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## Customer Perceptions and Strategies for Rural Tourism Accommodation

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**Abstract:** It is very important to highlight the understanding of the business consequences of online consumer reviews, online visibility, presence expertise of businesses, number of accommodations, market intelligence, and management response. The authors gathered data on rural tourism establishments (RTA) from a website leading infomediary for rural tourism, related to 235 French RTAs. The performance of RTAs and market intelligence was provided by complementary survey. The results of the study show how consumers position RTAs based on their positive perceptions help managers to understand what leads the consumer to position the RTA and which characteristics are most relevant. The implications of this study are for both tourism specialists and RTA managers who, in their pursuit of success, attempt to track and assess the real connections between the RTA's specific consumer positioning based on their insights, provided in the online review comments, defined business strategy, and management behavioral competencies.

**Keywords:** Online reviews; Market intelligence; Online visibility; Management response; Business performance; Accommodation; Services; Tourism; Strategies.

### Percepciones del Cliente y Estrategias para Alojamientos de Turismo Rural

**Resumen:** Es muy importante destacar la comprensión de las consecuencias comerciales de las opiniones de los consumidores en línea, la visibilidad en línea, la experiencia de presencia de las empresas, la cantidad de alojamientos, la inteligencia de mercado y la respuesta de la gerencia. Los autores recopilamos datos sobre establecimientos de turismo rural (RTA) de un sitio web líder en infomediación para el turismo rural, relacionado con 235 RTA franceses. El desempeño de los RTA y la inteligencia de mercado fue proporcionado por una encuesta complementaria. Los resultados del estudio muestran cómo los consumidores posicionan los RTA en función de sus percepciones positivas y ayudan a los gerentes a comprender qué lleva al consumidor a posicionar el RTA y qué características son más relevantes. Las implicaciones de este estudio son tanto para los especialistas en turismo como para los gerentes de RTA que, en su búsqueda del éxito, intentan rastrear y evaluar las conexiones reales entre el posicionamiento específico del consumidor de RTA en función de sus conocimientos, proporcionados en los comentarios de revisión en línea, la estrategia comercial definida y competencias conductuales de gestión.

**Palabras Clave:** Reseñas en línea; Inteligencia de mercado; Visibilidad en línea; Respuesta de la gerencia; Negocios actuación; Alojamiento; Servicios; Turismo; Estrategias.

### 1. Introduction

Hospitality experiences have an impact far beyond the end of the stay. Nowadays, guests share their experiences on social media, as well as recommend them to those closest to them. Readers trust and use online consumer reviews to reduce high-risk awareness of the services they liked to buy (Su et al., 2021; Tran, 2020). The potential consumer's choice will depend on the perceived usefulness of the product to meet their particular needs and preferences. What drives consumer choice is their perception of how well the product will satisfy a given need.

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While extensive research has covered online customer feedback about products (Barnesa & Jacobsen, 2014; Reichelt et al., 2014) and services (Litvin & Hoffman, 2012; Melo, 2020; Melo et al., 2017; Nieto et al., 2014), online review studies on RTA still remain relatively scarce. A deeper understanding of customer impact feedback would be of great value to businesses in this sector (Hernández-Maestro, 2020; Melo, 2020; Melo et al., 2017; Nieto et al., 2014).

The service experience and its concept have become one of the main references for the study of consumer decision making (Carbone & Haeckel, 1994; Gruen et al., 2006; Larsen, 2007), increasing the number of investigators dedicated to figuring out how to gather valuable information from it. Consumers' service experience is defined in their ratings and comments after using a good or service. Consumer reviews are one of the main sources of information about goods and services for potential consumers, as they are a rich source of information from their peers (Dellarocas, 2003; Kim et al., 2017; Man Yee et al., 2009). Customer reviews help to increase the credibility of a good or service, as such, promoting them will help businesses to be more competitive, influencing other consumers in their decision-making. (Bickart & Schindler, 2001; Hennig-Thurau & Walsh, 2003; Zhang, Z. et al., 2016). This customer feedback from the RTAs allows management, through a detailed analysis of the benefits perceived by the customer, to focus on the customer by identifying the actions necessary to improve the performance of their business (Day, E. et al., 1988). This kind of customer-focused approach has the advantage of examining the full range of competitive options in light of customers' most important wants, needs, and perceptions (Day, E. et al., 1988).

With this study the authors try: To (1) identify customers' perception of RTAs' positioning based on the volume of positive online reviews and their characteristics, and (2) analyze the impact of business results, the accommodation business strategy and the behavioral skills of management in the positive volume of online reviews, the authors collected information from the RTAs registered on the rural tourism infomediator site Toprural, owned by HomeAway Spain, SL. To collect data on the business performance of each RTA in the sample, the authors conducted a survey. The results of this study help to fill the research gap regarding the positioning and segmentation of RTAs based on their characteristics, management strategy and online reviews of their customers; they also respond to requests from the management of the RTAs for information on their competitive position from the customers' point of view. The model proposed by the authors includes customer variables (number of online reviews), business variables (online visibility, online presence expertise, number of managed accommodations), management behavior variables (market intelligence and managerial response), and business performance variables.

The next section addresses reviewing the conceptual background and further developing the conceptual model and research hypotheses. Followed by arguments about the data and model estimation. Then, in the last section, the results of the study and respective discussion, theoretical and practical implications, recommendations for researchers and professionals, and limitations are presented.

## **2. Conceptual background and research hypotheses**

### **2.1. Literature review**

#### **2.1.1. Market positioning**

One of the main concepts of marketing is that of market positioning, "the place that a brand occupies in the mind of its target audience" (Ries & Trout, 1985). Positioning is the comparative perception of a product category in relation to another substitute or complementary category by a specific target audience. As a perception, positioning is subjective, it is formed from a point of reference, comparison, and by a specific audience.

The image or consumer perception is a mental representation of the perceived attributes and benefits of the product. A particular perception or image depends on the relevance of the attributes for the consumer, on his own experience, on his degree of need and desire, and on what the consumer understands from what he is told (communication) and what he receives (service).

Nowadays, with the arrival of the internet, there is an intense exchange of information creating an online visibility (reputation) that is the basis for the purchase decisions of most consumers (Therkelsen, 2003). This internet image of accommodation is a critical factor for its competitive positioning (Hoare & Bock, 2019; Reyes-Menendez et al., 2019; Rodríguez-Díaz et al., 2019; Yacouel & Fleischer, 2012). Especially in this context in which we live with increasingly informed, discerning, and demanding

consumers, RTA managers cannot underestimate the importance of consumer choices, preferences, and requirements (Dryglas & Różycki, 2017).

Segmentation is an effective tool that can help businesses identify and classify customers into groups for different products and/or service offerings, according to their particular needs and preferences, characteristics, perceptions or behaviors (Ahani et al., 2019a; Day, G.S. & Wensley, 1988; Liu, J. et al., 2019; McCleary, 1995). Therefore, allowing to increase customer satisfaction and company revenues (Kotler & Armstrong, 2010; Kucukusta & Denizci Guillet, 2016).

Given the continued growth in the amount of social media information, online ratings and comments represent a rich source of feedback on consumer perceptions of the services provided (Ahani et al., 2019a; Rodríguez-Díaz et al., 2017).

More and more businesses have to acquire and use the knowledge of what is important to the consumer to achieve an effective market positioning. The subjective positioning of the accommodation, related to the consumer's mental processes, is his/her perceived image of the respective accommodation (Lewis, 1990).

### 2.1.2. Online reviews

The study of consumer perception of, in particular, the circumstances of tourism and hotel operations, such as service satisfaction and quality, through consumer feedback, online reviews, has been a success (Ahani et al., 2019b; Au et al., 2009; Lucini et al., 2020; Melo et al., 2017; Mittra & Khamkar, 2021; Racherla et al., 2013; Situmeang et al., 2020; Ye, Qiang et al., 2014), destination image and reputation (Lim et al., 2012; Lv et al., 2020; Reyes-Menendez et al., 2019; Rodríguez-Díaz et al., 2019; Su et al., 2021), experiences and behavior (Capriello et al., 2013; Crotts et al., 2009; Rocklage & Fazio, 2020), eWOM (Lee, H.A. et al., 2011; Melo et al., 2017; Nath et al., 2018; Rosario et al., 2020), and tourists' willingness to pay (Nieto-García et al., 2017). Consumers seek information about the services, from their provider and from their consumers, due to the high uncertainty regarding the potential quality of the service and, respective, difficulty in its evaluation. (Filieri et al., 2018; Mittra & Khamkar, 2021; Murray & Schlacter, 1990; Thi et al., 2021). Online reviews are key indicators, and clues, of perceived satisfaction with service quality (Melo et al., 2017; Mittra & Khamkar, 2021; Racherla et al., 2013), develop expectations regarding a potential service provider (Nath et al., 2018), and present opportunities to obtain current information on tourist perceptions, travel patterns, and how tourists "consume" hospitality industry offerings. Online reviews help consumers form their expectations of a successful experience, they are a relevant guide helping to make purchasing decisions (Fagerstrøm et al., 2016; Khan et al., 2022; Tran, 2020; Wen et al., 2021). The content, source, and receiver of information are important influences on consumer information (Cheung & Thadani, 2012; Hong et al., 2017). The initial interaction theory or uncertainty reduction theory, affirms the notion that when interacting with other people, in order to reduce uncertainty, they need information about other people (Berger & Calabrese, 1975; Gursoy, 2019). Currently, RTA managers may be more apt to embrace two-way communication strategies with viewpoints that promote online reciprocity with the customer, strengthening their relationship with them (Shin, D. et al., 2014; Shin, H. et al., 2020). Positive online reviews act as signals, raising readers' awareness and improving their confidence and attitudes. Consequently, online reviews improve the company's reputation, allowing for increased bookings and profitability. (Chen et al., 2008; Melo et al., 2017; Sweeney et al., 2012; Vermeulen & Seegers, 2009; Yacouel & Fleischer, 2011; Ye, Q. et al., 2009).

### 2.1.3. Strategic RTA business variables

RTA managers are conscious that consumers' assessment of their experiences with the stay are dependent on their past expectations related to perceptions of the service received (Nath et al., 2018; Pai et al., 2013; Vijayakumar et al., 2021). Consumer satisfaction has been defined in the literature as a post-consumption assessment measured whether the chosen option exceeds or equals expectations (Palacio & Martín-Santana, 2004; Prayag et al., 2017). And that customer rating of an experience impacts customer satisfaction and, by extension, online word of mouth (Bleier et al., 2019; Lemon & Verhoef, 2016; Melo, 2020).

Online reviews define expectations (Hernández-Estárico et al., 2012; Mudambi & Schuff, 2010; Vijayakumar et al., 2021). Currently, organizations do not control the information disclosed on the Internet. Therefore, they need to develop better tools that are dynamic and allow, through the implementation

of adequate measures applied to the main business variables for clients and organizations, to create the best image of the services offered. (Pantelidis, 2010; Ryu & Han, 2010; Vermeulen & Seegers, 2009; Zhang, Z. et al., 2010).

#### **2.1.3.1. Online visibility**

The competitive positioning of RTAs can be determined by the large number of clues, both quantitative and qualitative provided by tourists and managers (Ahmed & Rodríguez-Díaz, 2020; Rodríguez-Díaz et al., 2017). If the information collected in specialized databases about accommodation offers, composed of a series of assessments, opinions, videos, or images about the goods or services, is analyzed by each reader as a whole, it generates perceptions that produce a state of opinion that shapes the competitive positioning of the hotel businesses. Currently, the performance of businesses and tourist destinations fundamentally depends on their public image perceived by online visibility.

#### **2.1.3.2. Online presence expertise**

Business performance is promoted through training and work experience with the acquisition of management knowledge and skills as an essential resource (Beck & Wiersema, 2013; Bitencourt et al., 2020; Wiklund & Shepherd, 2005). Dynamic capabilities are defined as a set of processes, such as repeated practice that are an important learning mechanism for their development, help people understand processes more deeply by developing more effective routines (Eisenhardt & Martin, 2000).

#### **2.1.3.3. Number of accommodations**

Dimension is an important characteristic of hotels is their size and, due to economies of scale, it can be an important potential competitive advantage (Baber, 2015; Sirianni et al., 2013). The interaction between people is favored by belonging to a group, allowing the sharing of experiences, the development of valuable relationships and work towards a common goal that is enjoyable to achieve. In hospitality services, customer-customer interactivity is an integral part of the service experience, reflecting a specific social activity in the consumer's life, creating memories that will be later told as unforgettable episodes. (Camelis et al., 2013; van Doorn et al., 2010; Zgolli & Zaiem, 2017). When customers share feelings of friendship, affection and intimacy with employees, it arouses positive emotions in consumers and escalate their desire to extend their remain at the service location (Goi et al., 2014; Price & Arnould, 1999; Xu, 2020).

#### **2.1.4. Management competencies**

When businesses are small, the role of management is vital, as the management of businesses with few employees is carried out directly. As such, the influence of management on RTAs is decisive, since most of them are managed by private individuals (Kalleberg & Leicht, 1991). RTAs, like SMEs that they are, work around the personality of an individual manager, who interacts directly with the consumer, with the ability to innovate and deliver superior value to the consumer (Hills & Hultman, 2011; Roach et al., 2014; Sadiku-Dushi et al., 2019). To obtain a sustainable competitive advantage, managers must have management competencies in order to be more attentive to environmental conditions to increase their ability to adapt their internal resources (Sánchez, 2012). Probably the main source of essential resources that impact business results is the set of competencies, experience and management know-how, according to human capital theory (Pennings et al., 1998). Performance has been linked to the collection and generation, and further use of market intelligence and human capital (Gimeno et al., 1997).

##### **2.1.4.1. Market intelligence**

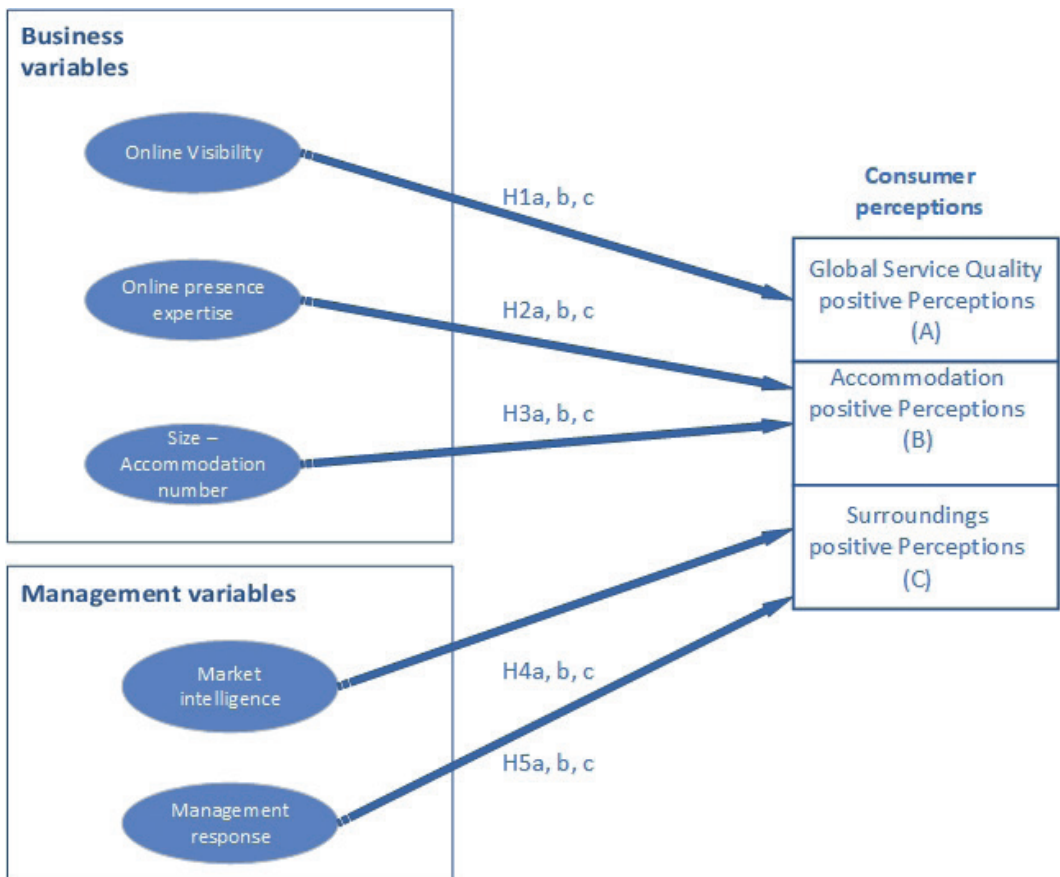
Hospitality managers, with increasing competitiveness, must be able to develop greater customer orientation in order to sustain better satisfaction of customer predilections and needs to attain their business performance objectives (Khorsand et al., 2020; Lee, Y.-K. et al., 2015; Wang, C.-H. et al., 2012). When managers rely on knowledge derived from customer and competitor reviews, their effort to create and maintain added value for their customers is rewarded with a performance that is more alert to business opportunities (Gebhardt et al., 2019; Kandemir et al., 2006; Liu, C.-H. & Lee, 2015; Lorentz et al., 2020). Businesses must constantly be aware of markets, scanning, researching, and analyzing them to identify and shape opportunities (March & Simon, 1958). These constant tasks require practical wisdom and a specific ability to understand customer behavior and decision-making (Eckhardt et al., 2019; Nonaka & Toyama, 2007).

**2.1.4.2. Management response**

One of the main clues perceived by consumers that RTA managers care about their consumers is management responses, which should reduce customers' perception of risk and improve the company's image (Lee, C.C. & Hu, 2005; Li et al., 2017; Proserpio & Zervas, 2017; Zhao et al., 2020), user-generated reviews must have appropriate responses from the RTA, so appropriate response strategies must be developed (Melo, 2020; Zhang, X. et al., 2020). The factors evaluated by consumers for choosing hospitality products, in the investigations carried out, indicate that the administration's responses to customer evaluations are relevant for consumers to decide (Park, S.-Y. & Allen, 2013; Wang, Y. & Chaudhry, 2018). Especially, the likelihood of a customer recommending the accommodation can increase with professional responses to service related issues or recovery from service delivery failures (Barsky & Frame, 2009; Levy et al., 2013; Liu, S. et al., 2021; Wang, Y. & Chaudhry, 2018). In addition, management responses are also seen by potential consumers, because of the internet transparency, implying a giving clues to readers and writers that the manager cares about providing a good service to its guests (Sheng et al., 2021; Xie et al., 2014; Zhang, X. et al., 2020).

The authors proposed the following theoretical model based on this theoretical review (figure 1):

**Figure 1. Proposed Theoretical Model (A, B, C)**



Source: Elaborated by the authors

## 2.2. Hypotheses development

Greater visibility on an infomediary site should help tourists become more interested to the accommodation's positive features (Nieto et al., 2014).

Consequently, the authors propose the following:

*Hypothesis 1:* More online visibility of an RTA on an infomediary site has a positive impact on the number of positive perceptions of tourists (a) GSQP, (b) AP, and (c) SP.

Numerous empirical studies have demonstrated the effectiveness of the experience (Argote, 1999; Zollo & Winter, 1999). In view of this, the authors proposed:

*Hypothesis 2:* A wider presence in the time of an RTA on a website impact positively the number of positive consumer perceptions (a) GSQP, (b) AP, and (c) SP.

Positive satisfaction or pleasure generated from a service encounter are reasons consumers post more positive online reviews (Melo, 2020). Businesses that serve consumers by increasing interactions between them, increase the positive perceptions of the whole group and, consequently, increase the number of positive online guest reviews. Furthermore, if its dimension is larger, this effect is increased.

Therefore, the authors propose that:

*Hypothesis 3:* More RTAs positively impacts tourists' number of positive perceptions (a) GSQP, (b) AP, and (c) SP.

Businesses that are able to gather and use market intelligence may reach considerably higher levels of performance more consistently than their less professional and, as such, less market-oriented peers. By responding with successful solutions, they make their customers more satisfied and increase their financial returns. (Hall et al., 2017; Kumar et al., 2011).

Based on previous research, the authors propose:

*Hypothesis 4:* The generation of market intelligence has a positive impact on the number of positive tourist perceptions (a) GSQP, (b) AP, and (c) SP.

The performance of RTA businesses is expected to be significantly affected by the volume of responses from management (Melo, 2020; Proserpio & Zervas, 2017; Xie et al., 2017). Management responses to the guests positive comments can help establish a warmer and stronger human relationship with reviewers so the RTA manager can learn to build goodwill with their most active customers and apply that knowledge to everyone else, which will be observed by the rest of the market (Hernández-Maestro, 2020; Melo, 2020; Park, S.-Y. & Allen, 2013; Thi et al., 2021; Zhang, X. et al., 2022).

Accordingly,

*Hypothesis 5:* The volume of management responses has a positive impact on the number of positive tourist perceptions (a) GSQP, (b) AP, and (c) SP.

## 3. Methodology

### 3.1. Sample analysis

GSQP, AP and SP the scale of perceived satisfactory experience reported by rural tourists in France were extracted from the study of Melo et al. (2017). The authors used an online questionnaire to reveal measures of owner's/manager's perception of the businesses performance and their market intelligence. For each RTA, information on visibility on an infomediator site, volume of management responses, business characteristics (provided by former Toprural owned by Vrbo, <https://www.vrbo.com/es-es/viajes/campa%C3%B1a/toprural-vrbo>), performance measures and market intelligence (online questionnaire) were merged (table 1). The authors then analyzed this data with SPSS 27.

The authors selected positive perceptions of the services delivered to the guests, and identify positive customer comments. According to the literature review (Chevalier & Mayzlin, 2006; Hu et al., 2009; Melo et al., 2017; Melo et al., 2022; Nieto et al., 2014; Racherla et al., 2013).

**Table 1: Variables**

Variable	Measure
GSQP	Average number of categories (Satisfaction, Rest, Comfort and Host) mentioned in positive online consumer reviews.
AP	Average number of categories (Information, Temperature, Cleaning, Decoration and Multimedia) mentioned in positive online consumer reviews.
SP	Average number of categories (Seasonality, Environment, and Access) mentioned in positive online consumer reviews.
Business profitability	Managers', 7-point Likert scale (1 = very bad, 7 = excellent): <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- RTAs' performance, profitability</li> <li>- Increase in RTA bookings</li> </ul>
	Managers', 7-point Likert scale (1 = "strongly disagree," 7 = "strongly agree"): <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- "I was satisfied with the income obtained by the RTA."</li> </ul>
Management Perceptions of Guest Satisfaction	Managers', 7-point Likert scale (1 = very bad, 7 = excellent): <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- "Consumer satisfaction with the RTA"</li> </ul>
Management Perceptions of Public Image	Managers' perception, 7-point Likert scale (1 = very bad, 7 = excellent): <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- "RTA's public image"</li> </ul>
Online visibility	Expenditures by RTA for a promotion on infomediary Toprural: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- Prestige (most expensive)</li> <li>- Gold</li> <li>- Silver</li> <li>- Without</li> </ul>
Online presence expertise	Presence on the Infomediary website (months)
Accommodations number	Dichotomous: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- 0 for only one accommodation</li> <li>- 1 for more than one accommodation</li> </ul>
Market intelligence creation	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- "I <b>always</b> attend fairs or important meetings on rural tourism."</li> <li>- "I am <b>very</b> attentive to news media and specialized papers on rural tourism"</li> <li>- "I am <b>always</b> aware about available online information of other RTAs proposals."</li> </ul>
Management response	- N. ° of management responses to online customer reviews (for each RTA,).

**Source:** Prepared by the authors from Melo et al. (2017)

Obtaining objective measures of SME performance is difficult, and as previous studies point to the existence of a positive relationship between managers' perceptions of performance and consumer evaluations, the authors used this approach (Melo et al., 2017; Nieto et al., 2014)

**Table 2: Categories**

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.
Accommodation 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 establishment, and if photos, movies, images, email, and videos were available on the
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:** Prepared from Melo et al. (2017)

The subjective approach to SME performance has been widely used (Avci et al., 2011; Hallak et al., 2015). In line with Melo et al. (2017), the authors used tourists holistic positive perceptions of the quality of the services delivered based on the three main groups of positive perceptions evidenced: GSQP, AP and SP (table 2).

The authors gathered data on 2,275 French RTAs, which translated into 10,047 consumer online reviews. To sieve these data, the authors removed any RTAs without complete data, blank or duplicate consumer online reviews. In the questionnaire, the authors requested answers from 1,618 French RTAs, these RTAs represent 8,628 consumer online reviews. An email was sent to provide RTAs with access to the questionnaire on the website. Subsequently, the authors sent a reminder email. Table 3 contains the characteristics of the sample. After the filtering process, it was possible to use 235 of the responses received from the owners/managers of the French RTAs.

**Table 3: Sample characteristics**

RTA number	235
Online visibility	
– Prestige (most expensive)	19
– Gold	96
– Silver (less expensive)	93
– Without	27
Online presence expertise (average in months)	61
N. ° of accommodations (average)	1.17
Management response volume (average)	0.83

**Source:** Own elaboration based on empirical data analysis.



### 3.2. Data analysis

The authors used basic descriptive statistics and compared all sampling frames with a range of variables using one-way analysis of variance (ANOVA), Welch, and chi-square tests to determine an overview of the sample and responses to different survey items. According to the literature review on tourism market studies, the authors used clustering techniques to discover a segmentation solution (Frochot, 2005; Kastenholz et al., 1999; Molera & Pilar Albaladejo, 2007; Park, D.-B. & Yoon, 2009; Pesonen, 2012).

The use of clustering has become a very common technique to identify market segments based on research data (Dolnicar, 2002). As such, a cluster analysis was performed involving GSQP, AP and SP. None of the cluster variables showed correlations above 0.9, verified by a multicollinearity analysis (Sarstedt & Mooi, 2014). The use of the two-stage cluster approach that has been widely used by tourism researchers, a technique used by the authors in this study (Chang, 2006; Prayag & Hosany, 2014).

A discriminant analysis was carried out in the two clusters with positive perceptions of tourists as discriminant variables to determine the predictor variables GSQP, AP, and SP that present the greatest contribution to the distinction between clusters, which served to verify the accuracy of the ranking classification (Pearce & Lee, 2005).

#### 3.2.1. Cluster analysis

A two-cluster solution based on rural tourism customers' perceptions of French RTAs was obtained through K-mean cluster analysis. According to the perceptions of a positive experience of staying in the French RTAs, AP and SP, the two clusters obtained were called Less Engagement (A) and More Engagement (B) (Table 4).

The cluster size presents differences, *Less Engagement* cluster includes 194 RTAs and *More Engagement* cluster includes 41 RTAs. With regards to positive tourist's perceptions, the segments differed significantly in GSQP, AP, SP, Mng customer satisfaction, online visibility, web presence expertise, number of accommodations, and management response volume (Table 5). But not in business profitability, Mng public image, and market intelligence generation (Table 5).

**Table 4: End cluster centers**

	A	B	Cluster		Error			
Cases	194	41	Medium Square	df	Medium Square	df	Z	Sig
AP	-0,258	0,779	44,224	1	0,335	1	110,422	0,000
SP	-0,290	1,257	106,560	1	342,670	1	342,670	0,000

**Source:** Authors elaboration.

The clusters were chosen to maximize the differences between the cases in the different clusters and the F-Tests should only be used for descriptive purposes. As the observed levels of significance were not corrected, they could not be interpreted as tests of the hypothesis of equal cluster means.

The authors used several profile variables to try to understand the differences between the two segments (Table 5).

#### *Cluster 1: Less Engagement (A)*

Cluster 1 has higher spending on online visibility (reputation), Table 5. This cluster has the lowest number of positive online reviews per RTA, 12.72, and includes 82.55% of RTAs.

#### *Cluster 2: More Engagement (B)*

Cluster 2 presented significantly more positive comments in the three perceptual dimensions GSQP, AP and SP (Table 5).

This cluster is the one that has significantly more management responses to the positive evaluations of guests and establishments with more than one accommodation unit. Cluster 2 represents 17.44% of RTAs having the highest number of positive online ratings per RTA, 23.72.

**Table 5: Characteristics by cluster**

Variables		Clusters	
		1	2
Positive perceptions	Global service quality	-0,34	<b>0,68**</b>
	Accommodations	-0,37	<b>0,98**</b>
	Surroundings	-0,42	<b>1,58**</b>
Performance	Business profitability	-0,11	0,06
	Mng Perception of Guest satisfaction	7,14	<b>5,54*</b>
	Mng Perception of public image	5,09	7,42
Business	Online visibility	<b>3,08**</b>	2,56
	Online presence expertise	48,02	<b>61,42**</b>
	Accommodations number	2,06	<b>2,06**</b>
Management	Market intelligence creation	-0,11	0,16
	Management response	1,18	<b>2,34*</b>

**Significance:** \* 0,10. \*\* 0,05

**Source:** Prepared by the authors

### 3.2.2. Discriminant analysis

The discriminant analysis, canonical discriminant function, was applied to the AP and SP dimensions (Tables 6 and 7).

**Table 6: Discrimination analysis**

Discriminant function	Eigenvalue	Canonical correlation	Wilks' $\lambda$	Significance
1	2.022	0.911	0.289	0,000
Std canonical discriminant function coeffs				
AP	0.670			
SP	0.915			

**Note:** 97.5% grouped cases correctly classified.

**Source:** Authors elaboration.

As a result of the discriminant analysis, it was found that all dimensions of perception contribute statistically to the discriminant function, being statistically significant.

To assess how customers' perceptions are correctly classified in the two clusters (table 7) the classification results were used and almost all (96.2%) of the 235 grouped cases were correctly classified, and the two clusters are valid and reliable. Both clusters were correctly classified into their respective groups, cluster 1 (100.0%) and cluster 2 (85.8%).

**Table 7: Cluster formation evaluation by classification results.**

Cluster case	Predicted group membership		
	1 (%)	2 (%)	Total (%)
1	194 (100.0)	0 (00.0)	194 (100.0)
2	9 (14.2)	35 (85.8)	41 (100.0)

Source: Authors elaboration.

### 3.2.4. Models

A multivariate analysis of variance (MANOVA) was performed to determine the effect of each predictor group on the three guest perception items as a whole. The adjustment statistics for each of the predictor items and the final models are presented in Table 8.

Models with groups of individual predictors across all three dimensions of perception had worse goodness-of-fit statistics than those of all-inclusive models, suggesting that the added predictors improved the models' fit beyond chance. In the first models (A.1, B.1, and C.1) the authors introduced the three variables related to the business (Table 5 - online visibility, online presence expertise, and number of accommodations). In the following three models (A.2, B.2, and C.2) all variables were introduced at the same time, variables related to the business and variables related to management (Table 5). VIF values lower than 1.5 were found for all models.

**Table 8: MANOVA results**

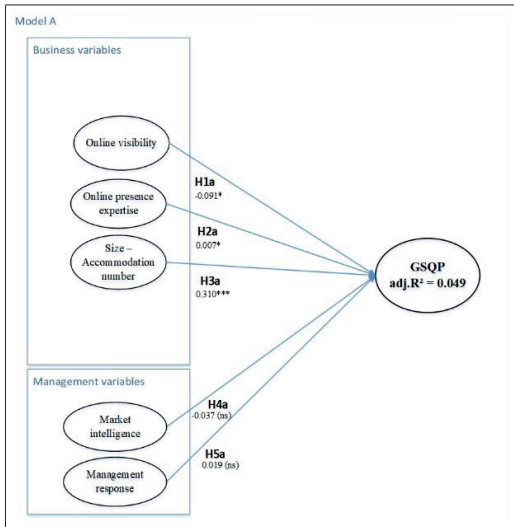
Models A, B, and C		GSQP (A)		AP (B)		SP (C)	
		MA.1	MA.2	MB.1	MB.2	MC.1	MC.2
(Constant)		-0,771***	-0,668**	0,019 (ns)	-0,750**	-1,465***	-1,287***
Business variables	Online visibility		-0,091*	-0,192***	-0,159**		-0,089 (ns)
	Online presence expertise	0,007*	0,007*		0,008*	0,013***	0,015***
	Number of accommodations	0,322***	0,310***	0,332**	0,334**	0,679***	0,649***
Management variables	Market intelligence		-0,037 (ns)				
	Management response		0,019 (ns)				
R2 adj		0,045	0,049	0,066	0,080	0,116	0,108
N		235					

**Significance:** \*p < 0.10; \*\*p < 0.05; \*\*\*p < 0.01; ns= non-significant

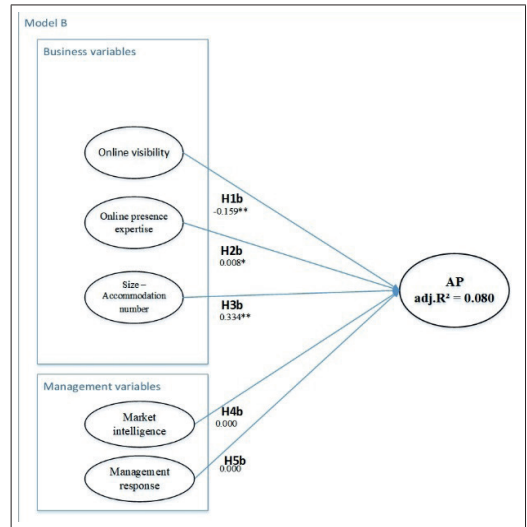
**Source:** Prepared by the authors based on data analysis.

The results of the models show that online visibility (-0.091, < 0.10), experience in online presence (0.007, < 0.10) and the number of accommodations (0.310, < 0.01) showed a statistically significant effect in the GSQP, (Model A. 2, Table 8, Figure 2). Regarding the AP, online visibility (-0.159, < 0.05), experience in online presence (0.008, < 0.1) and the number of accommodations (0.334, < 0.01) showed a statistically significant effect (Model B.2, Table 8, Figure 3).

**Figure 2: Model A outline results**



**Figure 3: Model B outline results**



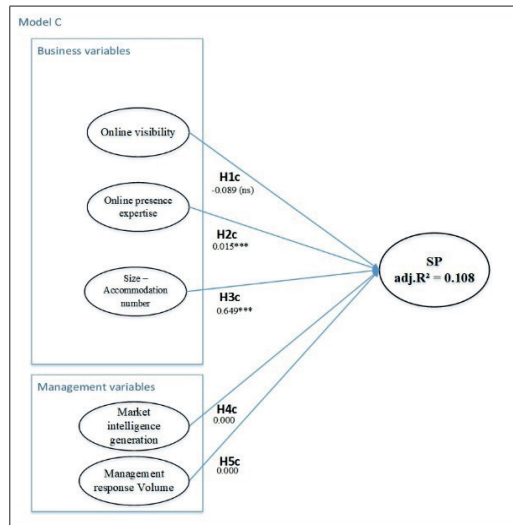
**Significance:** \* $p < 0.10$ ; \*\* $p < 0.01$ ; ns = non-significant.

**Significance:** \* $p < 0.10$ ; \*\* $p < 0.05$ ; ns = non-significant

**Source:** Own elaboration based on empirical data analysis.

Online presence expertise (0.015,  $< 0.01$ ) and number of accommodations (0.649,  $< 0.01$ ) presented a statistically significant effect on SP (Model C.2, Table 8, Figure 4).

**Figure 4: Model C outline results**



**Significance:** \*\*\* $p < 0.01$ ; ns = non-significant.

**Source:** Own elaboration based on empirical data analysis.

By analyzing the predictors, the authors detected interesting insights about the number of accommodations and the experience in the online presence that predicts the three dimensions of perception,

could become a useful management tool. However, online visibility had a negative effect on all three dimensions of perception, which was surprising.

Online visibility predicts for GSQP, AP, and LP.

#### 4. Discussion and implications

The authors of this study, from the point of view of positive perceptions of tourists (GSQP, AP and SP), try to recognize the positioning of RTAs and examine the characteristics of the two RTA segments based on three groups of variables: strategic accommodation variables, managerial behavior competencies, and business performance.

Organization management may not give the same attention to a specific type of consumer behavior and business variable when defining strategies to improve your service offerings. Consequently, the authors consider the need to assess the real links against the specific positioning of the RTAs based on the positive perceptions of consumers, exposed in the ratings and comments of online reviews, the business strategy, and management behavioral competencies.

Another approximation of this study is that the authors use combined data from consumers, owners/managers, and business characteristics. Namely, the positive perceptions of consumers (GSQP, AP, and SP), perception of owners/managers about their performance, behavioral competencies of managers (market intelligence creation and the management response), and strategic business variables of RTAs (online visibility, experience in presence in the website and number of accommodations).

##### 4.1. Theoretical implications

The results of this study reveal a research gap regarding the analysis of the positioning of RTAs based on the positive perceptions of the guest and on the specific characteristics of the RTAs. Another research gap that the results of this study indicate concerns a deeper knowledge of the process of acting on the volume of positive messages to the consumer through the strategic variables of the business and behavioral competencies of managers.

The authors' theoretical model makes it possible to shed light on how consumers position RTAs based on their perceptions of a positive experience, on the strategic variables of the accommodation unit, and on the manager's competencies that allow increasing the volume of positive messages from consumers.

##### 4.2. Practical implications

This study allows the owners/entrepreneurs of RTAs to improve their understanding of which leads consumers, based on their positive perceptions of the lived experience and the characteristics of the RTA that they consider relevant, to position the RTA.

For owners/managers, it is essential to know, as much as possible, the final results of the delivery of the services provided from the perspective of your consumer. It is very important to explore the strategic variables of the business and management competencies, which are key elements to increase the volume of positive online reviews from tourists when evaluating services.

These results obtained in the study allow us to highlight two business variables that helped owners/managers to generate an increased number of positive messages in each of the three categories mentioned above: number of RTAs managed (only one or more) and, on a smaller scale, degree, time that the RTA has been on the infomediary's website.

In this research, the authors show that of the variables considered, the representative variable of management that identifies RTAs with more than one lodging is the variable that most affects the number of positive messages. In this sector, although it is possible to find RTAs with two or three accommodation units, RTA chains do not exist.

According to the research results, the authors may think that an owner/manager with more than one accommodation unit probably manages his business in a more professional way, from the point of view of his behavioral skills, as well as the use of services, that generate greater engagement and greater willingness of consumers to post messages about their tourist experiences. But it should also not be forgotten that the period of presence on the online platform serves as an indicator of the time of presence in the market and, therefore, of the number of consumers served, which probably will generate a greater number of messages.

Namely, the messages number from the positive perceptions of the experience is related to greater investment in promoting the RTA on the Infomedia platform, but surprisingly, the survey result shows

a negative sign. These claims suggest that having a better and longer view of the RTA offer on the Infomedia platform decreases the number of positive online reviews.

It is possible that when an RTA is seen at the top of the Infomedia platform in the searches of potential consumers, their expectations about the services provided by the RTA are amplified, especially in more tangible attributes such as the characteristics that describe the RTA. Eventually, leading to it is possible that customers' post-experience perceptions are not as good as pre-experience perceptions in choosing the RTA.

This research has some limitations that allow the authors to suggest ideas for future studies. First, better business performance can generate the resources needed to invest more in greater online visibility and thus generate more positive feedback.

Thus, business performance can be both the antecedent and the cause. Second, the authors include information published on the TopRural website, current Vrbo. It is the most relevant infomediary for rural tourism in Europe, but it is only a specific site, so the generalization of these results to other sources of information cannot be carried out without careful analysis. Third, this study referred to RTAs in just one country, France.

According to UNWTO (2019), it is the main destination for international tourism, but again, the generalization of the results to other countries must be carefully analyzed. Simultaneous replication of this study to multiple countries and multiple online platforms such as other infomediary or destination sites, blogs, forums, social networking sites, and microblogs would be interesting to determine whether similar results emerge.

Another possible line of research would be the attempt to distinguish "moments of truth" in tourists' experiences. Finally, an insightful analysis could review how customers express themselves through the use of adjectives, first-person voice, grammatical context, or photos and videos, as well as the effects of responses posted by the RTA management.

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