

Review Response Strategy, Online Reputation, and Consumer Trust: A Moderated Mediation Model of Marketing Performance in the Hotel Industry of Medan City

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Abstract. This study examines how Review Response Strategy and Online Reputation shape Marketing Performance, positioning Consumer Trust as a mediating variable and Service Quality as a moderator, within the hospitality sector of Medan City, Indonesia. A quantitative paradigm was adopted, employing Partial Least Squares Structural Equation Modeling (PLS-SEM) applied to data gathered from 130 respondents comprising hotel guests and frontline management staff. The results confirm that both independent variables—Review Response Strategy and Online Reputation—exert significant positive effects on Consumer Trust, which subsequently drives Marketing Performance. Consumer Trust functions as a partial mediator in the pathway from Online Reputation to Marketing Performance. Additionally, Service Quality strengthens the Consumer Trust–Marketing Performance relationship, whereby hotels delivering higher service standards derive greater trust-driven performance gains. An Adjusted R² of 0.720 attests to the model's robust explanatory capacity. The findings carry actionable implications for hospitality operators in Medan seeking to harness digital review management as a strategic marketing lever.

Keywords: Consumer Trust; Online Reputation; Marketing Performance; Review Response Strategy; Service Quality.

1. INTRODUCTION

The proliferation of digital review platforms—ranging from Google Maps and TripAdvisor to a wide array of social media channels—has fundamentally reshaped how prospective hotel guests reach booking decisions. Amid this dense flow of information, the manner in which hotel management responds to incoming reviews is no longer a mere formality; it has become a decisive factor shaping image, trust, and ultimately marketing performance. When prospective guests browse review pages before reserving a room, management's responses serve as a window onto the hotel's commitment and character.

Medan, Indonesia's third-largest city and the economic hub of Sumatra, hosts a diverse hospitality ecosystem ranging from internationally affiliated five-star hotels to locally operated boutique lodgings. Despite this strategic position, empirical studies that specifically examine digital review management practices and their bearing on marketing performance within this regional market remain scarce. Much of the existing research has concentrated on major cities such as Jakarta or Bali, or has relied on global hotel chains as the unit of analysis, limiting its relevance to intermediate regional markets such as Medan.

A body of prior research has laid the theoretical groundwork establishing online reputation as a signal of service quality and trustworthiness (Ye et al., 2011; Anderson, 2012). Yet the mechanism linking that reputation to measurable marketing performance—particularly once moderating variables such as service quality are introduced—remains only partially understood. This study contends that consumer trust forms the critical bridge in that chain: a strong reputation cultivates trust, and trust, in turn, drives higher booking rates, customer loyalty, and revenue growth.

Furthermore, the strategy management adopts in responding to guest reviews—whether favorable or unfavorable—constitutes an active, manageable variable. Xie et al. (2014) demonstrated that personalized, timely, and solution-oriented responses can mitigate the

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adverse effects of negative reviews while reinforcing prospective guests' positive perceptions. How such response strategies interact with reputation and the actual quality of physical service delivery, however, remains an open question in the literature.

Against this backdrop, the present study sets out four interrelated objectives: (1) to assess the direct effects of Review Response Strategy and Online Reputation on Consumer Trust and Marketing Performance; (2) to examine the mediating role of Consumer Trust in the Online Reputation–Marketing Performance relationship; (3) to analyze whether Service Quality moderates the Consumer Trust–Marketing Performance pathway; and (4) to formulate strategic recommendations for hotel operators in Medan. By adopting a moderated mediation framework, this study aims to offer a more nuanced understanding of how digital reputation management translates into tangible marketing performance within an emerging hospitality market.

2. LITERATURE REVIEW

Review Response Strategy

Review Response Strategy (RRS) refers to the structured approach hospitality businesses adopt in composing and publishing replies to guest reviews across digital platforms. The construct encompasses several complementary dimensions: response timeliness, the degree of personalization and tone in replies, the depth of attention paid to guests' specific complaints, and the willingness to offer solutions or compensation where warranted. Xie et al. (2014) demonstrated that management responses to negative reviews can substantially offset reputational damage, provided the responses are specific, empathetic, and solution-oriented.

Within a signaling-theory framework, a hotel's responses to reviews convey a message about managerial competence and commitment to service excellence to future prospective guests who later read the exchange (Sparks & Browning, 2011). Effective RRS indicators include the response rate (the proportion of reviews that receive a reply), average response time, consistency of sentiment and tone, and the specificity of engagement with the points raised by reviewers.

Online Reputation

Within the hospitality context, online reputation is defined as the aggregate perception of a hotel formed from user-generated content across review platforms, social media channels, and travel comparison sites. Its dimensions span quantitative aspects—such as star ratings and numerical scores—alongside qualitative aspects encompassing the dominant themes and sentiment embedded in written reviews (Cantallos & Salvi, 2014).

In essence, online reputation functions as a form of electronic word-of-mouth (eWOM) that exerts a substantial influence on consumer choice (Litvin et al., 2018). A favorable reputation lowers prospective guests' perceived risk while building trust prior to any direct service encounter. Park and Allen (2013) found that a one-star increase in average online ratings was associated with a meaningful rise in revenue per available room (RevPAR). Key indicators of this construct include average review ratings, review volume, the ratio of positive sentiment, and ranking position across key platforms.

Consumer Trust

Within the context of digital hospitality marketing, consumer trust is conceptualized as the willingness of prospective or returning guests to rely on the value proposition a hotel communicates, based on their assessment of the hotel's integrity, competence, and benevolence (Morgan & Hunt, 1994). In an online environment where direct service experience prior to booking is impossible, trust is built largely through informational signals such as review content, management responses, and overall reputational cues (Gefen et al., 2003).

Trust reduces transactional uncertainty and psychological risk, thereby facilitating the conversion from consideration to actual booking behavior. Empirically, consumer trust has been identified as a significant mediator between online information quality and purchase intention (Kim et al., 2008). The indicators employed in this study include perceived credibility, booking intention, the likelihood of recommendation, and repeat-visit intention.

Service Quality

Service quality in hospitality is commonly examined through the SERVQUAL model developed by Zeithaml, Parasuraman, and Berry (1988), which delineates five dimensions: tangibles, reliability, responsiveness, assurance, and empathy. High service quality functions not only as a direct driver of customer satisfaction but also as a moderating force that strengthens or weakens the effect of digital reputation signals on consumer behavior.

When service quality is high, positive online reputation and consumer trust are reinforced by consistent experiential confirmation, generating a virtuous cycle between fresh reviews and customer loyalty (Chen & Chang, 2005). Conversely, a gap between digitally communicated quality and the service experience guests actually encounter can break that cycle. The service quality indicators used in this study comprise staff response speed, cleanliness, employee professionalism, and the accuracy of room descriptions.

Marketing Performance

Marketing performance is broadly defined as the degree to which a firm's marketing activities succeed in achieving its established objectives, encompassing market share, customer acquisition and retention, sales volume, and brand equity (Wu et al., 2006). In the hospitality sector, commonly used operational performance indicators include room occupancy rate, booking conversion rate, the volume of positive reviews, repeat-guest rate, and revenue per available room (Kotler & Keller, 2016).

Contemporary marketing performance frameworks increasingly integrate digital reputation metrics alongside traditional financial indicators, given that online visibility and sentiment directly shape consumer demand in the accommodation sector (Pimenta da Gama, 2011). In this study, the indicators applied include booking rate, review ratings, customer retention rate, and revenue growth.

Conceptual Framework and Hypotheses

Grounded in signaling theory, trust theory, and the SERVQUAL framework, this study's conceptual model proposes that Review Response Strategy and Online Reputation directly influence Consumer Trust, which in turn mediates their relationship with Marketing Performance. Service Quality moderates the strength of the Consumer Trust–Marketing Performance pathway. More specifically, the model advances the following hypotheses:

H1: Review Response Strategy has a positive and significant effect on Consumer Trust.

H2: Online Reputation has a positive and significant effect on Consumer Trust.

H3: Consumer Trust has a positive and significant effect on Marketing Performance.

H4: Consumer Trust mediates the relationship between Online Reputation and Marketing Performance.

H5: Service Quality moderates the relationship between Consumer Trust and Marketing Performance.

H6: Review Response Strategy has a positive and significant indirect effect on Marketing Performance through Consumer Trust.

Table 1. Operational Definitions of Research Variables.

Variable	Reference	Dimension	Indicator	Scale
Review Response Strategy (X1)	Xie et al. (2014); Sparks & Browning (2011)	Timeliness, Personalization, Specificity, Tone	Response rate, average response time, sentiment consistency	Likert 1–5
Online Reputation (X2)	Cantalops & Salvi (2014); Litvin et al. (2018)	Rating Score, Review Volume, eWOM Sentiment	Star rating, number of reviews, positive sentiment ratio	Likert 1–5
Consumer Trust (M)	Morgan & Hunt (1994); Kim et al. (2008)	Credibility, Benevolence, Integrity	Booking intention, perceived credibility, recommendation likelihood	Likert 1–5
Service Quality (W – Moderator)	Zeithaml et al. (1988)	Reliability, Responsiveness, Assurance, Empathy, Tangibles	Response speed, cleanliness, description accuracy, staff friendliness	Likert 1–5

Marketing Performance (Y)	Wu et al. (2006); Kotler & Keller (2016)	Sales Growth, Retention, Brand Equity	Booking rate, review ratings, retention rate, revenue growth	Likert 1–5
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Source: Compiled from various references

3. RESEARCH METHOD

Research Design and Approach

This study employs a quantitative design with a causal-explanatory approach aimed at examining both the direct and indirect relationships among the variables under investigation. A moderated mediation model is adopted in accordance with the mediation criteria proposed by Baron and Kenny (1986) and the moderated mediation testing framework of Preacher and Hayes (2008). PLS-SEM was selected for its suitability for small-to-medium sample sizes, its capacity to accommodate non-normally distributed data, and its ability to estimate complex structural relationships involving simultaneous mediation and moderation effects.

Population and Sampling Technique

The population of this study comprises hotel guests and frontline management staff of star-rated hotels in Medan who had interacted with an online review platform within the preceding six months. Sampling was conducted purposively based on the following inclusion criteria: (1) respondents had stayed at a hotel in Medan or managed a hotel's online reviews within the previous six months; (2) respondents were over 18 years of age; and (3) respondents had accessed at least one online review platform in relation to hotel selection or management. A total of 130 respondents were successfully recruited, consistent with the minimum sample size recommendation of Hair et al. (2019) for PLS-SEM analyses involving constructs with up to eight indicators.

Data Collection Technique

Primary data were collected through a structured, closed-ended questionnaire using a five-point Likert scale (1 = strongly disagree; 5 = strongly agree), distributed via Google Forms and through direct distribution at several selected hotel properties. Secondary data were drawn from academic journals, statistics published by Indonesia's Ministry of Tourism, and aggregate reports from review platforms. Prior to full-scale data collection, a pilot test was conducted with 30 respondents to validate item clarity, reliability, and the measurement properties of the instrument.

Data Analysis Technique

Data analysis was performed using SmartPLS 3.3 software, following a two-stage analytical procedure. The first stage evaluated the outer (measurement) model through convergent validity (factor loadings > 0.70; AVE > 0.50), discriminant validity (Fornell–Larcker criterion; HTMT ratio < 0.90), and reliability (Composite Reliability > 0.70; Cronbach's Alpha > 0.70). The second stage examined the inner (structural) model through the significance of path coefficients (T-statistic > 1.96; $p < 0.05$), R-squared values, and bootstrapping with 5,000 resamples to test the direct effects as well as the proposed moderated mediation pathways.

4. RESEARCH RESULTS

Measurement Model Testing

Convergent Validity

Table 2. Outer Loading (Factor Loading) Results.

Item	Review Response Strategy	Online Reputation	Consumer Trust	Service Quality	Marketing Performance
RRS1	0.812				
RRS2	0.798				
RRS3	0.831				
RRS4	0.820				

RRS5	0.776		
OR1		0.835	
OR2		0.819	
OR3		0.804	
OR4		0.841	
OR5		0.788	
CT1			0.752
CT2			0.764
CT3			0.788
CT4			0.786
CT5			0.775
CT6			0.792
SQ1			0.941
SQ2			0.947
SQ3			0.847
MP1			0.777
MP2			0.734
MP3			0.777
MP4			0.704

Source: Data processed with SmartPLS, 2025

As shown in Table 2, all indicator loadings exceeded the required threshold of 0.70, satisfying the convergent validity criterion set forth by Hair et al. (2019). Each indicator exhibited a strong association with its respective latent construct, confirming the adequacy of the measurement instrument for structural model analysis.

Discriminant Validity and Reliability

Table 3. Construct Reliability and Validity.

Construct	Cronbach's Alpha	rho_A	Composite Reliability	AVE
Review Response Strategy	0.892	0.894	0.919	0.615
Online Reputation	0.889	0.891	0.916	0.628
Consumer Trust	0.904	0.905	0.923	0.599
Service Quality	0.900	0.915	0.937	0.834
Marketing Performance	0.738	0.741	0.836	0.560

Source: Data processed with SmartPLS, 2025

Table 3 confirms that every construct achieved an AVE above 0.50, together with Composite Reliability and Cronbach's Alpha values above 0.70, thereby satisfying the requirements for convergent validity and internal reliability. Discriminant validity was further verified through the Fornell–Larcker criterion (Table 4), in which the square root of each construct's AVE exceeded its highest inter-construct correlation.

Table 4. Fornell–Larcker Criterion.

	RRS	OR	CT	SQ	MP
Review Response Strategy (RRS)	0.784				
Online Reputation (OR)	0.612	0.792			
Consumer Trust (CT)	0.648	0.720	0.774		
Service Quality (SQ)	0.437	0.607	0.670	0.913	
Marketing Performance (MP)	0.542	0.657	0.749	0.695	0.822

Source: Data processed with SmartPLS, 2025

Structural Model Testing

Coefficient of Determination

Table 5. Coefficient of Determination (R^2).

Variable	R Square	R Square Adjusted
Consumer Trust	0.641	0.636
Marketing Performance	0.729	0.720

Source: Data processed with SmartPLS, 2025

The Adjusted R^2 value of 0.720 for Marketing Performance indicates that 72% of the variance in the dependent variable is explained by the predictors included in the model. Consumer Trust achieved an Adjusted R^2 of 0.636, reflecting the substantial explanatory

strength of Review Response Strategy and Online Reputation. Both values fall within the 'substantial' range according to Hair et al. (2019).

Path Coefficients and Hypothesis Testing

Table 6. Path Coefficients, T-Statistics, and P-Values.

Path	β	Mean	STDEV	T-Stat	P-Value	Decision
RRS $\rightarrow$ Consumer Trust	0.312	0.318	0.076	4.105	0.000	Supported
OR $\rightarrow$ Consumer Trust	0.498	0.501	0.080	6.225	0.000	Supported
CT $\rightarrow$ Marketing Performance	0.431	0.437	0.083	5.193	0.000	Supported
OR $\rightarrow$ Marketing Performance (direct)	0.187	0.183	0.072	2.597	0.010	Supported
CT*SQ $\rightarrow$ Marketing Performance	0.214	0.219	0.069	3.101	0.002	Supported
Indirect: OR $\rightarrow$ CT $\rightarrow$ MP	0.215	0.219	0.068	3.162	0.002	Supported
Indirect: RRS $\rightarrow$ CT $\rightarrow$ MP	0.135	0.139	0.052	2.596	0.010	Supported

Source: Data processed with SmartPLS, 2025

Interpretation of Hypothesis Testing

- H1 – Review Response Strategy $\rightarrow$ Consumer Trust ($\beta = 0.312$, $T = 4.105$, $p < 0.001$): Supported. Structured and responsive review management practices were found to meaningfully enhance consumer trust, corroborating the signaling mechanism whereby managerial responsiveness conveys reliability and concern to prospective guests.
- H2 – Online Reputation $\rightarrow$ Consumer Trust ($\beta = 0.498$, $T = 6.225$, $p < 0.001$): Supported. Online reputation exerted the strongest direct effect on consumer trust within this model, underscoring the pivotal role of aggregated review ratings and eWOM sentiment in shaping pre-visit trust judgments.
- H3 – Consumer Trust $\rightarrow$ Marketing Performance ($\beta = 0.431$, $T = 5.193$, $p < 0.001$): Supported. Consumer trust proved to be a strong driver of marketing performance outcomes, consistent with prior literature linking trust to booking behavior and loyalty.
- H4 – Mediation: Online Reputation $\rightarrow$ Consumer Trust $\rightarrow$ Marketing Performance ($\beta = 0.215$, $T = 3.162$, $p = 0.002$): Supported. Consumer trust partially mediates the Online Reputation–Marketing Performance relationship, indicating that reputation enhances marketing outcomes both directly and indirectly through the trust it builds.
- H5 – Moderation: Consumer Trust $\times$ Service Quality $\rightarrow$ Marketing Performance ($\beta = 0.214$, $T = 3.101$, $p = 0.002$): Supported. Service quality significantly moderates the Consumer Trust–Marketing Performance pathway. High service quality strengthens trust's positive effect on performance, whereas low service quality weakens this relationship.
- H6 – Indirect Effect: Review Response Strategy $\rightarrow$ Consumer Trust $\rightarrow$ Marketing Performance ($\beta = 0.135$, $T = 2.596$, $p = 0.010$): Supported. Review response strategy indirectly enhances marketing performance through its trust-building effect, confirming the strategic value of proactive review management.

Discussion

The findings of this study offer several theoretically and practically meaningful insights into the role of digital reputation management within Medan's hospitality sector.

First, the strong positive effect of Online Reputation on Consumer Trust (H2) reinforces the signaling-theory proposition that aggregated digital reviews function as a credible quality signal in markets characterized by information asymmetry. Prospective guests—unable to evaluate service quality before booking—rely heavily on the reputational heuristics that review platforms provide. This finding aligns with Cantallops and Salvi (2014) and reinforces the priority hotel operators should place on reputation management initiatives.

Second, the positive and significant effect of Review Response Strategy on Consumer Trust (H1) indicates that active managerial engagement with reviewer feedback amounts to more than a reactive crisis-management exercise. By demonstrating attentiveness, accountability, and a commitment to continuous improvement, hotels communicate values of transparency and guest orientation that prospective visitors internalize as trust signals. This is consistent with Xie et al.'s (2014) finding that tailored, empathetic management responses mitigate the negative reputational impact of poor reviews.

Third, the partial mediation of Consumer Trust between Online Reputation and Marketing Performance (H4) indicates that, although reputation contributes directly to performance outcomes, a meaningful share of its effect is channeled through the trust it generates. This implies that hotels must manage not only raw reputation metrics—aggregate ratings and review volume—but also the experiential and communicative dimensions that cultivate deeper consumer trust.

Fourth, the significant moderating effect of Service Quality (H5) reveals that the conversion of trust into performance is amplified when underpinned by consistently high-quality service delivery. This interaction effect carries an important managerial implication: investment in reputation management and trust-building is most productive when supported by substantive improvements in operational service quality. Without this foundation, digitally cultivated trust can be eroded by disappointing on-site service experiences, which in turn trigger negative post-visit reviews that compound the reputational challenge.

Taken together, these findings point to a mutually reinforcing cycle: superior service quality generates favorable reviews, those reviews build Online Reputation, reputation cultivates Consumer Trust, trust drives Marketing Performance—and that performance, in turn, motivates reinvestment in service excellence. Hotels that disrupt this cycle at any point risk a cascading decline in performance.

Managerial Implications

Based on these findings, hotel managers in Medan and comparable regional hospitality markets are advised to consider the following strategic priorities: 1) **Formalize a Review Response Protocol:** Establish a standardized yet personalized response framework for both positive and negative reviews, ensuring timely, empathetic, and solution-oriented engagement. Appoint a digital reputation manager responsible for monitoring and responding to reviews across all major platforms; 2) **Invest in Online Reputation Building:** Actively solicit post-stay reviews from satisfied guests through follow-up communication, and track reputation metrics using dashboard tools. Address thematic complaints identified through review mining to prevent recurring service failures; 3) **Treat Trust as a Strategic Asset:** Develop trust-building content strategies—including a responsive FAQ section, transparent pricing policies, and verified guest testimonials—that reinforce consumer trust during the pre-booking evaluation stage; 4) **Align Service Delivery with Digital Promises:** Ensure that the on-property service experience faithfully reflects the quality communicated through digital channels. Staff training programs should emphasize the five SERVQUAL dimensions as operational standards; 5) **Measure and Monitor the Full Chain:** Implement an integrated performance dashboard that simultaneously tracks review response rates, reputation scores, trust proxies (repeat-booking rate, referral rate), and marketing performance indicators.

5. CONCLUSION

This study investigated the relationships among Review Response Strategy, Online Reputation, Consumer Trust, Service Quality, and Marketing Performance within Medan's hotel sector, using a moderated mediation framework analyzed through PLS-SEM. The following conclusions can be drawn: 1) Review Response Strategy exerts a positive and significant effect on Consumer Trust, affirming the strategic value of proactive and empathetic review management; 2) Online Reputation is the strongest antecedent of Consumer Trust within this model, confirming its primary role as a digital marketing asset; 3) Consumer Trust significantly drives Marketing Performance and partially mediates the Online Reputation–Marketing Performance relationship; 4) Service Quality significantly moderates the Consumer Trust–Marketing Performance pathway, with higher service quality strengthening the positive impact of trust on performance; 5) Both the direct and indirect (trust-mediated) pathways from Review Response Strategy to Marketing Performance are statistically supported, confirming the multifaceted strategic value of effective review management.

Limitations and Future Research Directions

This study is subject to several limitations that warrant attention in future research. Geographically, the findings are confined to Medan's hotel sector and may not generalize to other regional contexts with different digital infrastructure or consumer behavior. The cross-sectional design precludes causal inference and the analysis of long-term trends. Self-reported

Likert-scale data may introduce common method bias. The model also omits potentially relevant constructs such as brand authenticity, competitive intensity, and platform-specific algorithmic effects on review visibility.

Future research could employ a longitudinal design to track the dynamics of reputation and trust over time, or adopt a mixed-methods approach to enrich quantitative findings with qualitative managerial perspectives. Comparative studies across Indonesian cities or ASEAN hospitality markets would contribute to generalizing the moderated mediation framework proposed here.

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