THE WEBSITES OF JAPANESE *RYOKAN* AND EWOM: THEIR IMPACTS ON GUESTS' EXPECTATION AND EXPERIENCE

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ABSTRACT

The research aims to investigate the impacts of the websites of *ryokan* and e-Word-Of-Mouth (eWOM) available at the websites of Japanese e-travel agents on the guests' expectation for and experience at *ryokan*. The research stems from interpretivism and mainly adopts an inductive approach. Netnography is selected as a research strategy. The top three *ryokan* in terms of sales ranking are chosen. eWOM about these three are analysed, focusing on the impacts of websites and eWOM in developing the guests' expectation for and experience at *ryokan*, the appealing point(s) of *ryokan* for the guests, and the gaps between their expectation for and experience at *ryokan*.

eWOM on the e-travel agents' websites are more influential for the guests than the websites of *ryokan* in their buying-decision-making process and growing their expectation for *ryokan*. Of various appealing points of *ryokan*, the overall experience followed by the meals is the main interest of the guests. The room followed by the meals is the appealing point of *ryokan* that the guests' experience is most unlikely to meet their expectation. A section for eWOM on the website of *ryokan* is not examined as most *ryokan* do not have it on their websites. Considering the significance of eWOM confirmed in the research, *ryokan* should have a eWOM section on their website and it should also be examined in the future research. This research is valuable as *ryoka*n have not been examined well in previous studies, especially those in English.

Key words: *ryokan*, website, eWOM, netnography

INTRODUCTION

This paper aims to examine the impacts of the websites of Japanese *ryokan* and eWOM available at the websites of Japanese e-travel agents on guests' expectation and experience.

Accommodation facilities in Japan

Japan has countless accommodation facilities and Western-style hotels and Japanese-style inns are available. There are, however, many differences between these two types of accommodation. Of all, two can be seen as most prominent

differences. The first clear difference is in the guest room. The guest room in Japanese-style inns is characterised by the *tatami* floor (Japan Ryokan Association, 2010a) (See Fig. 1). The *tatami* floor is vital to create a Japanese atmosphere of the guest room and the overall quality of the guest room is one of the key appealing points of Japanese *ryokan* to their guests. The other apparent difference is meals offered. In principle, Japanese-style inns offer dinner as well as breakfast (Japan Ryokan Association, 2010b). In many cases, local products unique to the region where the Japanese-style inn is located are used for the breakfast and dinner. Such delicious and sumptuous meals are also one of the main attraction factors to guests and they also expect Japanese-style inns. In fact, most Japanese-style inns feature their meals on their websites (See Fig. 2).
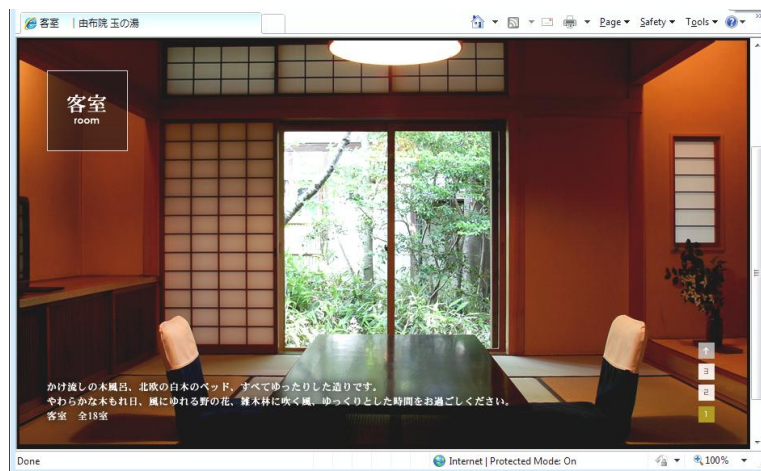

Figure 1. Guest room with the *tatami* floor featured on the website of Tamanoyu in Oita Prefecture (Source: Tamanoyu, 2011b)
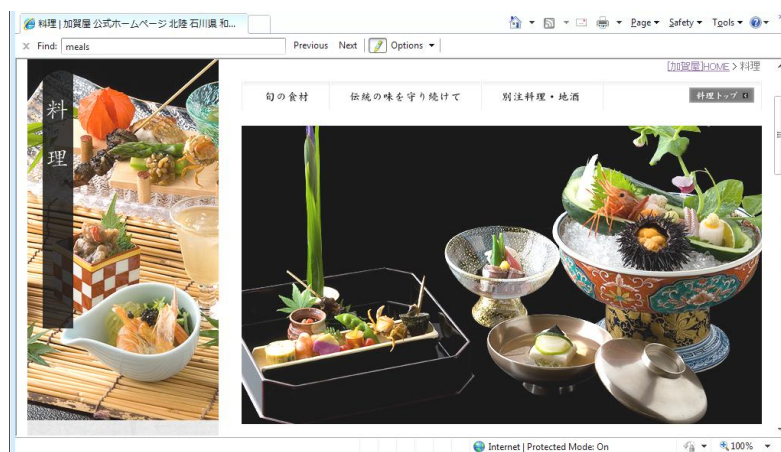

Figure 2. Meals featured on the website of Kagayain Ishikawa Prefecture (Source: Kagaya, n.d.)

Minsyuku and ryokan

There are two main types of Japanese-style inns, *minsyuku* and *ryokan*. Basically, they are distinguished by the management style, level of services, facilities and accommodation fees. Generally, *minsyuku*is family-run and relatively cheap to stay (Jimura, 2010). In addition, the owner's family of *minsyuku* tends to live there and this is common to B&B in European countries. In contrast, *ryokan* are likely to be managed by a company and expensive to stay. *Ryokan* are often found in the areas famous for hot-springs and many of them have their own hot-spring facilities (See Fig. 3),

whilst most *minsyuku* do not have such facilities. As Matsuda (2002) notes, hot-springs are very popular amongst Japanese guests; therefore, they are also one of the key attraction factors of Japanese *ryokan*. Both *minsyuku* and *ryokan* have not been examined well in previous studies in tourism, hospitality and marketing, especially those written in English. Moreover, the influence of websites of *ryokan* and eWOM on their guests would be more important for *ryokan* than for *minsyuku*, because the guests of *ryokan* would have higher expectation for their experience at the accommodation facility than those of *minsyuku*. Hence, this research focuses on *ryokan*.

Figure 3. Hot-spring facilities featured on the website of Hyoe Koyokaku in Hyogo Prefecture (Source: Hyoe Koyokaku, n.d.)

Key points in online marketing of Japanese ryokan

The three aspects of Japanese *ryokan* discussed above (guest rooms, meals and hot-spring facilities) can be seen as the vital appealing points to their guests. This is evidenced by the fact that these three are often featured at the websites of *ryokan* (e.g. Tamanoyu, 2011a) and those of Japanese e-travel agents (e.g. Jalan,

2011a) which work as intermediaries between *ryokan* and guests. Like Tripadvisor, these Japanese e-travel agents have a section for the guests' reviews about their expectation for and experience at *ryokan*, and the section has been getting more influential in the guests' buying-decision-making process. This paper tries to achieve its aim by analysing these guests' reviews about their expectation for and experience at *ryokan*, focusing on the

relationships between their expectation grown by the websites of *ryokan* and other guests' reviews and their experience at *ryokan*.

THEORETICAL FRAMEWORK

E-consumer behaviour

The Internet impact continues to grow steadily in the world and Japan is not an exception. According to the Ministry for Internal Affairs and Communications (2010), in 2009 Internet household penetration in Japan reached 78.0% and 94.08 million people use the Internet at home. A rapid increase in the proportion of old people (60 year-old or more) between 2008 and 2009 is also confirmed (Ministry for Internal Affairs and Communications, 2010). This data match well the argument that the number of elderly people using the Internet is increasing rapidly in the USA (Bitterman & Shalev, 2004).These imply that the number of e-consumers has also been increasing, especially in the developed countries.

Early research about e-consumers demonstrates that their main concerns were the functional and practical aspects (Dennis et al., 2009). In other words, what e-consumers can do and how easily they can do via the Internet and websites seem to have been their main concerns. Dennis et al. (2009) also summarise the characteristics of such "early adopters": they tended to be more educated, in a higher socio-economic status, younger than average and more likely to be male. Therefore, the Internet seems to have been utilised by limited market segments in its early development stage. However, this does not seem to apply to e-shopping in recent years. For example, an increase in the number of silver surfers is confirmed as stated above, and the Internet usage at home has been getting more accessible thanks to the cheaper monthly fees. In

fact, Jayawardhena et al. (2007) note that consumer's orientations in purchasing in the real world and on the websites are very similar. As discussed above, the functional and practical aspects are important for e-shopping and these can be rephrased as functions the website has and its east of use. From the study of Jayawardhena et al. (2007); moreover, it is also proved that the significant factors in the real world such as social interaction with other consumers and goods/service providers, and recreational motives are also important for e-consumers. Consequently, four key aspects in e-shopping are identified: (1) functions the website has, (2) ease of use, (3) opportunities for social interaction, and (4) provision of recreational motives. Kim, Kim and Kandampully (2009) investigate how buying environment characteristics, which are not directly associated with price or product information, are related to overall e-satisfaction; and how e-satisfaction and e-loyalty are interrelated. They conclude that convenience, web appearance and entertainment value have a direct effect on e-satisfaction (Kim, Kim & Kandampully, 2009). Of these three, convenience seems to be related with the above-mentioned (1), web appearance seems to be associated with the above-mentioned (1) and (2), and entertainment value seems to be related to the above-mentioned (3) and (4).

As Dennis et al. (2009) argue, the significance of (3) opportunities for social interaction and (4) provision of recreational motives in e-shopping can be evidenced by virtual ethnography (webnography) [also called "netnography" (e.g.Kozinets, 2002; Martin & Woodside, 2011)] of online blogs, social networking sites (e.g. Facebook) and e-word of mouth(eWOM). Of these, this research examines eWOM, adopting netnography to explore guests' expectation developed by the website of *ryokan* and eWOM, and how their experience at the *ryokan* meets their expectation.

Online marketing websites

Online marketing is the fastest growing of direct marketing and widespread use of the Internet has a dramatic impact on both consumers and marketers (Kotler, Bowen & Makens, 2010). The website has given marketers an innovative way to create value for consumers and build relationships with them (Kotler, Bowen & Makens, 2010).ICT has a great impact on the business operation. For instance, it is now possible even for a small business to operate globally via the usage of ICT including a website (Page & Connell, 2009).Gilbert, Powell-Perry and Widijoso (1999) believe that a successful web presence depends on more than just the technology used and the "look and feel" of the website. The importance of "look and feel" of the website is also noted by Miyazaki (2009). It is important for companies to establish effective and attractive websites as consumers tend to judge the nature and quality of companies by their website as well as the quality of their products (Miyazaki, 2009).In 2.1, four key aspects in e-shopping [(1) to (4)] are identified. Considering the points Gilbert, Powell-Perry and Widijoso (1999) and Miyazaki (2009) suggest, in addition to these four, the atmosphere and image the website creates and projects to consumers can also be seen as a significant aspect in online marketing.

According to Kotler, Bowen and Makens (2010), there are four major online marketing domains: Business-to-consumer (B2C), Business-to-business (B2B), Consumer-to-consumer (C2C) and Consumer-to-business (C2B). Of these, B2C has been the most studied area followed by B2B (Kotler, Bowen & Makens, 2010). This research looks at the impact of the websites of *ryokan* on their guests; hence, the B2C domain should be examined. In light of the current trends, however, more research should be conducted about the C2C and C2B domains. The more accessible the Internet has become for people in terms of its cost and infrastructure it requires, and the more advanced the Internet technology has become; the more interactive the activities available for the Internet users have become. As shown in (e-consumer behaviour), now many people write online blogs, join social networking sites and write and/or read eWOM. These activities can be categorised as the C2C domain, because consumers exchange their opinions each other and share any thoughts via online blogs, social networking sites and eWOM. Moreover, now consumers can tell their opinion about the company and their products via the website of the company or eWOM. This example can be seen as the C2B domain. This research mainly examines the B2C and C2C domains of online marketing by investigating eWOM about *ryokan*. The research also investigates the C2B domain of online marketing by exploring any tangible evidences that the guests of *ryokan* have left on the website of *ryokan* or eWOM.

Online marketing and websites in the tourism industry

The tourism industry consists of all those firms, organisations and facilities which are intended to serve the specific needs and wants of tourists (Leiper, 1979). Products can be divided into goods and services and tourism as a product is a combination of several different services such as transport, accommodation, catering, visitor attractions, travel agents and tour operators. Therefore, it is crucial to understand the nature of services when the marketing activities in the tourism industry are investigated. Lovelock and Wirtz (2004) note that the benefits come from ownership of physical objects or devices in case of goods, whilst those are created by actions or performances in case of services. Page and Connell (2009)

assert five underlying principles of services marketing: intangibility, perishability, heterogeneity, inseparability (between service provision and consumption) and lack of ownership. Because of these characteristics, it is impossible for consumers (tourists) to test the product (e.g. package holiday) before they purchase it. What tourists could get before the purchase is the information from various sources such as the product's website and WOM. Apart from photographs, videos and souvenir, what they can bring back from their holiday are memories, feelings and experiences. All of these are intangible until they are visualised as online blogs, comments at social networking sites, eWOM and/or tweets at Twitter. For the above-mentioned reasons, any visible information that prospective guests of *ryokan* could obtain before the purchase has a great impact on their buying-decision-making processes. Moreover, the information other guests visualised during/after their holiday would also have a large impact on the buying-decision-making processes of the guests of *ryokan*.

In tourism studies, research about online marketing and websites has emerged around 10 years ago. There are a lot of case studies which examine different sectors in the tourism industry all over the world. For instance, Wang (2002) evaluates the websites of international tourist hotels and tour wholesalers in Taiwan and confirms that 50% of the total sample of hotels and tour wholesalers has already established their own websites. Hudson and Lang (2002) investigate the online marketing in a case of tourism in Banff, Canada, and suggest that the use of the Internet including websites has been spread amongst tourists in their travel planning processes as well as amongst tour operators as a marketing tool. Doolin, Buegess and Cooper (2002) assess the level of website development in New Zealand's Regional Tourism Organisations and their research adopts the utility of using interactivity to measure the relative maturity of tourism websites. This would also imply the significance of (3) opportunities for social interaction (e-consumer behaviour) for the tourism websites. Regarding the Japanese research in this study area, Otani (2002) explores the changes the Internet would cause in the tourism industry and listed three possible changes: (i) sharing the information with others on the Internet (e.g. eWOM), (ii) the rise of direct marketing from service suppliers (e.g. accommodation) to tourists, and (iii) availability of the updated information on a real-time basis. This research examines (i) through a case study of Japanese *ryokan*.

METHODOLOGY

Research approach

There are a number of alternative approaches in the social scientific research. Of these, the distinction between positivist and interpretive approaches is a primary dichotomy (Veal, 2006) and the tourism and marketing research is not an exception. Jupp and Norris (1993) argue that the positivist approach aims to follow the principles of natural scientific research and proceeds by the formulation and testing of hypotheses with a view to making inferences about the causal connections between two or more social phenomena or "facts". In contrast, the interpretive approach puts more reliance on the people being studied to provide their own explanation of their situation or behaviour (Veal, 2006). This research stems from interpretivism and adopts an inductive approach as the main research approach. In other words, this research examines mainly qualitative data, but also looks at quantitative data.

Netnography

Netnography is chosen as the strategy of this research. Netnography can be seen as online ethnography and seems to be first established by Kozinets in the mid-1990s (Kozinets, 1997). This research aims to explore the impacts of the websites of *ryokan* and e-WOM on their guests; therefore, netnography is regarded as the most appropriate research strategy in light of the research aim. Compared with other research strategies and data collection methods such as questionnaire surveys, personal interviews and focus groups, netnography is easier to control as other people are not involved in its data collection process. Netnography is also ideal in terms of the costs and time for the data collection. It also allows the researcher to collect/examine a large amount of data within a limited time and to interpret the contexts on eWOM which were developed by a number of guests of*ryokan*. Netnography,of course, has limitations as well as the advantages mentioned above. As netnography can be seen as a qualitative research strategy rather than a quantitative one, the common issues in the qualitative research such as the reliability and validity of the data and objectivity in the data analysis process should be listed as its limitations. The number of eWOM examined is increased as many as possible for the reliability and validity of the data. Moreover, the *ryokan* the researcher has stayed before are not

selected to ensure objectivity. As discussed in (o*nline marketing and websites in the tourism industry*), the tourist experience can be made tangible by tourists via various online tools. The research conducted by Martin and Woodside (2011) is a good example of netnography research which adopts online travel blogs to interpret four tourists' experiences in Tokyo.

Justification of choices: Japanese *ryokan* and eWOM examined in the research

Most Japanese *ryokan* have their websites, but the proportion of *ryokan* which have a section for eWOM is still relatively small. Moreover, only positive eWOM tends to appear even if such a section is set on the websites. Hence, the eWOM available at e-travel agents in Japan should be investigated, referring to the websites of chosen *ryokan*. There are a number of e-travel agents which have a section for eWOM about Japanese *ryokan* as part of their websites. Of these, Jalan and Rakuten Travel are most famous and widely used. They deal with online booking of all kinds of Japanese *ryokan* from the luxurious to the budget. Considering an extremely large number of eWOM available, three Japanese *ryokan* are selected for this research and they are the top three *ryokan* in terms of sales ranking via Jalan as of 25 January–22 February 2011 (See Table 1).

Table 1. The top three Japanese ryokan in terms of sales ranking via Jalan

	Name	Prefecture	Website
1	Arima Royal Hotel	Hyogo	http://www.arimaroyal-h.com/
2	Tokinoyu Setsugetsuka	Kanagawa	http://www.hotespa.net/hotels/setsugetsuka/
3	Hamachidorinoyu Kaisyu	Wakayama	http://www.hotespa.net/hotels/kaisyu/

(Source: Jalan, 2011b)

A wide variety of tangible online data are developed by the guests of *ryokan*, and all of them can be investigated in netnography research. Next the reasons why eWOM is selected as the data examined in the research are explained. Online blogs have been getting popular amongst Japanese people; however, it is difficult to find those focusing only on their travels. Moreover, most online travel blogs involve the information other than their expectation for and experience at *ryokan*. Furthermore there is no consistency how travel bloggers describe their expectation and experience. These points make the data collection and analysis difficult. Second, the social networking sites originating in the USA such as Facebook have not widely used in Japan. The largest social networking site in Japan is Mixi. Mixi requires people to register the site to be users and the researcher is not a user. Like online blogs, moreover, the site is not specifically to share users' travel experiences. Hence, social networking sites are not appropriate as the data explored in the research. Compared to online blogs and social networking sites, eWOM available at the websites of Jalan and Rakuten Travel are made mainly to exchange and share the guests' expectation for and experience at *ryokan*. In addition, eWOM available at their websites follows a specific format. That is why adopting eWOM as the data investigated would not cause any serious problems in the data collection and analysis. eWOM is also desirable in terms of anonymity since people can upload their eWOM with their username. For the above-mentioned reasons, eWOM available on the websites of Jalan (See Fig. 4) and Rakuten Travel (See Fig. 5) were chosen as the most appropriate data examined in the research. Japanese words which are equivalent to "website" and "eWOM" are used to identify the data related to this research. The analytical methods adopted are interpretation of eWOM and coding. The details are explained in Table 2.

Figure 4. Examples of eWOM on the website of Jalan (Source: Jalan, 2011c)

Figure 5. Examples of eWOM on the website of Rakuten Travel
(Source: Rakuten Travel, 2011)

Table 2. Analytical methods adopted: Interpretation of eWOM & coding

	Source the guest looked at	Guest's expectation & experience mainly about	Relationship between the guest's expectation & experience
1	W	O	A
2	E	R	B
3		M	C
4		H	D
Abbreviations	W = Ryokan's website	O = Overall & Service	A = High expectation & High satisfaction level with their experience
	E = eWOM on e-travel agents' websites	R = Room	B = High expectation & Low satisfaction level with their experience
		M = Meals	C = Low expectation & High satisfaction level with their experience
		H = Hot-spring facilities	D = Low expectation & Low satisfaction level with their experience

NB. 32 codes are developed by a combination of the above-mentioned three different elements. (E.g. WOA, EMA)

RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

Arima Royal Hotel (ARH)

As of 26 February 2011, ARH has 846 eWOM in total (635 on Jalan and 211 on Rakuten Travel).

B2C: From ARH's website to their guests

ARH has their website (See Tab. 1) and three key aspects of *ryokan* identified in 1.3 are featured on the website. Of 846 eWOM, only one mentions that the ARH's website was influential in the guests' buying-decision-making process and developing their expectation for ARH. This does not match the argument by Gilbert, Powell-Perry and Widijoso (1999) and Miyazaki (2009) which emphasises the importance of the atmosphere and image the websites deliver. This is probably because, the eWOM examined in this research are not on the ARH's website. This is common to the cases of other two *ryokan* examined in this research and this can also be seen as a limitation of the research. This only eWOM was identified as WOA&EOA (See Table2 for coding).This means that the guests had high expectation for their overall experience at ARH developed by the website and eWOM on the websites of the e-travel agents, and their experience met their expectation.

C2C: From eWOM about ARH to their guests

42 eWOM shows that eWOM on the e-travel agents' websites were influential in their buying-decision-making process and growing their expectation for ARH.Of

these, 19 were largely about the meals (EM) and 18 were mainly about overall experience (EO). Four eWOM is chiefly about the room (ER) and only one is primarily about the hot-spring facilities (EH). Of three key appealing points of *ryokan*, therefore, the meals are vital for ARH. Of 19 EM, 15 (78.9%) were identified as EMA and three were regarded as EMB. 18 EO are broken down into 11 EOA, six EOB and one EOC. This shows that the overall experience at ARH met or is beyond the guests' expectation as the total number of EOA and EOC (12/18 = 66.7%) indicates. However, the result also implies that the overall experience of the guests often does not match their expectation, because seven out of 18 EO (38.9%) shows their overall experience was different from their expectation in a good (1 EOC) or bad (6 EOB) sense. Another point should be noted is that all four ER were regarded as ERB. This means that the guests' high expectation for the room was not met by their experience at all. Its main cause seems to be guests' subjective views toward "being old": some may think the room is old, whilst others may feel the room is not old. In short, on the whole the guests' experience on EO at ARH is somewhat different from their expectation in a negative sense, that on ER at ARH is totally different from their expectation also in a bad sense, and that on EM at ARH is somewhat different from their expectation in a negative sense.

C2B: from guests to ARH

Like most of other *ryokan*, the ARH's website does not have a section for the C2B domain; hence eWOM on the website of the e-travel agents seems to be the only opportunity which allows guests to take such actions online. Two eWOM suggest that ARH should put more information about the access to ARH on their website as they feel ARH is difficult to access by car.

Tokinoyu Setsugetsuka (TS)

As of 26 February 2011, TS has 1,798 eWOM in total (1,021 on Jalan and 777 on Rakuten Travel).

B2C: From TS's website to their guests

The three key aspects of *ryokan* are featured on TS's website. Of 1,798 eWOM, five (2 WOA & EOA, 1 WOA, 1 WOC and 1 WRC) demonstrate that their decision and expectation were influenced by the TS's website. This indicates that three had high expectation and one had low expectation for their overall experience at TS, but consequently all of them were happy with their experience. The other had low expectation for the room at TS; however, it was betrayed in a good sense. In short it can be said that the TS's website did not developed too high expectation of guests which is impossible for TS to meet.

C2C: From eWOM about TS to their guests

89 eWOM demonstrates that eWOM on the e-travel agents' websites were important in their decision and growing their expectation for TS. Of these, 66 were EO followed by 13 EM, eight EH and two ER. Hence, the main expectation of the guests seems to be for the overall experience at TS rather than for any specific aspect of TS. 66 EO are broken down into 35 EOA, nine EOB, 18 EOC and four EOD. This result shows that on the whole the overall experience at TS met or beyond the guests' expectation as the total number of EOA and EOC (53/66 = 80.3%) demonstrates. However, the result also means that the overall experience of the guests often does not fit their expectation, because 27 out of 66 EO (40.9%) shows their overall experience was different from their expectation in a positive (18 EOC) or negative (9 EOB)

sense. Two ER were one ERB and one ERC, and 13 EM include three EMB and seven EMC. In conclusion, on the whole the guests' experience on EO at TS is somewhat different from their expectation in a good sense, that on ER at TS is totally different from their expectation in a positive or negative sense, and that on EM at TS is considerably different from their expectation in a good sense.

C2B: from guests to TS

The TS's website has a section for the C2B domain; hence, the guests can make any comments about their experience or suggestion for the future through the website. The TS's website shows both positive and negative comments and the TS's replies are also available. As for eWOM, two eWOM suggest TS to put more detailed information about the meals.

Hamachidorinoyu Kaisyu (HK)

As of 26 February 2011, HK has 1,088 eWOM in total (611 on Jalan and 477 on Rakuten Travel).

B2C: From HK's website to their guests

The HK's website features the three key aspects of *ryokan*. Of 1,088 eWOM, seven (2 WOA & EOA, 1 WOC, 2 WRA, 2 WRB& ERB) consider the HK's website in their decision and developing their expectation for HK. This shows that the overall experience at HK and the room were two main concerns for the guests who referred to the website. The overall experience they had at TK met or beyond their expectation, whilst their experience on the room was divided into two (2WRA and 2 WRB & ERB).

C2C: From eWOM about HK to their guests

54 eWOM evidence the impact of eWOM in the guests' decision and growing their expectation for HK. Of these 54, 37 were EO followed by nine ER and eight EM. Like TS, therefore, the main expectation of the guests would be for the overall experience at HK rather than for any peculiar aspect of the HK. 37 EO are broken down into 20 EOA, three EOB, 12 EOC and two EOD. Like TS again, on the whole the overall experience at HK met or beyond the guests' expectation as the total number of EOA and EOC (32/37 = 86.5%) tells. On the whole, the guests' overall experience at HK matches well their expectation to a certain extent as the total number of EOA and EOD shows (22/37 = 59.5%). As for EM, however, on the whole a certain level of the gap between the guests' expectation and experience can be confirmed. Eight EM are broken down into two EMA, four EMC and two EMD and four EMC means that their expectation for the meals was betrayed in a good sense. On the other hand, on the whole the guests' experience on ER met relatively well their expectation as the total number of ERA and ERD indicates (7/9 = 77.8%), though there are two ERB. In short, on the whole the guests' experience on EO and EM at HK is somewhat different from their expectation in a positive sense, and that on ER at HK is somewhat different from their expectation in a negative sense.

C2B: from guests to HK

It is found that HK is managed by the company which runs TS. Hence, the HK's website also has a section for the C2B domain and it enables the guests to make any comments about their experience or suggestion for the future through the website. Like the TS's website, the HK's website shows both good and bad comments on their website and also makes their replies available there. As for eWOM, two eWOM suggest HK to put

more detailed information about the access to HK and its hot-spring facilities.

CONCLUSION AND RECOMMENDATIONS

As most *ryokan* still do not have a section for eWOM, the research examined only the eWOM on the e-travel agents' websites. Interestingly, however, two out of three *ryokan* examined in the research has such a section and both are run by the same company. This might have caused a certain level of a bias in the results as only eWOM available at the e-travel agents' websites were analysed. Hence, future research should choose *ryokan* whose websites have a section for eWOM and analyse eWOM at the websites of *ryokan* and e-travel agents.

Nonetheless, it could still be said that eWOM on the e-travel agents' websites would be more influential for the guests than the website of the *ryokan* as there is a large difference in the number of eWOM between that referring to the impact of the website of *ryokan*(E = 13) and that referring to eWOM at the e-travel agents' websites (W = 185). In contrast, there is not a vast difference in the proportion of A & D and B & C (See Tab. 2) between W (A & D = 61.5%, B & C = 38.5%) and E (A & D = 58.4%, B & C = 41.6%). The proportion of B & C in E is slightly higher than that in W. This is probably because guests' subjective views are reflected on eWOM. Various guests would evaluate the same *ryokan*, room, meals and hot-spring facilities differently. The innovative and useful aspect of eWOM is that it allows the guests to visualise their "real" voice and makes this information available for people all over the world. However, it is risky for guests to develop very high expectation only by reading eWOM as this nature is very subjective. In contrast, the information available at the website of

ryokan is much more objective (e.g. photos of the room). Hence, how such information is perceived depends on each guest and this process would not be influenced by other guests' subjective views. However, even such relatively objective information can be modified by the *ryokan*for the marketing purposes and it might look too good. Moreover, the guests cannot imagine well how their experience will be only from the website of *ryokan*.In conclusion, it is important for guests to obtain the information from eWOM on the e-travel agents' websites as well as the website of *ryokan*.

Of O, R, M and H (See Table.2), the aspect of *ryokan* which shows the highest proportion of B & C is R (53.3%) followed by M (45.0%). This means that more than half of eWOM whose expectation for *ryokan* was mainly about the room was betrayed their expectation in a negative sense in most cases (7 ERB and 1 ERC). Hence the room can be seen as the most difficult aspect for guests to have an appropriate level of expectation. As discussed in the 4.3.2 and 4.3.3, the eWOM on the website of *ryokan* is a very useful function which can cover the C2B domain of online marketing and the website of *ryokan* as well as e-travel agents' websites should have this section for guests and themselves.

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