferentes si nos enfrentamos a RTE con pocos o con muchos mensajes.

5.8. Limitaciones y líneas futuras de investigación

Hay una serie de implicaciones de esta investigación para futuros proyectos de investigación. Primero, sería interesante extender estos hallazgos a otros tipos de alojamiento turístico, como hoteles y apartamentos turísticos, y a otros contextos más allá del sector del alojamiento. En esta investigación incluimos información publicada en el sitio web de Toprural (ahora parte de HomeAway Spain, S.L.). Es el principal infomediario para el turismo rural en Europa, pero es un sitio específico, lo que puede limitar la generalización de nuestros resultados. Sería interesante replicar este estudio incluyendo más de una plataforma de contratación electrónica, como otros sitios web (blogs, foros, sitios de redes sociales), para determinar si se obtienen resultados similares. Este estudio se

refirió a establecimientos de turismo rural, sobre todo en Francia. Es el principal destino para el turismo internacional (OMT 2019), pero la generalización de los resultados a otros países puede ser limitada. Sería interesante replicar este estudio utilizando varios países y plataformas simultáneamente.

En segundo lugar, esta investigación también ilumina la necesidad de ideas adicionales sobre la identificación de "momentos de la verdad" en las experiencias de los turistas. Además, un análisis adicional podría examinar cómo los clientes se expresan mediante el uso de adjetivos, voz en primera persona o contexto gramatical. Sería interesante investigar el efecto de la inclusión de fotos y videos en las revisiones y comentarios, así como los efectos de las respuestas publicadas por el propietario del establecimiento. El análisis del contenido de las respuestas puede proporcionar información adicional, por lo tanto, la investigación puede ampliarse para analizar el contenido particular de las respuestas de las empresas.

En tercer lugar, vale la pena considerar un análisis diferenciando entre los mensajes de turistas residentes en el país y los de no residentes. La misma lógica subyace en la diferenciación de los países de origen de los turistas no residentes. Comprender las posibles diferencias en términos de posicionamiento perceptual del cliente también podría resultar revelador.

Para concluir, es importante tener en cuenta que esta investigación proporciona información interesante relacionada con los comentarios positivos de los clientes online y su impacto en los resultados empresariales. La investigación futura podría abordar las relaciones propuestas en un contexto offline. Específicamente, sería relevante entender el peso de la información interna y la información externa offline. A este respecto, la información externa offline podría ser comercial (es decir, información proporcionada por operadores turísticos a través de canales de información offline) o no comercial (es decir, boca-oreja). Dicha intención daría como resultado una comprensión más completa de las decisiones de compra del consumidor, su impacto en los resultados empresariales y cómo la gestión empresarial puede afectar esas decisiones. Además, podría realizarse un estudio longitudinal en el que un modelo de datos de panel podría identificar el nivel óptimo de los mensajes online a considerar. Finalmente, sería muy interesante mejorar la precisión de los

modelos en términos de resultados RTE, utilizando, por ejemplo, las tasas de ocupación y los ingresos como complemento a las percepciones de estos resultados.

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Appendices

Appendice. 1 Letter to French rural tourism owners

Toprural



Cher propriétaire de la Maison du tourisme rural,

En collaboration avec l'université de Salamanque, nous réalisons une enquête concernant l'impact du site internet Top Rural sur les clients. Dans le cadre de cette étude, nous avons sélectionné votre maison du tourisme parmi un échantillon. Nous espérons ainsi compter sur votre coopération dans la réalisation d'un bref questionnaire.

L'Université de Salamanque sera alors chargée de traiter les données reçues. Toute information sera classée confidentielle. Si vos données sont jugées utiles et de bonne qualité pour votre entreprise et pour l'industrie en général, les résultats de l'étude vous seront envoyés en guise de remerciement. Sachez par ailleurs qu'il s'agit de la première étude académique à caractère scientifique ayant pour sujet l'impact des commentaires sur les internautes.

Voici les informations nécessaires pour accéder au questionnaire personnalisé :

L'utilisateur : b.ponz@wanadoo.es pour commencer le questionnaire, veuillez cliquer sur le lien suivant :

<http://www.encuesta-usal.com/> Nous vous remercions pour votre participation.

Cordialement,
L'Equipe Toprural



Sera tiré au sort parmi tous ceux qui répondent au questionnaire, un agenda en cuir, rechargeable, doté d'un porte carte et d'un stylo, d'une valeur totale de 100 €, qui sera envoyée à l'adresse de la maison du tourisme rural qui gagne.

Appendice. 2 French rural tourism owners' questionnaire

Questionnaire pour les propriétaires de Tourisme Rural

1. Dans le dernier an, indique l'état de votre logement en milieu rural, sur les points suivants, marquant 1 à 7 (**1 - très mal, 7 - Excellent**)

	Très mal			Excellent			
	1	2	3	4	5	6	7
Rentabilité / Bénéfice							
La croissance du nombre de réservations							
La satisfaction du client							
L'image publique de votre hébergement (réputation)							

2. Indiquez votre degré d'accord avec les énoncés suivants liés à votre hébergement en milieu rural (**1 - très en désaccord à 7 - très largement d'accord**)

	En total désaccord			En total accord			
	1	2	3	4	5	6	7
Je suis satisfait des revenus de cette entreprise							
Le style de vie offert par cette entreprise me satisfait							
Mon travail me satisfait							
La reconnaissance sociale fournie par cette entreprise me satisfait							
Dans l'ensemble, je suis heureux avec cette entreprise							

	En total désaccord			En total accord			
	1	2	3	4	5	6	7
J'assiste toujours à des foires ou des réunions importantes sur le tourisme rural							
Je suis très conscient des rapports de presse et spécialisés sur les foires ou réunions importantes en matière de tourisme rural							
Je dédie peu de temps pour lire et répondre à des messages que mes clients laissent dans le site web d'hébergement ou d'autres sites web comme Top Rural							
Je reste toujours au courant des informations disponibles sur l'Internet à propos des propositions d'autres maisons de tourisme rural							