The **influence** of **User Generated Content** on Johannesburg Hotels, South Africa

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Abstract | The significance of online User Generated Content (UGC) has been increasing rapidly around the world, influencing travellers' decision-making when planning trips, as well as businesses' online reputations. Prior to the COVID-19 pandemic, in South Africa, there has been a significant growth in the accommodation sector, particularly in Johannesburg, due to the development of various tourism subsectors throughout the city. Little research has been conducted which examines the influence of UGC on hotels and almost none in South Africa. Therefore, this study provides a contribution towards local literature and further understanding of how travellers rate and view the services of hotels, using Johannesburg hotels as a case study. The study was conducted through the use of a desktop analysis of travellers' ratings and reviews of 147 three to five star hotels in Johannesburg as listed on the TripAdvisor platform. The findings highlight the profile of these hotels as well as a broad overview of visitor perceptions of hotels within Johannesburg. They then provide an analysis of reviews for each hotel which gives insight into the perceptions of visitors of a variety of hotels. This analysis offers an important perspective into the satisfaction of tourists staying at Johannesburg hotels.

Keywords | User generated content, hotels, Johannesburg, TripAdvisor, eWOM

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1. Introduction

Urban tourism is a growing focus for research, especially in cities located in the global South (Rogerson, 2014, Rogerson & Rogerson, 2014, 2016, 2021a, 2021b). A key component of the urban tourism economy is the accommodation sector and hotels serve as the primary accommodation type chose by travellers in urban areas (Fang, Li & Li, 2019; Nisar, Haji, Prabhakar & Dwivedi, 2019, Provotorina, Kazmina, Petrenko & Makarenko, 2020; Valentin & O'Neill, 2019; Zhao, Gu, Yue & Xu 2022). Since South Africa's transition to democracy in the mid-1990s the development of the accommodation services sector has been an important contributor to the competitiveness of South Africa in the global tourism economy (Rogerson & Rogerson, 2018). Johannesburg is South Africa's leading destination as differentiated by number of trips and bed nights (Rogerson & Rogerson, 2021b). In addition, Johannesburg is the leader in business tourism (Rogerson & Rogerson, 2017; 2021b). Since the 1990s Johannesburg's hotel sector has matured and diversified its product offerings to cater for local, regional and long haul international tourists. Visitors to the city can now choose from a menu of accommodation offerings including five-star luxury hotels, boutique hotels, limited service hotels, all-suite hotels and airport hotels.

There are a multitude of factors which influence the South African and indeed international hotel economy and the burgeoning use of social media for marketing, travel, and business purposes is becoming one of the most significant (Dewnarain, Ramkissoon & Mavondo, 2019; Perez-Aranda, Vallespín & Molinillo, 2018). The use of social media in the travel and tourism industry has markedly increased in recent years (Hvass & Munar, 2012). There are a variety of practical uses and applications of social media among tourism stakeholders. Travellers utilise social media in order to plan their trips and to share information amongst one another. Hotels have also adopted the use of social media in order to engage with their customers, promote their brands and to improve their service quality and performance (Dewnarain et al., 2019; Leung, Law, van Hoof & Buhalis, 2013; Mendes-Filho, Mills, Tan & Mane, 2018). The information shared on social media by both travellers and businesses is referred to as User Generated Content (UGC). Research shows that UGC is created and shared on a variety of different platforms including social networks, such as Facebook, Instagram and Twitter, online vlogs such as YouTube, as well as travel sites such as TripAdvisor (Bertot, Jaeger & Hansen, 2012; Lever, Mulvey & Elliot, 2017; Joseph et al., 2022). This relatively new way of sharing and acquiring information has been deemed electronic word of mouth (e-WOM) which has largely replaced traditional word of mouth (WOM), particularly in the tourism industry (Filieri & McLeay, 2013; Jeong & Jeon, 2008; O'Connor, 2010; Pourfakhimi et al., 2020).

Johannesburg is South Africa's leading destination for urban tourism (Rogerson, 2014, 2017, 2021b). Consequently, the quality of the city's hotel economy and its future growth and success is dependent on traveller satisfaction. The contemporary hotel industry is highly dependent on UGC though relatively little research exists on this topic (Beham, 2015; Berezina, Bilgihan, Cobanoglu & Okumus, 2016; Torres & Singh, 2016). Thus, the aim of this paper is to explore the influence of UGC on 3 to 5-star hotels located in Johannesburg by examining the ratings and reviews of travellers on the platform TripAdvisor. This is undertaken in order to offer insight into how UGC on TripAdvisor influences hotel services, hotel reputation and assists hotels in improving their overall performance.

2. Literature

2.1. The Accommodation Sector and Hotels in South Africa

The accommodation sector forms an integral part of any tourism experience as it offers short-term stays for travellers away from their homes (Poudel, 2013; Rogerson, 2013a). It is considered to be one of the most significant, visible and largest sectors within the tourism industry (Timothy & Taye, 2009). There are several different types of accommodation which vary in terms of size, quality, the facilities they offer as well as in ranking (Jauhari, 2012; Merwe & Wöcke, 2007; Poudel, 2013; Timothy & Teye, 2009). Hotels are the most well-known type of accommodation establishments, offering a substantial number of rooms and facilities, such as business conference rooms and restaurants (Glen & Mearns, 2018; Mishra, 2018; Timothy & Teye, 2009). Significant hotel development is evident in many countries, specifically in big cities (Lam et al., 2015; Rogerson, 2014).

As with the broader accommodation sector, hotel establishments also face significant challenges which affect their growth and development (Bakhtiar & Vinogradov, 2019; Timothy & Teye, 2009). Seasonality is one of the most significant challenges that the hotel segment faces due to the fact that demand for accommodation changes throughout the year (Duro, 2016; Saito & Romão, 2018; Timothy & Teye, 2009). Increased competition is another major challenge faced by hotels (Bakhtiar & Vinogradov, 2019; Crick & Spencer, 2010; Guttentag, 2015). High demand for accommodation, price increases, as well as new development of hotels are generally the causes of increased competition between hotels (Bakhtiar & Vinogradov, 2019; Crick & Spencer, 2010). When there is high demand for accommodation, it creates intense competition between different operators and so hotels use their service quality and pricing structures to attract consumers (Álvarez-García, Cruz del Río-Rama & Simonetti, 2017; Timothy & Teye, 2009). What is abundantly clear from previous literature is that service quality has become a key element for hotels to gain a competitive advantage (Crick & Spencer, 2010; Umasuthan & Park, 2018).

The growth of the tourism industry in South Africa, in the years leading up to the COVID-19 pandemic, has played a pivotal role in the growth of the accommodation sector (Phiri, 2016; Rogerson, 2013a; Visser & van Huyssteen, 1999). As a result increased attention has been given to the reality of different tourists' needs and thus, the development of a range of different hotel products throughout the country (Rogerson, 2010; Rogerson & Kotze, 2011). This has resulted in market segmentation and the emergence of different types of hotels such as boutique hotels, budget hotels, heritage hotels, airport hotels, limited service hotels as well as luxury hotels in order to cater for different tourists' needs (Mhlanga, 2018; Rogerson, 2010; Rogerson & Kotze, 2011). The transformation of hotels in South Africa also led to further changes in the quality and size of hotels which has allowed hotels to be graded based on the services and facilities that they offer, as is common in many countries throughout the world (Rogerson, 2014; TGCSA, 2013).

The City of Johannesburg has long been the commercial centre of South Africa. It is the country's largest city and most significant destination for many urban tourism subsectors, most notably, business tourism, MICE tourism and transit tourism (Rogerson & Rogerson, 2017). As such, there is high demand for a range of accommodation offerings in Johannesburg (Rogerson, 2013a, 2017; Sibisi & Abrahams, 2018). Since Johannesburg receives a large number of tourists the accommodation sector is of great importance as a means to provide standardised accommodation services to visitors (Rogerson, 2014; Rogerson & Rogerson, 2018). Demand for accommodation in

Johannesburg has increased significantly due to the growing number of visitors recorded, particularly during the post-apartheid period and in the years leading up to the COVID-19 pandemic (Rogerson, 2014). While Johannesburg boasts a wide variety of accommodation establishments, hotels remain the most significant type of accommodation establishment for urban tourism in Johannesburg (Darkey & Horn, 2009; Rogerson, 2014; Rogerson & Rogerson, 2016).

2.2. User Generated Content

One of the primary ways in which social media is used by tourism stakeholders is to close the communication gap between suppliers and consumers (Liu, Pennington-Gray & Klemmer, 2015; Neti, 2011; Tsai, Chen, Hu & Chen, 2020). Service quality is one of the most significant components of hotel success rates. There are numerous ways in which customers are able to provide feedback to hotels and to rate service quality. One of the most prominent ways of rating hotel service quality is UGC, in this case content on hotel services provided by past customers, which assists in understanding visitor perceptions of hotels. In recent years, the majority of UGC is generated electronically through social media platforms (Ersin & Gödze, 2018; Matikainen, 2015).

Word of mouth (WOM) marketing has long been a significant component of travel planning due to the perceived trusted nature of the experiences of other travellers. Although research is limited, previous studies have shown that social media WOM, or electronic WOM (e-WOM), has the ability to influence travellers' purchasing decisions as well as the ability to influence traveller perceptions of tourism products and thus reputation of tourism businesses (Balaji et al., 2016; Teng, Khong, Chong & Lin, 2017). Tourism e-WOM comes in the form of online content which is created by users of social media when they eva-

luate and rate tourism products and services (Balaji et al., 2016; Halliday, 2016; Teng et al., 2017; Wang). The significance of e-WOM is that it assists travellers by enabling them to access helpful travel information. In addition, it also helps businesses identify positive and negative feedback in order to maintain and improve service quality (Balaji et al., 2016; Halliday, 2016; Teng et al., 2017). There are several different review sites available to travellers and tourism operators, however, TripAdvisor is regarded as the most trusted (Bigné et al., 2020; Miguéns et al., 2008; O'Connor, 2010; Reyes-Menendez et al., 2019).

There are two important components of UGC which are used within the accommodation sector: ratings and reviews. Ratings are overall scores for hotel quality and services which provide a holistic perception of the experience by the reviewer (Hvass & Munar, 2012; TripAdvisor, 2020). In addition, reviewers often provide further detail to explain the score through reviews which consist of more detailed explanations for the given ratings, commenting on aspects such as rooms, hotel service, sleep quality, food and/or the area in which the hotel is located (Martín & Román, 2017; Schuckert, Liang, Law & Sun, 2019). These combined hotel ratings and reviews are used to convey the quality of hotel services and describe the specific positive and negative attributes of an accommodation provider (Liu et al., 2015; Xu & Li, 2016). The way this information is utilized, varies between hotel operators and travellers.

Through eWOM via social media platforms, hotel operators are able to gain a wide range of feedback from consumers in real time. This allows them to understand the wants and needs of their clients in order to manage their services and facilities. In cases of negative reviews, they are able use the feedback in order to rectify their mistakes and to improve their performance (Dinçer & Alrawadieh, 2017; Martín & Román, 2017; Phillips et al., 2017). On the other hand, travellers utilise social media in order to interact with one another,

exchange information, plan trips and share their travel experiences (Halliday, 2016). It has been demonstrated that UGC plays an important role in travel planning. UGC has an influence on travellers in that it enables them to differentiate services by gathering information from reviews written by former travellers (Leite-Pereira et al., 2020; Rabadán-Martín et al., 2020). E-WOM, which is typically done through UGC, is considered more valuable than traditional WOM in that it is considered more truthful and unfiltered owing to the greater freedoms that the online format provides reviewers (Balaji et al., 2016; Barreda & Bilgihan, 2013; Xu & Li, 2016). Since e-WOM content affects both future travellers' purchasing decisions as well as their perception of products or services, UGC is of great significant to the tourism industry and the hotel segment (Filieri & McLeay 2013; Jeong & Jeon, 2008; O'Connor, 2010; Rabadán-Martín et al., 2020). Research has shown that prospective travellers consider both positive as well as negative reviews when making their decisions, thus both are of great significance (Fotis et al., 2012; Miguéns et al., 2008).

3. Methodology

This study is an exploratory study which uses a mixed-method approach, analysing both qualitative and quantitative data. In order to understand traveller perceptions of hotels through online UCG, the TripAdvisor platform was selected as the focus of this study for two reasons. Firstly, it is the most well-known and commonly used platform for reviewing tourism experiences, globally (O'Connor, 2010). In addition, numerous previous studies have determined the reliability and validity of TripAdvisor reviews and it was thus deemed the most reliable UCG platform for this context (O'Connor, 2010). A range of data was extracted from TripAdvisor including characteristics of the various hotels

included in the study, their ratings on TripAdvisor and an in-depth analysis of online reviews for each hotel. For the purpose of this study, only 3 to 5-star hotels were selected to be included. This specific group was chosen due to the high demand for quality hotels which has led to improved services offered by 3 to 5-star hotels that largely cater for business and leisure tourism markets (Rogerson, 2018). It also provides a baseline of services the hotels would have to offer to receive a star grading, which assists in deeper analysis. Furthermore, Johannesburg was chosen as the study area because of the scope of hotels found within the city and since it is the largest contributor to the urban tourism economy in South Africa (Rogerson, 2014; Rogerson & Rogerson, 2016, 2017, 2021b).

The hotel sample falls within a wide geographic area, known as Greater Johannesburg. This classification is related partially due to the grouping of hotels on TripAdvisor within this geographic area. However, also important to note is that the municipal boundary of the City of Johannesburg does not include the region surrounding the airport, which is in the adjacent municipality, known as Erkulehni. It was decided that the area surrounding O.R. Tambo International Airport was an important component to include in analysis of hotels within a major metropolitan area such as Johannesburg. This is especially crucial in the case of Johannesburg due to the significance of business travel in the city as well as transit to other parts of South Africa and Southern Africa which use Johannesburg as a hub. A total of 147 3- to 5-star hotels were found on TripAdvisor within this region and are thus included in the analysis discussed below.

Data collection was done through a desktop analysis as all data was collected from the TripAdvisor platform. There are three sets of data. The first set of data is quantitative data which consists of a profile of 3 to 5-star hotels located in Johannesburg, listed on TripAdvisor. This set of data comprised of hotel information such as hotel identification (the number from 1 to 147 assigned to

each hotel), hotel name, star grading (hotel class), traveller ranking by TripAdvisor (the ranking given to a hotel based on traveller ratings), traveller rating by TripAdvisor (the overall rating of a hotel's service), number of reviews each hotel has, location of hotels, hotel ownership, as well as hotel size. This data was then captured onto an Excel spreadsheet and formed the base from which further analysis was conducted. Five themes were developed from this data to provide a descriptive analysis of the profile of these hotels: hotel location, which covers the areas (suburbs) in which these hotels are located; hotel star grading (hotel class) which covers the differences in these star grading and how many hotels fall under each category; hotel size (small, medium and large) and hotel ownership which describes how many hotels are chain affiliated versus independently owned of hotels offered in Johannesburg.

The second set of data focused the text included in travellers' reviews on TripAdvisor. Qualitative data in the form of these reviews was quantified in order to provide a better understanding of some important components which were frequently discussed. A word frequency analysis was conducted which involved counting the frequency of words that appear in travellers' reviews which are linked to hotel services. The analysis was carried out using Atlas.ti 8, a software used to process textual data. This technique, adopted from O'Connor (2010) and Stringam and Gerdes (2010), is used to identify the specific aspects that reviewers look for during their stay at a hotel and how many times certain issues are raised. The analysis involved an extraction of reviews from each hotel in order to provide an impression of reviews for the hotel across the range of hotels and within respect to different hotel characteristics. The five most recent reviews were extracted from each hotel on TripAdvisor and captured them on a word document. The reviews were subsequently uploaded onto Atlas.ti 8 and a word frequency count analysis was run. Since the software does not automatically

eliminate thematic words, the researcher manually eliminated all ambiguous words and words which were not liked to hotel services. The generated words were then captured in a table from which a descriptive analysis was developed.

The third and final set of data consisted of qualitative data of travellers' reviews of selected hotels. Therefore, a manual analysis to analysis of travellers' reviews of these hotels was undertaken. For this section, a representative sample of the 147 hotels in the population were selected for the analysis. The hotel sample included 60 hotels, made up of 20 hotels from each star grading (hotel class). A range of 20 hotels was selected from each star grading, which was considered an adequate representation as it amounts to about 40% of the total number of hotels in this study. Unlike the data from traveller reviews wherein only five reviews were selected for analysis, all responses from these hotels were examined in order to provide a more in-depth analysis of UGC within this context. This data was then further analysed in order to identify patterns and themes among hotels of various types, based on the first set of data assessing hotel characteristics. Quotations from a selections of reviews are highlighted below in order to better understand some of the quantitative data results from the previous two sets of data.

4. Results and Discussion

This section highlights some of the major findings from the study including a profile of this selection of hotels in Johannesburg as well as some basic information on their TripAdvisor profiles such as traveller ratings and number of reviews. In addition, traveller reviews are analysed in two ways. The quantitative data of word frequency highlights trends among hotels throughout the region and a further qualitative analysis of reviews of selected hotels helps further understand TripAdvisor ra-

tings, word frequencies within reviews and more detail on traveller perceptions.

4.1. Profile of Hotels

At the time this study was conducted, a total of 147 star-graded hotels located in the Johannesburg area were found on TripAdvisor. These hotels were sorted by applying TripAdvisor's traveller ranking function, and data about the hotels was recorded including characteristics such as: hotel identification, hotel names, star grading (hotel class), traveller ranking, number of reviews, location as well as hotel ownership. This data was then sorted into groups based on their star grading. As such, three groups of hotels were formed – one for hotels belonging to each star grade. The total number of 3-star hotels was 49, 4-star hotels was 58 and 5-star hotels was 40 within this population at the time of analysis (see Table 1).

Table 1 | Profile of Johannesburg Hotels

Star Grading	Number of Hotels	Ownership		Size		
		Chain Affiliated	*Independent*	*Small*	*Medium*	*Large*
3-star	49	25	24	13	30	6
4-star	58	30	28	13	27	9
5-star	40	24	16	23	16	1
Total	147	79	68	49	73	16

Source: Own elaboration

In terms of some of the characteristics of the hotels, there is a relatively even spread between hotels based on star rating, with the largest proportion found within the 4-star grading category. In terms of hotel ownership, there was also a relatively even split, overall, with slightly more chain-affiliated hotels than independent hotels. When segmenting this information based on star-grading, the only significant difference is seen within the group of 5-star hotels, in which there are more chain-affiliated hotels than independent hotels. This is likely due to the ability of large chains to provide the necessarily facilities and services to meet the Tourism Grading Council of South Africa (TGCSA) requirements. When considering the size of the hotel, which is qualified by the number of rooms, 50% of this population is considered a medium-sized hotel, which include hotels between 51 and 249 rooms. There are, however, a fair share (33%) of hotels considered small, with less than 50 rooms while only a small proportion (10%) is considered a large hotel (more than 250 rooms). Similar proportions are seen among 3 and 4 star hotels, when the data is disaggregated, however a difference is seen in the case of 5-star hotels, among which the highest proportion is small-sized hotels. Many hotels found in Johannesburg are considered luxury boutique hotels, which are inherently small in size, and thus would account for the share of small hotels within this group. Table 2, highlights the geographic distribution of hotels based on star grading.

Table 2 | Geographic Distribution

	Northern Johannesburg	Eastern Johannesburg and Airport Cluster	Western Johannesburg and Soweto	Central Business District	Southern Johannesburg
3-star	28	16	2	3	0
4-star	30	14	7	5	2
5-star	34	5	1	0	0
Total	92	35	10	8	2

Source: Own elaboration

The largest cluster of hotels in Johannesburg, are found in Northern Johannesburg with nearly all 5-star hotels found in this region. This region includes nodes such as Sandton and Rosebank which are significant business centres, both leisure and corporate spaces. Interestingly, very few quality hotels are found within the Central Business District (CBD) and none with a 5-star grading. This finding is as a result of the hollowing out of central Johannesburg of corporate headquarters, upmarket retailers and hotels during the 1990s and the move northwards to the newer suburban business nodes (Murray, 2011; Rogerson, 2020). Another significant proportion of hotels is found in Eastern Johannesburg, which includes those linked to the airport and thus accounting for this cluster. Only 8% of all hotels in this population are found outside of these regions, which demonstrates the highly clustered nature of Johannesburg hotels in significant business, leisure and transit centres as evidenced by Figure 1.
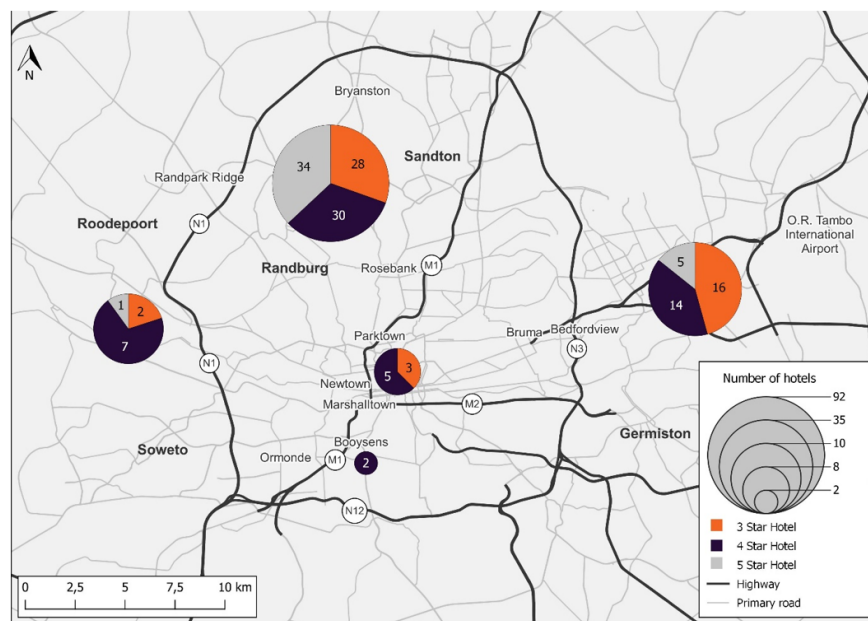

Figure 1 | Location of 3 to 5 Star Hotels in Greater Johannesburg
Source: Own elaboration

4.2. Traveller Ratings

TripAdvisor of provides travellers with a platform on which to share their travel experiences in the form of writing reviews and leaving ratings. Travellers rate their entire service experience on a scale from 1.0 and 5.0 and then are able to leave specific comments in the form of a more detailed review. These two elements form part of UGC which influences the reputations of brands as well as prospective travellers' decision-making processes and are thus seen as important. Table 3, illustrates that average TripAdvisor ratings tend to increase in conjunction with the increase in star-grading, demonstrating that, overall, TGCSA is grading hotels on par with traveller perceptions and experiences.

When considering the distribution of traveller ratings, most 3 to 5-star hotels in Johannesburg listed on TripAdvisor generally have good ratings, with 69% of these hotels having an overall rating of 4.0 or 4.5 out of 5.0. There were 41 hotels which were given a score rating of 4.5 which represent relatively good service. Of the hotels with a rating of 4.5, most were 5-star hotels (22) with fourteen 4-star hotels and five 3-star hotels also

Table 3 | TripAdvisor Ratings and Reviews

Star Grading	Average TripAdvisor Rating	Average Number of Reviews	Distribution of TripAdvisor Rating (out of 5.0)					
			2.5	*3.0*	*3.5*	*4.0*	*4.5*	*5.0*
3-star	3.73	7	2	5	15	22	22	8
4-star	4.00	9	2	0	10	31	14	1
5-star	4.43	15	0	1	2	7	5	0
Total	4.05	11	4	6	27	60	41	9

Source: Own elaboration

receiving this rating. Looking at the highest score rating of 5, which indicates all reviewers found the hotel experiences 'excellent', only 4-star and 5-star hotels achieved this rating score. In total, there were 9 hotels out of the 147 that were rated a 5.0, one of them was a 4-star hotel and the remaining eight were 5-star hotels. Only 10 hotels received scores considered 'poor' (2.5/5) or 'average' (3.0/5), seven of which are 3-star hotels, two of which are 4-star hotels and only one of which is 5-star. Overall, the trend revealed in this data is that there is a general correlation between the star grading of Johannesburg hotels and their score ratings on TripAdvisor in that higher ratings are generally attributed to hotel of higher star grading.

In terms of hotel ownership, 5 of the hotels which received a rating of 3.0 were independent hotels and 1 was a chain affiliated hotel. For hotels with a rating of 3.5, 12 were independent hotels and 15 were chain affiliated hotel. Of the 60 hotels which received a rating of 4.0, 19 were independent and 41 were chain affiliated. With a rating of 4.5, there were 24 independent hotels and 17 chain affiliated hotels and finally, no chain affiliated hotels were scored a rating of 5.0, all 9 hotels were independent hotels. Often chain affiliated hotels are associated with providing consistent services because they are more financially secure. However, in Johannesburg however independent hotels typically matched and often exceed service quality when compared to affiliated hotels according to visitor rating. Upon analysis, it was found that these top-rated independent hotels in Johannesburg were mostly luxury boutique hotels which would allowed individually catered service.

The top three most frequently mentioned words are 'hotel' (875), 'room' (524) and 'staff' (459). Other words that were frequently mentioned were 'stay' and 'service' and those related to the food and drink offerings (indicated by words such as 'breakfast', 'restaurant', 'dinner', 'bar' etc.). This is not surprising as it is likely that those are the components of the experience on which visitors would comment. In addition, the locations of the hotels as well as the security/safety were also frequently commented on. The word 'safe' was the 30th most frequently used word, while the words 'crime' and 'unsafe' did not appear at all. In the context of Johannesburg, the importance of the location and the safety/security features of hotels is paramount for travellers (especially international travellers) given the city's unsafe reputation and its high crime rate (Vigneswaran, 2020).

What is important here, however, is to examine the descriptive words which provide more meaningful information about visitor experience. The frequency of words with positive connotations – 'good' (411) 'great' (321) 'excellent' (170) - is significantly higher than mentions of the word 'bad' (48). Furthermore, positive adjectives such as 'clean', 'friendly', 'comfortable' 'helpful' and 'beautiful' also appeared in the top 20 most frequently used words. On the other hand, when examining the 60 most frequently used words, only two descriptive words could be considered subjectively negative 'bad', as mentioned above and 'small' which was mentioned 78 times. This is significant as it indicates that overall, the experience of visitors who

wrote reviews was largely positive, demonstrating and overall level of satisfaction among visitors to these hotels. The frequency of the key words found in this study indicating the importance of these fe-

atures for travellers is in line with those found in other past studies (O'Connor, 2010; Stringam & Gerdes, 2010).

Table 4 | Frequency of Words in Reviews

Word	Frequency	Word	Frequency	Word	Frequency
Hotel	875	Lovely	100	Venue	52
Room	524	Recommend	97	Conference	51
Staff	459	Reception	95	Perfect	51
Stay	416	Business	92	Value	51
Good	411	Dinner	89	Wi-fi	51
Great	321	Amazing	83	Convenient	50
Breakfast	289	Bar	80	Quiet	50
Service	289	Small	78	Money	49
Rooms	287	Spacious	78	Bad	48
Friendly	207	Safe	74	Shuttle	47
Food	200	Shower	74	Buffet	45
Clean	175	Bed	67	Guests	44
Excellent	170	Wonderful	67	Spa	44
Location	152	Restaurants	62	Price	41
Restaurant	147	Bathroom	61	Beds	37
Comfortable	144	Booked	59	Booking	37
Experience	116	Located	58	Gym	34
Helpful	113	Facilities	56	Security	33
Pool	107	Quality	56	Management	29
Beautiful	102	Menu	52	Professional	27

Source: Own elaboration

4.4. Traveller Reviews

In order to better understand the above results in terms of word frequency, a selection of traveller reviews were also analysed qualitatively. This information helps expand on the word count by delving deeper into the entirely of these reviews. This section aims to provide a better understanding of the general service quality provided by Johannesburg hotels as perceived by travellers. In order to understand the perceived reputations of these hotels the most recent reviews of each of the hotel were reviewed in order to assess the kinds of comments (positive or negative) travellers make about the establishments.

Unsurprisingly, an in-depth analysis of the reviews from the selection of hotels mostly hold good online reputations. Many reviews were entirely po-

sitive explaining some of the specific aspects they found helpful and specific component of the service quality they experienced. One reviewer wrote:

> Park Inn Stay
> Wonderful reception and service throughout my stay at this friendly exceptionally well serviced hotel. A lovely menu and when the food arrived it was very well prepared and presented!! Will definitely recommend to family and friends!!

Among the positive reviews, some of the most common compliments were related to the staff with comments such as "*the staff were amazing constantly cleaning and trying to keep everyone safe*". Many reviews commented on the staff at some point in the review, while some attributed

their positive experiences entirely to the staff, see below:

> Stunningly careful and helpful staff
> I travelled to Johannesburg for business and was unfortunately taken ill with two'DVT's and associated pulmonary complications. I was in hospital for six days while my wife was in the hotel. The management and staff were fantastic. They extended our stay without any problem, and gave us a reduction in the rate. They invited my wife to take me in food cooked in their kitchens, or fruit from the breakfast bar. There was a shuttle available until 10.00 p.m. which ran my wife to the hospital and picked her up to take her back to the hotel, or to any other local location she wanted. When I came out of hospital, I had to stay in the hotel for about a week before I could fly again, and I was overwhelmed by the number of staff that sought me out to see how I was progressing. I always say you can't tell a hotel's quality until something goes wrong. For me, something went really wrong and the Radisson Blu Gautrain hotel performed way beyond my wildest expectations. I would absolutely recommend them, always.

One significant finding which emerged when examining specific reviews was the numerous mentions of the suitability of these hotels for business purposes or for transit/stopovers. As with the above review, which mentions the value of the hotel as a "great stopover" another reviewer discussed the suitability of another hotel for transit: *"If you are in transit and want a good quality and value stay-over, this is the one"*. Several other reviews discussed the importance of their hotels due to the fact that they were visiting Johannesburg

for business. One said:

> BUSINESS TRAVEL HOTEL
> The Protea Hotel Fire & Ice Johannesburg Melrose Arch is located close to central Johannesburg and Sandton city. It is close to the Wanderes cricket grounds which is a short drive away. The Hotel caters for business travellers and has a shopping mall within a 5 minute walk from the Hotel. The restaurant has a wide variety of dining and adequate breakfast selections.

This reviewer commented on the benefit that the hotel had leisure facilities to utilize while travelling for business and this sentiment was echoed in numerous other reviews discussing travel for business.

In addition, among both business as well as transit and leisure travellers, many mentioned the significance of shuttles and transportation provided by the hotels. One reviewer said *"Free shuttle to airport every 15 minutes"* while another said *"has a shopping mall within a 5 minute walk from the Hotel"*, and a third *"The Montecasino precinct is a great stopover and has everything"*. This is of particular importance in a city like Johannesburg which is geographically spread out and also lacks sufficient public transportation. It is clear that the fact that many hotels are located in leisure precincts and provided good transportation options were seen as significant and positive.

Majority of the hotels which received negative reviews belong to local hotel groups and most travellers commented on how outdated the hotels were and how they failed to provide a service that was expected for their star grading. Many noted issues with maintaining facilities. One review below highlighted this:

> RECOMMENDED IMPROVENTS
> The garden court location is very convenient. The hotel must now look at

replacing carpets with tiles which are user-friendly healthy-wise. The timing of cleaning must not inconvenience clients who might want to take a longer rest. Maybe the hotel can improve on TV channels.

The four main fundamental elements of a hotel which are commented on in travellers' reviews are location, value, service as well as cleanliness. Some of the aspects which were apparent in hotels that did not receive good reviews were mostly reviewed negatively based on their location, because they did not offer value for money and because they did not offer good service. However, the most significant seemed to the issues with the facilities being outdated and the need to upgrade their facilities, as mentioned in the review below:

> A bit tired
> Dated, tired and in need of a refresh. The rooms could also have been cleaned a bit better. The restaurant food was not great, facilities average and the gym wanting. Even the courtesy bus to the airport need attention. Overall, I was disappointed and assume there must be better elsewhere. Sadly, I would not go back.

In the analysis of more detailed reviews, special note was also taken to consider the frequency and manner in which hotels responded to these reviews. The majority of the hotels included in this sample were found to be active on their TripAdvisor pages - only 3 out of the 60 selected hotels did not respond to any reviews. However, the frequency of reviews did vary significantly. Interestingly, 3-star hotels were found to most frequently reply to reviews and within a timely manner. More than half of this sample of 4-star hotels were found to be very poor at responding to travellers' reviews. They were found to be very selective with the reviews that they respond to with many ignoring most

reviews and selecting just one or two reviews to respond to on a monthly or a yearly basis. Noticeably, only five of the 16 5-star hotels included in this sample were found to consistently respond to reviews. One of the reasons for this, could be that many hotels only respond to negative reviews. Since 4 and 5-star hotels tend to have fewer negative reviews, this could account for the discrepancies. However, it is something to note and demonstrates a possible concern in terms of online engagement.

When considering the ownership of hotels, there was a significantly higher rates of responses to reviews amongst hotels which are independent, rather than chain-affiliated. Of the 26 hotels which were found to poorly respond to customer reviews, 17 of them were chain affiliated, which is more than half of the total number of chain-affiliated hotels (30) used in this analysis. This result is surprising given that chain affiliated hotels tend to have more departments/structures in place to offer quality customer support.

In terms of the types responses offered, the majority of hotels were found to make use of both personalised and generic responses. Some generic response to negative reviews included statement such as *"Thank you for participating and contributing towards our on-going efforts to continuously improve our services and facilities. We have noted your feedback and valuable comments. We hope to be of service to you again in the near future"*. Personalised responses are often detailed responses which directly address all that has been said by a reviewer. For reviews which were not necessarily negative but in which travellers raised one or more issues with their stay, hotels often addressed/acknowledged the issue whilst also providing a fairly generic response. For example:

> Dear Foluoch. It is great to hear that you had a wonderful stay with us! Thank you for taking the time to review our hotel - it is with guests' valua-

ble feedback that we are able to maintain and upgrade our friendly and efficient service levels. We apologise that we did not explain how the billing system works, we should have explained. We look forward to welcoming you to CedarWoods of Sandton soon

While chain-affiliated hotels primarily responded more personally only to negative reviews, independent hotels often provided personalised responses to negative as well as to positive reviews.

In terms of the person responsible for replying to reviews, the owner of the hotel often responded only in the case of small-scale hotels and therefore, personalised responses to traveller reviews were common. In the case of medium and large sized hotels, a member of hotel staff (the manager/general manager/public relations manager/social media manager/guest relations manager or front office desk) was responsible for replying to traveller reviews on TripAdvisor. As such, generic responses were the norm from these establishments.

From the above reviews, it is evident that travellers value what they pay for - if travellers pay for a 4-star hotel then they expect the hotel to look like and offer services of a 4-star grading. These results demonstrate that it is important for hotels to ensure that they offer services which match their grading standard as when this is not the case, hotels can suffer in their customer reviews and consequently, develop a negative online reputation which will decrease their chances of repeat visitations and future new visitations. For the hotels with positive reviews, this positive e-WOM increases their chances of being chosen by future travellers. Hotel responses to travellers were mostly generic and did not seem to have a major influence on hotel ratings. However, it is still imperative that hotels maintain their online presence.

5. Conclusions

This advent of electronic user generated content has had a significant influence on the travel industry due to the move of consumers and companies towards the online world for many reasons including travel planning and marketing purposes (Amaro et al., 2016). Therefore, UGC has come to be a crucial element of the travel industry as it is a labour-intensive and service-based industry which cannot be easily assessed other than through previous traveller experiences (O'Connor, 2010). The hotel segment is highly influenced by UGC due to its extremely competitive nature. Its key success factor is customer satisfaction and which results effective WOM marketing, particularly when there exists such a wide range of options available to consumers (Martín & Román, 2017).

Hotels in Johannesburg have shown to have a solid online presence as their overall ratings are relatively high and majority of reviews positive. Previous literature has found that star grading, hotel size as well as hotel ownership were said to be noted as factors affecting good online presence (Rabadán-Martín et al., 2020). In the case of Johannesburg however, it was found that, in most cases, star grading does not share a direct relationship with the kind of ratings and reviews an establishment receives. There were, overall, favourable reviews throughout the range of star-gradings. That said, however, in Johannesburg it was found that there is a tendency for higher graded establishments to be rated slightly more favourably than 3-star graded hotels. Looking at the factor of hotel size, medium-sized hotels were found to have the best online presence overall followed by small-sized hotels, and that large-sized hotels generally do not have a significantly good online presence. This observation is in opposition to the assumption made by Rabadán-Martín et al. (2020). However, the differences were not stark.

In terms of the content of travellers' reviews, a word frequency count was undertaken from which

it was found that the most frequently mentioned matters in travellers' reviews are "hotels, room, staff, stay, service, rooms, and food". This result supports international literature from O'Connor (2010) and Anagnostopoulou et al. (2020) in that there are common issues that travellers look for when staying at hotels, across different regions and different purpose of travel. In the case of Johannesburg hotels, the majority of qualifying words were positive for the above services which were significant. This shows that, overall, hotels in Johannesburg are over performing in terms of meeting and/or exceeding customer expectations. When delving deeper into a more in-depth analysis of reviews, some other interesting trends emerge. The most common aspects of hotel services which were often considered very positive aspects of the experiences were related to the food and beverage offerings as well as the staff. There were significant mentions of satisfaction with staff across the range hotels within this study. Furthermore, several specific aspects of hotels which were frequently highlighted included locations, safety and transportation options. These are, arguably, aspects which are particularly significant in the context of Johannesburg, due to concerns around safety and poor public transportation within the city. Although reviews were generally positive, there were several reviews which mentioned the need for improvements of facilities. Some reviews, even when overall positive, did note that facilities in many hotels would benefit from upgrading. These inputs could assist hotels in future development.

In terms of hotel responses, interestingly, the frequency and quality of hotel responses did not seem to have a major influence on their overall rating. However, independent hotels did appear to provided more frequent and personalized responses, while chain-affiliated hotels responded infrequently and often with vague and generic responses. Although this is the case, it is still important that hotels maintain a good online presence and thus need to ensure that the update and monitor their online profiles on platforms such as TripAdvisor. Overall, these positive reviews and ratings confirm the overall quality of Johannesburg's major business and leisure hotels. Therefore, maintaining an active and comprehensive online presence is important for the success of hotels. Further research could unpack and further understand the role of UGC in other accommodation types as well as those in more rural contexts.

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