



## Article Title

Selling rooms online: the use of social media and online travel agents

## Citation

Inversini, A., & Masiero, L. (2014). Selling rooms online: The use of social media and online travel agents. *International Journal of Contemporary Hospitality Management*, 26(2), 272-292. Retrieved from <http://login.ezproxy.lib.vt.edu/login?url=http://search.proquest.com.ezproxy.lib.vt.edu/docview/1469873603?accountid=14826>

## Abstract

This paper aims to focus on the reason why hoteliers choose to be present in online travel agent (OTA) and social media websites for sales purposes. It also investigates the technological and human factors related to these two practices.

The research is based on a survey sent to a wide range of hotels in a Swiss touristic region. The empirical analysis involves the specification of two ordered logit models exploring the importance (in terms of online sales) of both social media and the online travel agent, Booking.com.

## Methods

The empirical analysis involves the specification of two ordered logit models reflecting on two main research objectives, namely: the importance of social media in terms of online sales; and the importance of OTAs (particularly booking.com) in terms of online sales.

The importance of social media and OTAs is also tested against online management styles and adoption factors. Particularly, three sets of hypotheses have been formulated and successively tested through model estimation.

## Findings:

Findings highlight the constant tension between visibility and online sales in the web arena, as well as a clear distinction in social media and OTA website adoption between hospitality structures using online management tools and employing personnel with specific skills.

## Practical implications:

The research highlights the need for the hospitality industry to maintain an effective presence on social media and OTAs in order to move towards the creation of a new form of social booking technologies to increase their visibility and sales.

## Originality/value :

This research contributes to understanding the major role played by OTAs and social media in the hospitality industry while underlining the possibility of a major interplay between the two.

## Conclusion:

First, despite the ever-increasing literature in this area, no studies have yet focused on the combined social media analysis and OTA effects on online sales focused specifically on:

- Selection criteria online platform.
- Manage online sales channels.
- Participation of human resources;
- Hotel characteristics.

The likelihood of social networking and OTA being differentiated from online sales depends on several other factors, which, interestingly, vary across the two variables investigated. For the importance of social media, we noted the central importance of:

- the existence of booking engine technologies on the hotel's website;
- staff dedicated to managing websites;
- Room capacity.

For the importance of Booking.com OTA, the relevant factors include:

- Popular channels online.
- Dedicated staff to manage online sales. And
- Hotel class.

Secondly, it notes that innovative forms of reservation technology, combined with effective marketing, can facilitate the link between OTA and social media. Thus, three different conclusions with practical implications were drawn.

The interaction between OTA and social media reflects the tension (and the dilemma in some respects) between vision and revenue, leading to the possibility of developing new distribution strategies.

The implementation of hotel-owned software to sell and manage online distribution affects the interests of hotel owners in the use of social media.

The centrality of the human factor and the various relevant competencies required are critical to the hospitality industry to work in OTA and social media.