

Social Media and the Management of E-Reputation in Hotels: Evidence from a Qualitative Study in Morocco

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Abstract

The growing influence of social media has significantly transformed how hotel reputation is constructed and perceived in digital environments. This study examines how social media platforms shape the e-reputation of hotels in Morocco and explores how hotel managers perceive the potential role of artificial intelligence in strengthening online reputation management and customer engagement (CG). Given the exploratory nature of the research, this study adopts a qualitative research design to investigate the role of social media in managing hotels' e-reputation. Empirical data were collected through 12 semi-structured interviews conducted with general managers and marketing or reservation managers of four- and five-star hotels. The interview data were analyzed using IRAMUTEQ software to perform lexical and thematic analyses, enabling the identification of dominant discourses, recurrent perceptions, and strategic orientations related to social media usage and online reputation management. The findings indicate that social media platforms play a central role in shaping hotel image, influencing customer perceptions, and guiding purchase decisions. Managers perceive e-reputation as a strategic asset that requires continuous monitoring, rapid response, and proactive digital communication. Although artificial intelligence remains at an early stage of adoption, participants recognized its potential to enhance review analysis, personalize customer interactions, and support digital marketing decision-making. This study contributes to the limited qualitative research on hotel e-reputation in emerging markets and offers managerial insights into the future integration of artificial intelligence into online-reputation management.

Keywords: e-reputation, social media, hotel marketing, hotels, digital management, artificial intelligence, Morocco, qualitative research, IRAMUTEQ



1. Introduction

The rise of social networking has changed the way businesses communicate, interact with customers, and manage their reputation. These digital tools represent both potential and challenges for the hotel industry, where reputation and customer satisfaction are of utmost importance. On the one hand, they enable direct and instant communication with customers, increasing their commitment and dedication to the brands. However, they expose companies to increased visibility, as every review, comment, or publication can significantly affect their online reputation.

The company's discourse is no longer unique; it merges with that of increasingly well-informed users, whose resonance in terms of credibility exceeds that of institutions (Cadel. P, 2010).

Online reputation management has become a strategic priority for hotels, particularly four- or five-star hotels. As consumers become increasingly connected and informed, they increasingly rely on social media content and online reviews to make decisions. While a good reputation can attract loyal customers and boost a hotel's competitiveness, poor management of negative comments or digital crises can have serious negative effects on a hotel's revenue and reputation.

Four- and five-star hotels are a key element of Morocco's tourism strategy and an essential pillar of the national economy. Social media platforms, such as Facebook, Instagram, and, more recently, TikTok, are proving essential for connecting with Moroccan and foreign consumers. Nevertheless, despite the growing importance of social networks in this industry, few scientific studies have analyzed how Moroccan companies integrate these resources into their marketing and reputation management strategies.

Despite their richness, existing research often focuses on quantitative methods or on European and North American contexts, leaving a gap in our knowledge of the dynamics specific to emerging markets such as Morocco.

This is the background of the present study, which aims to understand how social networks affect the online reputation management of upscale hotels in Morocco. The main objective of this study is to answer the following question using a qualitative methodology based on 12 semi-structured interviews with marketing managers and directors:

How do hotels in Morocco strategically use social media to build, manage, and protect their e-reputation, and how do hotel managers perceive the potential contribution of artificial intelligence to optimize online reputation management?

The results of this study are important from both academic and practical perspectives. From a theoretical perspective, this study adds to the body of knowledge on the function of social media in hotel marketing, drawing attention to behaviors and viewpoints specific to Morocco. From a practical perspective, these findings provide hotel industry professionals with specific suggestions on how to optimize the beneficial effects of social networks on their brand image while preparing for and managing digital emergencies. This study provides a relevant perspective for academics and professionals, broadening the concept of e-reputation in a globalized yet culturally specific environment.

2. Literature review

2.1. From corporate reputation to E-reputation: The digital transformation of hotel reputation

The concept of reputation has long been recognized as a strategic intangible asset that influences stakeholders' perceptions, trust, and purchasing decisions. Traditionally, corporate reputation has been defined as the overall assessment of an organization developed over time through its actions, performance, and communication (Fombrun, 1996; Gotsi & Wilson, 2001). From this traditional perspective, reputation is largely shaped by organizational communication and direct interactions between firms and their stakeholders. However, the rapid digital transformation of communication has profoundly changed the mechanisms by which reputation is created, disseminated, and evaluated. The emergence of social media, online review platforms, and user-generated content has progressively shifted reputation management from an organization-centered process to a collaborative and dynamic process in which consumers actively participate.

Although research on this subject remains relatively limited, several definitions of e-reputation have been proposed. E-reputation is broadly defined as "the reputation built from the set of perceptions that stakeholders create from any element circulating on the Internet" (Paquerot et al., 2011). It encompasses all digital interactions and online content, reflecting the collective opinions of users and stakeholders in digital environments.

Unlike traditional corporate reputation, which generally develops through repeated offline interactions and tends to remain relatively stable over time, e-reputation is dynamic, continuously evolving, and highly sensitive to the information shared online. Digital technologies have significantly accelerated the circulation of information, allowing customer experiences, opinions, and evaluations to influence public perceptions of organizations rapidly. Consequently, online reputation has become a strategic asset that requires continuous monitoring and proactive management.

Several scholars have attempted to conceptualize this multidimensional construct. Dutot and Castellano (2015) identified four key components of e-reputation: social media presence, website quality, service quality, and brand attributes, highlighting how the different dimensions of an organization's digital presence collectively shape its online reputation. Similarly, Chun (2005) proposed that reputation consists of three complementary dimensions: e-character, reflecting the company's perceived personality; e-identity, referring to the design and presentation of its digital interfaces; and e-experience, representing the consistency between online promises and customers' actual experiences.

Other authors have emphasized the stakeholder perspective. Gotsi and Wilson (2001) define corporate reputation, including its digital dimension, as "a stakeholder's overall assessment of a company over time," based on both direct experiences and various forms of communication or symbolic representations. Likewise, Jones et al. (2009) argue that e-reputation corresponds to stakeholders' perceptions shaped through digital media and online interactions. Barnett et al. (2006) further define reputation as "the collective representation of a company's past actions and outcomes, reflecting its ability to deliver valuable results to various stakeholders," underlining the cumulative and evolving nature of reputation in digital environments.

These complementary perspectives demonstrate that e-reputation should not be understood as a simple extension of traditional reputation but rather as a multidimensional and co-created construct resulting from continuous interactions between organizations and online communities. In this study, e-reputation is considered a dynamic process through which hotels' digital images are continuously constructed, evaluated, and transformed by customers' online interactions, reviews, and social media activities.

Because online reputation emerges through complex and non-linear processes, its assessment requires approaches that go beyond conventional reputation measurements. According to Cioppi, Curina, Forlani, and Pencarelli (2019), two principal approaches are currently used to evaluate online reputation. The first relies on direct user-generated indicators, such as online ratings, reviews, and comments published on digital platforms, whereas the second is based on composite indices that conceptualize reputation as a multidimensional phenomenon extending beyond simple sentiment analysis. Although the latter approach remains relatively limited, recent studies have shown that research continues to rely predominantly on user-generated online reviews as the principal indicator of e-reputation (Puma-Flores and Rosa-Díaz, 2023).

While e-reputation represents the outcome of stakeholders' digital perceptions, social media has become one of the principal mechanisms through which these perceptions are created, shared, and amplified. Therefore, understanding the strategic role of social media is essential for explaining how hotel e-reputation is continuously constructed and managed in increasingly digital and interactive environments.

2.2. Social media in the hotel industry: A strategic driver of E-reputation

Following the digital transformation of corporate reputation, social media have become one of the principal environments in which hotels build, communicate, and manage their e-reputation. While e-reputation reflects stakeholders' overall perceptions of a hotel, social media are the primary channels through which these perceptions are created, shared, and continuously reshaped. Consequently, understanding the strategic role of social media is essential to explain how hotels influence customer perceptions and strengthen their competitive position in increasingly digital markets.

It is widely recognized that the hotel industry, as part of the tourism sector, is significantly transforming its marketing strategies by favoring interactive digital media over traditional marketing and public relations methods (Albayrak, Caber, & Sigala, 2021). This transformation promotes continuous communication with customers before, during, and after their stay, allowing hotels to establish stronger and more personalized relationships with their audiences. Increasingly, travellers are turning to the Internet, particularly social media platforms, to search for general and detailed information about hotels before making reservation decisions (Lakha & Radetic, 2015; Leng et al., 2019; Lončarić & Vaid, 2021). Today, the Internet is widely perceived as a credible source of information because much of its content is created and shared directly by users through reviews, recommendations, photos, and personal experiences (Attia 2017; Book and Tanford 2019).

The Internet constitutes a vast communication ecosystem that enables individuals worldwide to exchange information, share experiences, and evaluate products and services collectively (Aichner, Grunfelder, Maurer, & Jegeni, 2021). Within this ecosystem, social media have

evolved far beyond simple communication. They have become strategic platforms for hotels to develop their brand identity, increase visibility, engage with customers, and continuously shape their online reputation. User-generated content, online reviews, comments, and interactions collectively influence potential customers' perceptions, making social media a central mechanism in the co-creation of hotel e-reputation.

Furthermore, social media provides hotels with cost-effective opportunities to promote their services, communicate directly with customers, and strengthen brand awareness. An active and consistent presence on platforms such as Facebook, X (formerly Twitter), Instagram, and TikTok is essential for hotel establishments. Without a strong digital presence, hotels risk losing visibility among potential customers and missing the valuable opportunities offered by digital transformation. In the hospitality industry, where service quality cannot be evaluated before consumption, social media content increasingly serves as a signal of credibility and quality, reducing customers' perceived risk and influencing booking intentions.

In addition, the algorithms used by social media platforms collect and analyze vast amounts of user data to better understand customers' behaviors, preferences, and interactions. These algorithms personalize users' online experiences by recommending content that matches their interests and previous activities. Consequently, hotels must move beyond simply maintaining an online presence and develop strategic content that is engaging, relevant, and consistent with their brand identity. Therefore, regularly publishing attractive content, interacting with users, and responding to customer feedback have become essential components of effective e-reputation management.

While social media has considerably expanded hotels' ability to communicate with customers and influence their online reputation, it has also generated an unprecedented volume of digital interactions, reviews, and user-generated content. Monitoring and managing large quantities of information manually has become increasingly complex. In this context, artificial intelligence is emerging as a strategic extension of social media management, offering new opportunities for automated monitoring, sentiment analysis, personalized customer engagement, and proactive e-reputation management.

2.3. Artificial Intelligence: An emerging lever in hotel E-reputation management

As social media has become the primary environment for building and managing hotel e-reputation, the growing volume and complexity of digital interactions have progressively exceeded the capabilities of traditional manual reputation management. Hotels are now required to monitor thousands of online reviews, comments, and user-generated content across multiple digital platforms in real time. In this context, the gradual integration of artificial intelligence (AI) into the hotel industry represents a major transformation in traditional e-reputation management practices, enabling a shift from reactive monitoring to more proactive, data-driven, and predictive reputation management.

AI offers hotel establishments sophisticated tools for monitoring their online image in real time, analyzing data generated through digital interactions, and responding to customers in more personalized and efficient ways. Rather than replacing human decision-making, AI complements managerial capabilities by facilitating faster information processing and

supporting strategic decision-making in digital communications. For example, platforms such as Hotel Runner have recently developed AI-powered review management centers that facilitate the centralization of customer feedback and the automatic generation of tailored responses. By encouraging both proactive and responsive interactions with customers, these tools contribute to improving customer satisfaction while supporting hotels' commercial performance (Hospitality Net, Hotel Tech Report, HotelRunner, 2023).

In addition, AI plays a central role in detecting fake online reviews, an issue of growing concern in the hotel sector, where reputation strongly influences customer trust and booking decisions. The rapid development of generative language models, such as ChatGPT, which can produce realistic and nuanced reviews, has made the distinction between authentic and artificially generated content increasingly complex. This situation highlights the need for AI-based verification systems capable of preserving the credibility, transparency, and reliability of online reviews (AP News 2023).

Furthermore, automated sentiment analysis, supported by machine learning and natural language processing techniques, enables a deeper understanding of customer perceptions expressed in online reviews. This analytical capability provides hotel managers with valuable insights for identifying emerging issues, adjusting service quality, refining marketing strategies, and anticipating customer expectations (Taylor & Francis, 2023). Likewise, AI-powered recommendation systems contribute to the greater personalization of the customer experience, thereby strengthening customer engagement, satisfaction, and loyalty.

While artificial intelligence presents significant opportunities for improving operational efficiency and enhancing customer experience, its implementation raises important organizational and ethical challenges. Key issues include the quality and reliability of the data used to train AI systems, transparency in automated decision-making, data privacy, and the need to maintain an appropriate balance between technological capabilities and human expertise in the field. Consequently, AI should not be viewed solely as a technological innovation but as a strategic capability, that supports hotels in developing more agile, proactive, and customer-centered approaches to e-reputation management. Therefore, its successful integration requires not only technological investment but also organizational readiness, employee training, and careful consideration of ethical implications.

3. Research methodology :

3.2. Methodological approach :

To thoroughly investigate the research question, a qualitative method was selected because it facilitated a detailed comprehension of how an e-reputation is formed and managed in the dynamic and rapidly changing realm of digital communication. This approach is particularly effective in identifying the intricacies of professional dialogue and the often subtle dynamics that influence reputation-related activities.

Tracy (2020) underscores the significance of qualitative research in elucidating cultural elements that are frequently implicit, shared understandings that are intuitive, context-dependent, and shaped by individual experiences. Rather than merely gathering explicit statements, this approach facilitated the observation of how reputation ideas evolved through actions and reflections. In alignment with this perspective, the study employed semi-structured interviews, offering an adaptable and organized method of data collection. The interview guide

ensured that key topics were addressed, while the participants were encouraged to speak openly, resulting in rich and occasionally unexpected insights. This method proved particularly effective in an exploratory context, where the focus was not on testing hypotheses but on highlighting personal experiences, diverse perspectives and shared professional logic. Tracy (2020) characterizes qualitative research as a comprehensive methodological framework that incorporates interviews, textual analysis, and both in-person and digital participant observation, elements that reflect the complex realities of today's digitalized environment.

3.3. Sampling and data collection :

The study drew on insights from 12 professionals working in managerial or marketing roles in four- and five-star hotels. These establishments were deliberately selected for their visible online presence and active use of social media in communication strategies.

Interviews were scheduled based on participants' availability and were conducted either face-to-face or remotely. Each session lasted approximately 30–60 min. With the interviewees' informed consent, all conversations were recorded and subsequently transcribed to ensure the accuracy and completeness of the data. This process, widely used in marketing research (Evrard et al. 2000), allowed for a detailed and faithful representation of each participant's contribution.

3.4. Data analysis :

To analyze the qualitative data, this study employed IRAMUTEQ, a software program designed to perform lexical and thematic analyses on textual corpora. This tool made it possible to identify recurrent expressions, conceptual clusters, and underlying discursive patterns in the participants' responses.

The analysis revealed areas of convergence and divergence across the interviews, shedding light on common strategic attitudes, shared perceptions regarding the role of social networks, and various approaches to the management of digital images. Through this process, the study was able to map the contours of current e-reputation practices, as described and experienced by professionals.

By supporting computer-assisted content analysis, IRAMUTEQ enables researchers to preserve the richness, complexity, and diversity of qualitative data while ensuring methodological rigor throughout the analytical process.

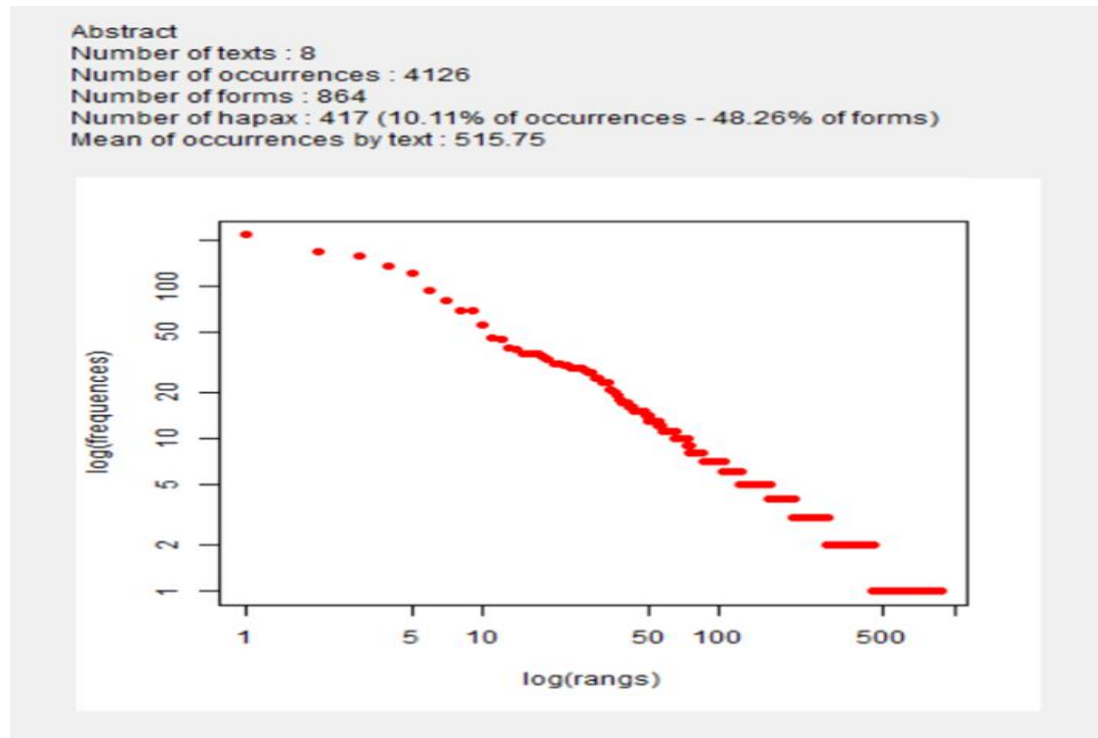
3.5. Ethical considerations :

Participation in the study was voluntary and based on informed consent. All participants were informed about the purpose of the research, confidentiality conditions, and their right to withdraw at any time. The interviews were anonymised to ensure privacy and confidentiality, and no identifying information about the hotels or managers is disclosed. The study complied with standard ethical research guidelines.

4. Results and discussion :

4.2.Descriptive Analysis :

Figure 1. Statistics After Lemmatization and Zipf's Law



Source : Elaborated by authors

Figure 1 presents the lexical statistics of the interview corpus after lemmatization according to Zipf's Law. As expected, the lexical distribution follows the classical Zipfian pattern, whereby a limited number of words occur very frequently while the majority of terms appear only once or a few times. In the present corpus, hapax account for **48.26%** of all lexical forms, indicating a high degree of lexical diversity among participants' responses.

Beyond these descriptive statistics, the lexical distribution reveals that Moroccan hotel managers share a common understanding of the strategic importance of e-reputation while expressing diverse managerial experiences and operational practices. The coexistence of highly frequent terms and numerous low-frequency expressions suggests that e-reputation management is not perceived as a standardized activity but rather as a multidimensional process influenced by each hotel's organizational context, customer profile, and digital maturity.

This diversity is reflected in managers' own narratives. As interviewee 1 explained : *“Social media play a crucial role in building and maintaining our online reputation. They not only enable us to promote our offerings but also help establish and strengthen trust-based relationships with our customers.”*

Figure 2. Frequency analysis for active forms

	Freq. 	POS
customer	80	nom
social	45	nom
review	44	nom
share	36	nom
comment	36	nom
experience	33	nom
medium	30	nom
online	29	nr
hotel	29	nom
positive	28	adj
negative	27	nom
feedback	25	nom
guest	23	nom
offer	20	nom
service	18	nom
numb	17	adj
establishment	17	nom
reputation	16	nom
network	16	nom
image	15	nom
time	15	nom
platform	15	nom
monitor	15	nom
tool	13	nom
engagement	13	nom
respond	13	nom
impact	12	nom
evaluate	11	ver
quality	11	nom
rate	11	nom
mention	11	nom
improvement	11	nom
maintain	10	ver

Source: Elaborated by authors

Figure 2 presents the frequency analysis of the active lexical forms identified in the lemmatized corpus, highlighting the most frequently used terms across the twelve interviews. The predominance of words such as customer, hotel, social media, review, service, and experience indicates that hotel managers primarily associate e-reputation with customer interactions and service quality rather than with promotional activities alone.

Beyond their lexical frequency, these active forms reveal that managers perceive social media as strategic tools for strengthening customer relationships, monitoring customer satisfaction, and supporting continuous service improvement. In the context of Moroccan four- and five-star

hotels, online reviews and digital interactions are viewed as valuable managerial resources that contribute to competitiveness and informed decision-making.

This perception is illustrated by interviewee 7, who stated: “Social media has now become an essential platform for shaping our institution's online image and reputation.”

Overall, the frequency analysis confirms that customer engagement, online reviews, and digital communication constitute the core dimensions of hotel e-reputation management, reinforcing the strategic role of social media in shaping customer perceptions and guiding managerial practices.

Figure 3. *Frequency analysis for variables*

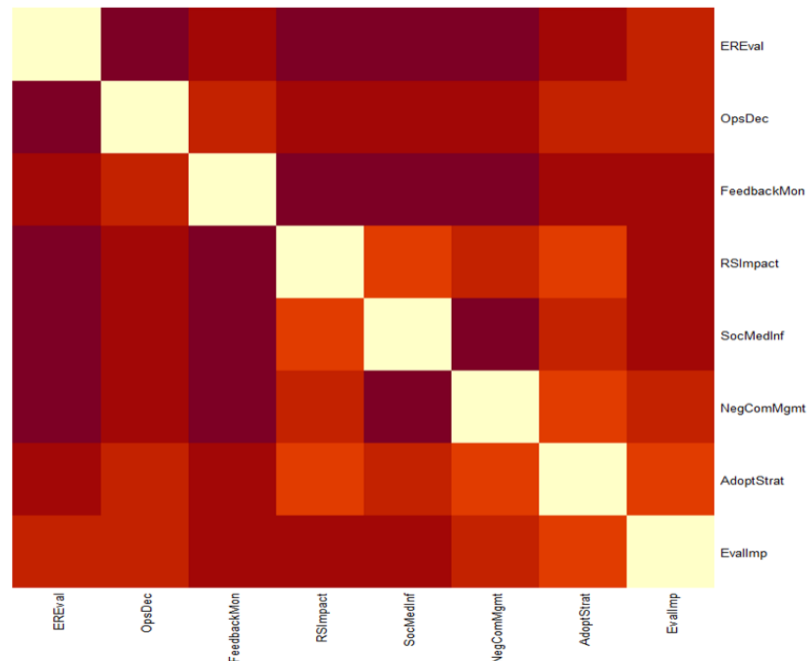
	AdoptStrat 	EREval	EvalImp	FeedbackMon	NegComMgmt	OpsDec	RSImpact	SocMedInf
sw	242	299	275	194	204	270	270	309
nom	178	253	174	115	156	202	183	250
ver	24	36	25	14	35	40	20	32
nr	21	31	18	27	28	24	24	35
adj	15	26	16	5	6	12	13	16
num	1	0	1	0	4	0	0	3

Source: *Elaborated by authors*

Figure 3 presents the frequency analysis of the principal variables identified in the interview corpus, highlighting the relative importance of the themes discussed by hotel managers. The results indicate that variables related to **social media influence, e-reputation evaluation, customer feedback, operational decision-making, and reputation management strategies** are the most frequently addressed. Their prominence suggests that hotel managers consider these dimensions as fundamental components of e-reputation management. Beyond their frequency, these findings reveal that managers perceive online customer interactions not merely as communication indicators but as valuable sources of managerial information that support service improvement and strategic decision-making.

Overall, the frequency analysis confirms that e-reputation management in Moroccan four- and five-star hotels relies on the continuous monitoring of customer feedback and social media interactions, which increasingly guide operational practices and reinforce service quality.

Figure 4. Heat Map Visualization



Source: Elaborated by authors

Figure 4 presents the heat map visualization of the lexical variables identified in the interview corpus. The intensity of the colors reflects the relative importance and co-occurrence of the principal themes across respondents' discourses. The visualization reveals that variables related to **customer feedback, online reviews, social media interactions, and service quality** exhibit the strongest lexical concentrations, highlighting their central role in hotel e-reputation management.

Rather than representing isolated concepts, these thematic clusters demonstrate that managers consistently associate online reputation with continuous customer engagement and operational improvement. This finding suggests that social media are perceived not only as communication platforms but also as strategic tools for monitoring customer satisfaction and supporting managerial decision-making.

As illustrated by interviewee 4 : “*Customer feedback is generally constructive and taken very seriously by management... in order to find solutions and improve our customers' satisfaction and experience*”.

Overall, the heat map confirms that the discourse of Moroccan hotel managers is strongly centred on customer-oriented reputation management, where digital interactions and online feedback constitute key drivers of service improvement and competitive positioning.

4.3. Correspondence Factor Analysis and Similarity :

According to the Correspondence Factor Analysis (CFA) presented in Figure 5, four principal components jointly explained 100% of the total variance in the lexical data. The first two components accounted for 55.96% of the explained variance, with Factor 1 contributing 30.18% and Factor 2 contributing 25.78%, indicating that these dimensions capture the dominant lexical

structure of the interview corpus. Factors 3 (24.13%) and 4 (19.90%) further complemented the analysis by accounting for the remaining variability, providing a comprehensive representation of the underlying discourse.

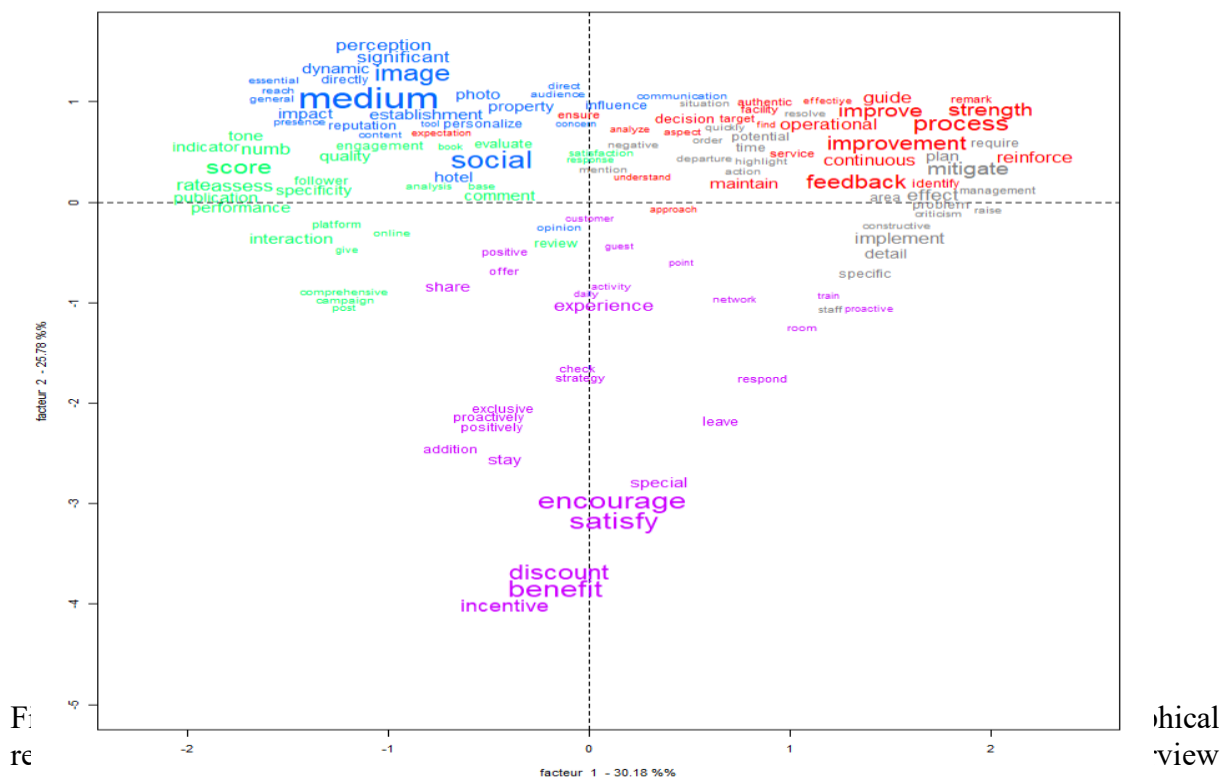
Figure 5. Contribution of CFA Factors

	Valeurs p...	Pourcentages	Pourcentage cumules
facteur 1	0.42438	30.18062	30.18062
facteur 2	0.36249	25.77916	55.95978
facteur 3	0.33938	24.13549	80.09527
facteur 4	0.27989	19.90473	100

Source: Elaborated by authors

Figure 5 also highlights the contribution of the lexical variables to the principal factors identified by the CFA. The most influential variables are primarily associated with customer interactions, online reviews, social media engagement, and managerial decision-making, suggesting that these dimensions constitute the core themes structuring hotel managers' perceptions of e-reputation. Beyond their statistical contribution, the factor structure reveals that managers conceptualize e-reputation as a multidimensional and dynamic construct, in which customer feedback and digital interactions continuously shape strategic communication and operational decision-making within Moroccan four and five star hotels.

Figure 6. CFA results

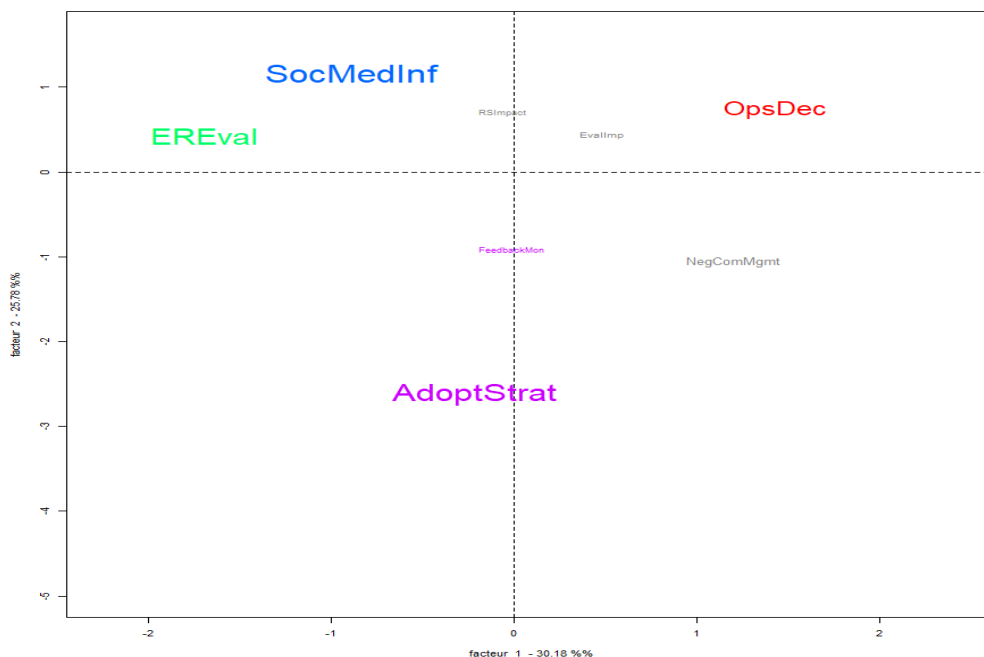


The analysis reveals five distinct yet interconnected lexical clusters, reflecting the multidimensional nature of hotel e-reputation management.

The first cluster (blue) is centred on social media, image, perception, and communication, highlighting managers' emphasis on the role of digital platforms in shaping the hotel's online image. The second cluster (green) groups terms related to performance indicators, engagement, ratings, and evaluation, reflecting the importance of monitoring online reputation through measurable performance metrics. The third cluster (red) brings together concepts such as feedback, operational processes, improvement, and customer identification, illustrating how online customer feedback supports operational adjustments and continuous service improvement. The fourth cluster (purple) includes terms associated with customer satisfaction, incentives, benefits, and experience, indicating the strategies implemented to encourage positive online engagement. Finally, the fifth cluster (grey) refers to implementation, criticism, and detailed analysis, emphasizing the need to translate customer feedback into concrete managerial actions.

Overall, the CFA results demonstrate that e-reputation management in Moroccan four and five star hotels is structured around five complementary dimensions: **digital visibility, reputation monitoring, operational improvement, customer engagement, and continuous service enhancement**. Together, these dimensions illustrate that social media are not merely communication channels but strategic resources supporting data-driven managerial decision-making and long-term competitiveness.

Figure 7. CFA results for variables



Source: Elaborated by authors

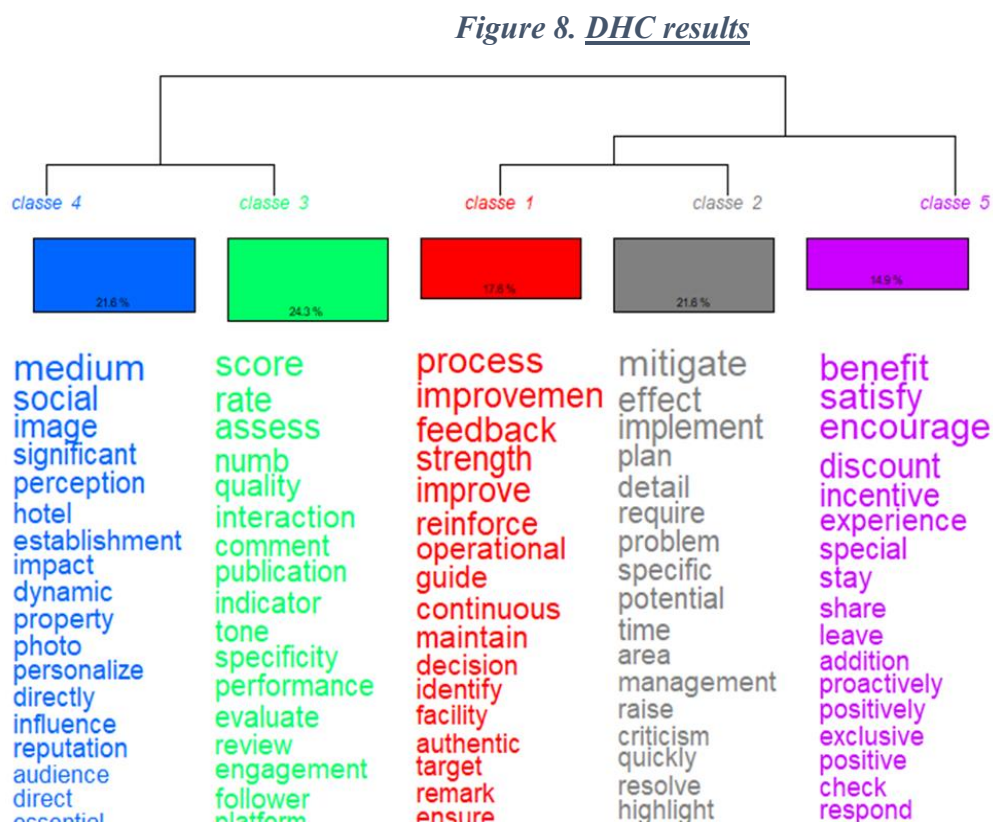
Figure 7 reveals two major dimensions in the way hotel managers and marketing executives perceive social media use:

On the one hand, a distinction emerges between strategic and operational approaches. Some establishments adopt a proactive stance (AdoptStrat) and fully integrate social media into their overall marketing strategy. Others, by contrast, use these platforms primarily in a reactive manner within the logic of operational decision-making (OpsDec).

However, a distinction is observed between the analytical dimension and feedback management. Social media platforms are seen as tools for assessing online reputation (SocMedInf, EREval), while also requiring effective handling of negative comments and customer feedback (FeedbackMon, NegComMgmt).

In summary, social media are essential to hotel reputation and decision-making, as they span the strategic monitoring, evaluation, and management of customer interactions.

4.4. Descending Hierarchical Classification and similarity :



Source: Elaborated by authors

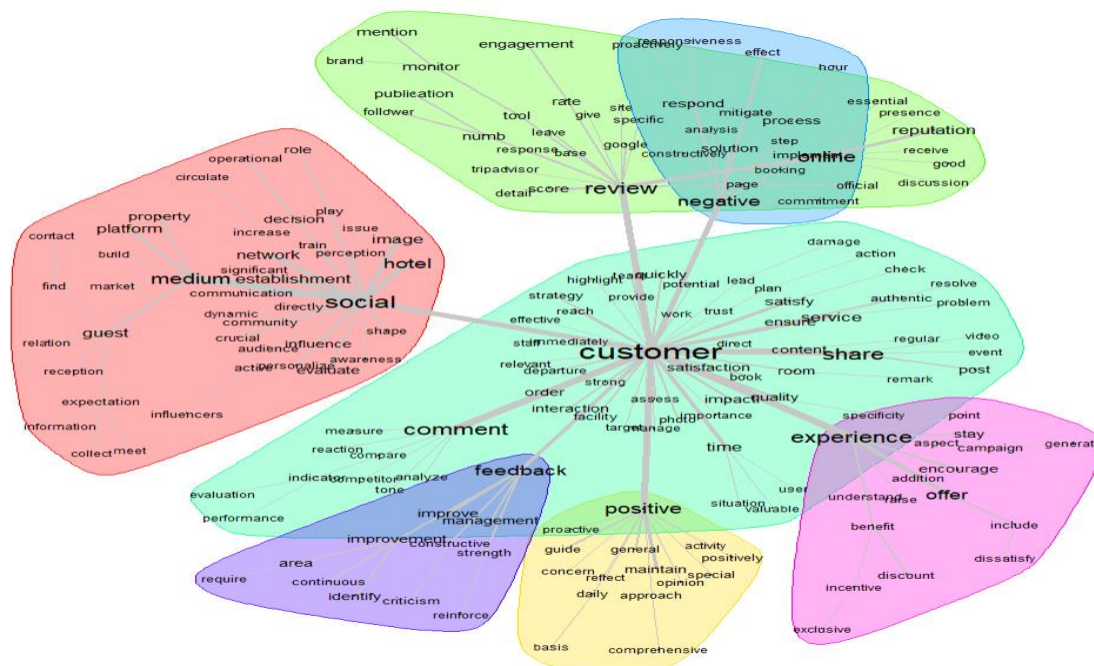
Figure 8 presents the results of the Descending Hierarchical Classification (DHC), which organizes the interview corpus into five coherent lexical classes representing the principal dimensions of hotel e-reputation management. The hierarchical structure reveals that these classes are complementary and collectively describe the managerial practices adopted by Moroccan four- and five-star hotels in managing their online reputation.

Class 4 (21.6%) is centred on **social media, image, perception, and reputation**, emphasizing the strategic role of digital platforms in shaping the hotel's online visibility and brand image. Class 3 (24.3%), the largest lexical group, focuses on **performance indicators, customer reviews, engagement, and evaluation**, highlighting the importance of monitoring online reputation through measurable indicators. Class 1 (17.6%) is associated with **feedback**,

operational improvement, and decision-making, illustrating how customer comments contribute to service enhancement and operational adjustments. Class 2 (21.6%) includes terms related to **problem mitigation, implementation, and management actions**, reflecting managers' efforts to address customer complaints and implement corrective measures. Finally, Class 5 (14.9%) groups words such as **satisfaction, incentives, benefits, and customer experience**, illustrating the strategies developed to encourage positive customer engagement and stimulate favourable online reviews.

Overall, the DHC results demonstrate that e-reputation management extends beyond the monitoring of online reviews. Instead, it relies on an integrated process combining digital communication, performance evaluation, operational improvement, customer satisfaction, and proactive reputation management. These findings highlight that Moroccan hotel managers increasingly consider customer-generated content as a strategic resource for strengthening service quality and maintaining long-term competitiveness.

Figure 9. Similarity analysis



Source: Elaborated by authors

Figure 9 presents the similarity analysis, which illustrates the co-occurrence network of the main lexical forms identified in the interview corpus. The analysis reveals that **customer** occupies the central position within the network, connecting the principal themes related to **social media, online reviews, hotel image, customer experience, positive feedback, and reputation management**. This centrality indicates that customer interactions constitute the core element around which hotel e-reputation is constructed and managed.

Several interconnected thematic clusters emerge from the analysis. One cluster links **social media** with **hotel image** and **brand visibility**, emphasizing the role of digital platforms in shaping online reputation. Another cluster associates **reviews, negative comments, and**

reputation, highlighting the importance of monitoring customer feedback and responding promptly to online criticism. Additional clusters relate to **customer experience**, **positive feedback**, and **incentives**, reflecting managers' efforts to encourage customer engagement and generate favourable online reviews.

This interpretation is supported by interviewee 9, who stated:

«Feedback from our customers allows us to tailor our action plans with the goal of maintaining our strengths, improving them, and addressing negative comments immediately.»

Overall, the similarity analysis demonstrates that e-reputation management in Moroccan four and five star hotels is organized around a customer-centred ecosystem, where social media interactions, online reviews, and customer experience are closely interconnected. These findings confirm that digital reputation is continuously co-created through the interaction between hotels and their guests, making customer feedback a strategic resource for service improvement and long-term competitiveness.

Discussion

The findings from this study offer valuable insights into how four and five star hotels in Morocco are adapting to the growing importance of digital reputation management. Consistent with previous studies (Albayrak et al., 2021; Book & Tanford, 2019), hotel managers unanimously acknowledged that platforms such as TripAdvisor, Instagram, Facebook, and X (formerly Twitter) have become essential channels influencing customers' perceptions and booking decisions. The lexical analyses further confirmed that concepts related to **customers**, **reviews**, **service quality**, and **social media** occupy a central position in managers' discourse, highlighting the strategic importance attributed to online interactions.

However, a notable gap emerges between this strategic awareness and the operational practices reported during the interviews. Although respondents clearly recognize the importance of e-reputation, most hotels continue to rely on reactive approaches centred on responding to negative comments, resolving complaints, and protecting brand image after issues arise. Few participants described proactive strategies based on predictive monitoring or advanced digital analytics. This finding suggests that e-reputation management remains largely reactive rather than data-driven; confirming that digital transformation within Moroccan hotels is still at an intermediate stage of maturity.

This situation should also be interpreted within the socio-economic context of the Moroccan hospitality industry. While international hotel chains generally have access to advanced digital resources, many establishments continue to face constraints related to financial investment, human resources, and digital competencies. Several respondents reported that reputation monitoring is still performed manually by marketing or reception staff in addition to their daily operational responsibilities. Such practices illustrate that online reputation management has not yet evolved into a fully institutionalized managerial function but remains integrated into broader marketing or customer service activities.

Another important finding concerns the limited integration of artificial intelligence into current managerial practices. Although the literature increasingly identifies AI as a strategic lever for sentiment analysis, automated review monitoring, predictive analytics, and personalized customer engagement, these technologies were only marginally reflected in the respondents'

narratives. This contrast reveals that the challenge is not merely technological but also organizational. The interviews suggest that several barriers continue to slow AI adoption, including limited digital expertise, insufficient staff training, uncertainty regarding the return on investment of AI solutions, and concerns about preserving the personalized service that characterizes high-end hospitality. In hotels, where human interaction remains a fundamental component of the customer experience, managers may perceive AI as a complementary tool rather than a substitute for personal service.

Consequently, the findings point to a significant transition currently underway. Moroccan hotels appear to be moving from traditional reputation management based primarily on human monitoring toward more intelligent and data-driven approaches. Rather than replacing managerial expertise, artificial intelligence has the potential to strengthen decision-making by enabling real-time monitoring of customer sentiment, early detection of reputational risks, automated prioritization of online feedback, and more personalized customer communication. Such capabilities would allow hotel managers to shift from corrective interventions to preventive and strategic reputation management.

From a managerial perspective, this transition requires more than technological investment. It calls for the development of organizational capabilities, including digital training, stronger collaboration between marketing and operational departments, and the integration of AI into existing customer relationship management processes. Public policies supporting digital transformation and professional training within Morocco's tourism sector could also facilitate this evolution, particularly for hotels with more limited technological resources.

Overall, this study demonstrates that Moroccan four- and five-star hotels have largely recognized the strategic importance of e-reputation, yet their management practices remain predominantly reactive. Bridging this gap represents one of the major challenges for the sector in the coming years. By combining human expertise with AI-supported analytics, hotel managers could develop a more proactive, customer-centred, and resilient approach to e-reputation management, thereby strengthening both service quality and international competitiveness in an increasingly digital tourism market.

5. Conclusion

This research offers meaningful insights into how e-reputation is currently approached within the hotel industry, shedding light on both professional perceptions and the concrete practices adopted in response to the expanding influence of digital social networks.

Grounded in a qualitative approach, the study highlights a significant gap between hotel managers' strategic awareness of the importance of e-reputation and the operational practices currently implemented to manage it. Although online reputation is widely recognized as a strategic asset essential for maintaining competitiveness in the hospitality market, reputation management remains largely reactive and relies primarily on manual monitoring and traditional communication practices. This discrepancy between awareness and implementation suggests that the operational capabilities required to manage e-reputation proactively are still insufficiently developed.

Beyond its empirical findings, this study contributes to the growing body of literature by integrating three complementary perspectives e-reputation management, social media, and artificial intelligence within the specific context of Moroccan hotels. The findings support the view that customer interactions, online reviews, and social media engagement have become central components of reputation management. They also suggest that artificial intelligence should not be viewed solely as a technological innovation but as a managerial capability capable of transforming e-reputation management from a reactive communication function into a proactive strategic process.

The investigation also highlights several organizational, technical, and cultural challenges that currently limit the adoption of AI within hotel reputation management. Although artificial intelligence has not yet emerged as a central operational lever among the professionals interviewed, it appears to represent a promising avenue for future development. AI technologies offer considerable potential for automating online monitoring, performing sentiment and semantic analyses of customer-generated content, identifying reputational risks at an early stage, and supporting more personalized interactions with customers. However, the successful integration of these technologies requires not only technological investment but also staff training, organizational learning, and a broader process of digital transformation.

Looking ahead, the evolution of e-reputation management in Moroccan hotels will increasingly depend on their ability to combine human expertise with AI-powered analytical tools. Rather than replacing managerial judgment, artificial intelligence should complement existing managerial practices by supporting faster decision-making, predictive reputation monitoring, and more agile customer communication. Such an approach would enable hotels to move beyond a reactive management model toward a more proactive, data-driven, and customer-centred strategy.

As with any qualitative research, this study presents certain methodological limitations. The relatively small sample and the exclusive focus on professional perspectives constitute primary constraints. Additionally, the absence of empirical data from digital platforms and the lack of input from customers limit the broader applicability of the findings. These limitations suggest several promising avenues for future research, including combining managerial interviews with large-scale analyses of online reviews, integrating mixed-method approaches involving qualitative inquiry, automated textual analysis, and natural language processing (NLP), and conducting comparative studies across different cultural or geographical contexts. Further research examining the organizational conditions that facilitate AI adoption in hotel operations would also contribute to advancing knowledge in this field.

Ultimately, this study contributes to a broader reflection on the evolution of communication and management practices within the hospitality industry at the intersection of digital marketing, customer relationship management, and technological innovation. More importantly, it suggests that the future competitiveness of hotels will depend not only on the quality of the services they provide but also on their capacity to transform customer-generated digital information into strategic knowledge. In this perspective, artificial intelligence represents not merely a technological innovation but a strategic enabler for building sustainable, customer-centred, and resilient e-reputation management systems.

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