





# “Exploring value co-creation strategies to improve e-reputation in the hotel industry: insights from Fez, Morocco”

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# EXPLORING VALUE CO-CREATION STRATEGIES TO IMPROVE E-REPUTATION IN THE HOTEL INDUSTRY: INSIGHTS FROM FEZ, MOROCCO

## Abstract

In the context of a rapidly evolving digital landscape, the co-creation of value with customers has gained importance in both academic and business realms, particularly within the hospitality sector. This study aims to analyze the integration of value co-creation strategies to enhance the online reputation of hotels, with a focus on active customer involvement. Using a qualitative research strategy, the study involved semi-structured, in-person interviews with twenty hotel managers from various hotels in Fez, Morocco. Thematic analysis of the interview data, conducted using NVivo 14 software, highlighted the critical role of value co-creation, customer experience, and e-reputation in enhancing hotels' online reputation. Key sub-themes identified under value co-creation include active collaboration, innovation based on customer needs, and taking into account online comments. Regular online surveys were also significant for gathering customer proposals. In terms of customer experience, themes such as engagement, satisfaction, and perception were prominent. E-reputation management emerged as crucial, with sub-themes including real-time monitoring and response, integrating feedback into improvement processes, adopting advanced tools, and adapting online reputation strategies based on continuous feedback. The results underscore the interconnectedness of customer engagement, experience, and e-reputation. Integrating strategies that consider online comments and adopt advanced tools significantly improves the online reputation of hotels. Conclusions advocate for a cohesive approach prioritizing customer experience and continuous improvement, through innovative technologies and strategic adjustments to meet evolving customer needs, fostering a positive and enduring hotel online presence.

## Keywords

value co-creation, e-reputation, hospitality management, customer experience, innovation strategies, adaptability, digital transformation

## JEL Classification

L83, M31, O32

## INTRODUCTION

Online reputation management is crucial in the dynamic and highly competitive contemporary hospitality industry. Maintaining a positive online reputation in Morocco is essential for businesses, as consumers rely heavily on online feedback for purchasing decisions. Positive reviews can enhance a hotel's profitability and brand image, significantly boosting sales and customer attitudes towards the establishment. Conversely, a single negative review can significantly reduce bookings and damage a hotel's reputation. E-reputation, shaped by online customer ratings and reviews, has a profound impact on a hotel's overall performance, highlighting the critical importance of managing customer perception and communication online.

In the evolving digital environment (El Rhazali et al., 2024), customers have become central actors in value creation, actively engaging in

brand activities (Emmendoerfer et al., 2023). Value co-creation involves a shared, collaborative, and simultaneous process where multiple stakeholders voluntarily contribute to developing new value. This approach fosters synergy and dynamic interactions between clients (Hsieh et al., 2022). Within this digital ecosystem, online reviews have become crucial for constructing brand reputation. Value co-creation in hospitality aims to improve customer experience by actively engaging customers in service design, personalization, and transparent communication. This practice not only meets customers' expectations but also involves them in value creation, strengthening their sense of belonging and involvement.

Despite its importance, there is limited understanding of how value co-creation can be strategically integrated into e-reputation management to enhance hotels' online reputations. The scientific problem this study seeks to solve is identifying the specific strategies that hotels can use to engage customers in value co-creation, thereby improving their online reputation and overall performance. Addressing this problem is vital for developing effective e-reputation management practices in the hospitality industry, ensuring that hotels can maintain a positive online presence and achieve long-term success.

## 1. LITERATURE REVIEW

Value co-creation has become essential in the hospitality sector for enhancing service quality and customer satisfaction. This concept spans from low customer involvement with sporadic company-initiated dialogue to high customer involvement characterized by continuous customer-initiated dialogue (Chathoth et al., 2013; Mohammadi & Sheikh, 2013). Service-dominant (S-D) logic views value creation as a collaborative, contextual, and interactive process involving companies, customers, and stakeholders (Lazrak & El Idrissi Tissafi, 2024; Vargo et al., 2023). Grounded in experiential and social exchanges, all participants contribute to shared experiences and social constructs (Ahn et al., 2020; Ferreira & Menezes, 2015).

In the hotel industry, S-D logic is vital for enhancing service quality and customer satisfaction, particularly in an online context (Sadighha et al., 2024). The studies by Cabiddu et al. (2013), Liu et al. (2023) highlight the mutual benefits of online co-creation, including service improvement and customer satisfaction. This process enables hotels to leverage user-generated content, enhancing service innovation and personalization (Sigala, 2016). Such interactions between hotel services and guest input enrich the guest experience and amplify the hotel's brand image (González-Mansilla et al., 2019; Re et al., 2021).

Active customer involvement in online service design aligns services with user experiences, which is crucial for success (Assiouras et al., 2019). Indeed,

active online engagement improves perceived service quality and customer loyalty, thereby strengthening brand connections (Chen et al., 2017). Employee empowerment in online co-creation also contributes to better service delivery and increased satisfaction by aligning organizational strategies with frontline staff contributions (Abdel-Aty & Deraz, 2020).

Inclusivity, particularly for customers with disabilities, plays a key role in enhancing a hotel's reputation for diversity and inclusivity (Navarro et al., 2015). Personalized experiences drive consumer satisfaction (Dhillon et al., 2021). Hotels can offer personalized services and interactions to guests, significantly improving satisfaction and increasing the likelihood of positive reviews (Hariandja & Vincent, 2022). By leveraging data on guest preferences and behavior, hotels can create unique and memorable experiences that resonate personally, fostering stronger emotional connections with the brand and leading to increased customer loyalty and positive electronic word-of-mouth (eWOM).

In the modern hotel industry, e-reputation has become a pivotal factor influencing customer decisions and overall business success. As tourists increasingly rely on digital information to choose accommodations, managing a hotel's online presence effectively has become essential (Ahani et al., 2019; Fueyo, 2015). E-reputation, shaped by online ratings, reviews, and social media interactions, plays a crucial role in this context (Anggani & Suherlan, 2020; Diéguez-Soto et al., 2017). Electronic word-of-mouth (eWOM), which includes any online cus-

tomers' statement that significantly affects public perception and consumer choices, is key to e-reputation management (Hennig-Thurau et al., 2004). The rise of social media has only increased the importance of eWOM in reputation management, affecting consumer decision-making, brand image, and future bookings (Bakos & Dellarocas, 2011; Cantalopos et al., 2016).

A strong link exists between online satisfaction, eWOM, and hotel performance, demonstrating how online comments can drive strategic decisions and enhance brand positioning (Manes & Tchetchik, 2018). Effective management of negative eWOM can transform challenges into opportunities for enhancing brand reputation and increasing revenue (Chen et al., 2017). Successful management of value co-creation and e-reputation is critical for improving hotel performance and customer satisfaction. Engaging customers in the co-creation process positively affects hotel brand equity and customer satisfaction (González-Mansilla et al., 2019; Hariandja & Vincent, 2022). Additionally, top management support for new service co-creation can accelerate and enhance service development, directly benefiting market outcomes and customer satisfaction (Santos-Vijande et al., 2018).

Additionally, involving diverse customer groups, including those with disabilities, in the co-creation process promotes inclusivity and tailored services, further boosting customer loyalty (Bordian & Gil-Saura, 2021; Navarro et al., 2015). Leadership support and a positive organizational climate are essential to prevent value co-destruction and enhance the co-creation experience (Ukeje et al., 2021). Moreover, effective management of online consumer reviews and responses plays a crucial role in maintaining a positive online reputation, which in turn affects customer trust and booking intentions, ultimately improving hotel performance (Xie et al., 2014).

Despite its importance, there is limited understanding of how value co-creation can be strategically integrated into e-reputation management to enhance hotels' online reputations. This study aims to address this gap by analyzing the specific strategies and actions that hotels can employ to effectively engage customers in value co-creation, thereby improving their online reputation and overall perfor-

mance. Addressing this problem is crucial for developing comprehensive and effective e-reputation management practices in the hospitality industry, ensuring that hotels can maintain a positive online presence and achieve long-term success.

## 2. METHODOLOGY

To understand strategies for improving online reputation in Fez, a list of 3 to 5-star hotels was compiled from the regional tourism directorate (DRT) for qualitative research. This list, detailed in Table 1, includes hotels' star categories, number of comments, ratings, and sources of these ratings, and served as a foundation for conducting interviews with hotel managers.

**Table 1.** Hotel classification, comments, ratings, and source (date: May 6, 2024)

Name of the hotel	Classification type	Number of comments	Rating	Site
FES MARRIOTT JNAN PALACE	5*	1,996	8,4	Booking
LES MÉRINIDES	5*	849	7,9	Booking
PALAIS MEDINA	5*	1,952	8	Booking
RAMADA FÈS	5*	19	8,9	Booking
SAHRAI	5*	529	8,5	Booking
ZALAGH PARC PALACE	5*	163	7,1	Booking
ACROSS	4*	302	8	Booking
BARCELO FÈS MEDINA	4*	1,278	7,6	Booking
FÈS INN	4*	937	7,8	Booking
L'ESCALE	4*	61	7,9	Booking
MENZEH ZALAGH	4*	435	8	Booking
NOUR PLAZZA	4*	641	8,5	Booking
ROYAL MIRAGE	4*	1,494	7,9	Booking
SOFIA	4*	151	7,1	TripAdvisor
TGHAT	4*	104	7,1	TripAdvisor
VOLUBILIS	4*	5,516	7,4	Booking
WASSIM	4*	182	6,2	Booking
ARENA FÈS	3*	608	7,1	Booking
ATLAS SAISS	3*	952	8,2	Booking
BATHA	3*	431	8,3	Booking
DE BRAZZA	3*	13	8,4	Booking
IBIS MOUSSAFIR FÈS	3*	2,167	6,7	Booking
MENZEH FÈS	3*	225	7,8	Booking
MOUNIA	3*	118	6,8	Booking
NOUZHA	3*	516	6,7	Booking
PERLA HOTEL	3*	1,014	7,5	Booking
SIDI HARAZEM	3*	191	5,5	Booking
SPLENDID	3*	955	7,1	Booking
ZAH RAT AL JABAL	3*	759	7,6	Booking

The study adopts a qualitative research strategy, aligning with recommendations for illuminating new aspects of existing phenomena through exploratory methods (Bowen, 2009; Chatterjee, 2019). This approach facilitates an in-depth understanding of complex events and experiences, capturing elements such as feelings, thought processes, and personal observations. An inductive coding approach allowed key themes and perspectives to emerge naturally from the data, with thematic analysis deemed essential for identifying key themes and underlying connections (Strauss & Corbin, 1998; Williams & Moser, 2019).

The data collection phase spanned five months, from May 21 to September 22, 2023, during which 20 hotel managers were interviewed, resulting in approximately 85,000 words of textual data. The respondents included an equal mix of ten men and ten women, mostly aged between 31 and 50, ensuring demographic diversity. The age distribution was as follows: 30-40 years (6 respondents), 41-50 years (12 respondents), and 51-60 years (2 respondents). Each participant held significant decision-making authority within their hotel, providing relevant and impactful insights. All respondents (100%) were managers. Nationally, 90% of the respondents were Moroccan, and 10% were foreigners. Regarding their experience in the hotel, 15% had 1 to 3 years of experience, 60% had 4 to 6 years, and 15% had over 6 years of experience.

**Table 2.** Interviewee characterization

Characteristics	Respondent (n=20)
<b>Age</b>	
30-40	6
41-50	12
51-60	2
<b>Position of the interviewee</b>	
Manager	100%
<b>Nationality</b>	
Moroccan	90%
Foreigners	10%
<b>Length of experience in this hotel</b>	
1 to 3 years	15%
4 to 6 years	60%
Over 6 years	15%

Semi-structured interviews were conducted in both French and English, accommodating participants' language preferences, with subsequent data analysis conducted primarily in English. NVivo

14 software was used for thematic analysis, facilitating the identification of recurring patterns and significant themes. This structured approach involved recording and transcribing interviews, meticulously proofreading transcripts, organizing data based on relevant questions, and coding and thematizing data with high inter-coder agreement (Strauss & Corbin, 1998). The interview guide included eight questions focused on value co-creation, customer experience, perception, satisfaction, engagement, and online reputation. This rigorous methodology provided a reliable foundation for understanding practices adopted by hotels to enhance value co-creation and manage their e-reputation.

### 3. RESULTS

Interview excerpts were purposively sampled to align with the study objectives. These excerpts were then condensed into subcategories and categories, from which overarching themes were derived. Table 3 presents a detailed breakdown of the interview excerpts, along with their corresponding subcategories, categories, and the resulting themes.

The thematic content analysis of the open-ended survey responses reveals that value co-creation, customer experience, and e-reputation are integral to the hotel's strategic approach. The analysis, focusing on sentences addressing interview questions, showed that most responses were usable despite some grammatical errors. The 'value co-creation' theme covered sub-themes like active collaboration, innovation based on customer needs, taking into account online comments, and regular online surveys. The respondents highlighted the importance of involving customers in brainstorming sessions and workshops, tailoring services based on feedback, and adapting strategies according to online comments and surveys.

The 'customer experience' theme included engagement, satisfaction, and perception, with respondents emphasizing the integration of customers in the co-creation process to enhance their experience and using satisfaction indicators to evaluate service quality.

**Table 3.** Results of thematic content analysis

Excerpts from in-depth interviews	Sub-categories	Categories	Themes
"...We invite our customers to participate in brainstorming sessions and workshops to co-create a product that adapts to their specific needs."	Active collaboration	Co-creation of products and services	Value co-creation
"...Customer feedback presents for us unique and innovative perspectives, which leads us to offer services tailored to their needs."	Innovation based on customer needs		
"...Based on online comments on different platforms, we adapt our value co-creation strategy to offer products compatible with their needs."	Taking into account online comments	Customer feedback mechanisms	
"...Regular surveys are sent by email to our customers after their experiences, to acquire proposals to integrate them into the new installations."	Regular online surveys		
"...We rely on the integration of the customer in the co-creation process in order to improve their overall experience."	Engagement	Customer experience enhancement	Customer experience
"...We take satisfaction indicators into consideration in order to evaluate the quality of our service."	Satisfaction	Customer experience assessment	
"...Our customers' perception is considered an essential tool in the success of our establishment because satisfied customers can recommend our services to those around them."	Perception		
"...We work on online customer feedback in real-time. Positive feedback motivates us to move forward and improve, while negative feedback is resolved instantly to strengthen our online reputation."	Real-time monitoring and response	E-reputation management	E-reputation
"...We have a team that constantly monitors online reviews across different platforms, including our website, hotel industry sites, and travel forums. These reviews are a source of improvement for us."	Integrating feedback into the improvement process		
"...As part of managing our e-reputation, we opt for advanced tools such as Google Analytics to measure the degree of customer interaction with our online content and Social Mention to build an overall vision of our online situation."	Adopting advanced tools		
"...We adapt our online reputation strategy based on the feedback and insights gathered from various online platforms to ensure we meet our customers' expectations and maintain a positive reputation."	Adapting the online reputation strategy		

The 'e-reputation' theme encompassed real-time monitoring and response, integrating feedback into improvement processes, adopting advanced tools, and adapting online reputation strategies. The respondents noted the importance of working on feedback in real-time, using tools like Google Analytics for measuring customer interaction, and continuously adapting strategies based on feedback to meet customer expectations.

#### 4. DISCUSSION

The findings of this study highlight the critical importance of integrating value co-creation with e-reputation strategies to enhance hotel performance. The thematic analysis reveals that active customer collaboration, continuous feedback mechanisms, and the strategic use of advanced tools are essential for maintaining a positive reputation and improving service quality. These conclusions align with those of Carvalho and Alves (2022) and Chathoth et al. (2013) who emphasize

the importance of customer involvement and feedback in creating innovative and customized services.

Another key aspect is the use of advanced technologies to enhance customer engagement. Buhalis et al. (2022) highlight the potential of the Metaverse in creating hybrid virtual and physical experiences. By strategically using the Metaverse, hospitality and tourism organizations can co-create unique experiences, allowing customers to engage with the hotel before, during, and after their visit. This innovative use of technology not only enriches the customer experience but also strengthens the bond between customers and the hotel, leading to higher satisfaction and loyalty (Lazrak et al., 2024).

Continuous monitoring and real-time feedback integration are essential for effective e-reputation management. Kohtamäki and Rajala (2016) emphasize the importance of value co-creation and co-production in service ecosystems, which can be applied to e-reputation management. They ar-

gue that continuous engagement with customers and stakeholders is vital for maintaining a positive online reputation. This involves not only responding to feedback promptly but also integrating this feedback into the hotel's improvement processes.

Additionally, Ranjan and Read (2016) stress the need for a clear conceptual understanding and measurement of value co-creation. They argue that effectively evaluating customer feedback and real-time monitoring are crucial for improving e-reputation strategies. By adopting advanced tools, hotels can monitor customer interactions and feedback, enabling them to make data-driven decisions that enhance service quality and customer satisfaction.

Several factors contribute to the results of this study. First, increasing digitalization and the widespread use of social media platforms have made customer feedback more accessible and actionable, allowing hotels to gather real-time insights and adapt their strategies promptly. Second, the competitive nature of the hospitality industry necessitates innovative approaches to stand out, making value co-creation and e-reputation management critical components of business strategy. Finally, the shift toward a more customer-centric approach in service industries emphasizes the importance of understanding and meeting customer needs and expectations.

This study provides actionable insights for hotel managers to enhance customer engagement and e-reputation through value co-creation strategies. Managers should actively involve customers in service design through workshops and feedback sessions to improve services and strengthen loyalty. Real-time monitoring and prompt response to online reviews are crucial, and tools can help manage the online presence and address feedback efficiently. Additionally, integrating feedback gathered from regular surveys into continuous improvement processes demonstrates a commitment to customer satisfaction. Personalizing services based on customer feedback creates memo-

orable experiences, further enhancing satisfaction and loyalty. To ensure the success of these initiatives, support from top management is essential, including staff training and strategic planning. By implementing these strategies, hotels can significantly enhance their service offerings, customer satisfaction, and overall reputation.

Future research should explore the long-term impacts of value co-creation and e-reputation management on hotel performance. Studies could examine the role of cultural differences in value co-creation and e-reputation management practices across different regions. The integration of emerging technologies, such as artificial intelligence and big data analytics, in managing e-reputation and enhancing customer experience could also provide valuable insights. Finally, examining the impact of ecological and sustainable practices (Tissafi, 2020) on value co-creation and customer loyalty could contribute to a more comprehensive understanding of sustainable hospitality management.

This study has several limitations that require careful consideration when interpreting the results. First, challenges encountered during interviews with hotel managers may have limited the diversity of perspectives studied. Communication barriers, such as time constraints or language and translation issues, may have influenced the representativeness of the sample. Additionally, the voluntary nature of participation may introduce bias, as participating hotel managers might be more inclined toward value co-creation or have relevant experiences. The limited geographic scope of this study, focusing on the city of Fez and on 3- to 5-star hotels, may also restrict the generalizability of the results to other hotel and cultural contexts. Finally, although carefully analyzed, the data are based on declarative perceptions and may be subject to social desirability bias. Acknowledging these limitations is essential for approaching these findings with caution and considering them as part of broader and more diverse future research.

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## CONCLUSION

This study aimed to explore how the integration of value co-creation strategies can enhance the online reputation of hotels from the perspectives of hotel managers. The findings demonstrate that actively involving customers in co-creation through collaboration, innovation tailored to customer needs, and

regular online surveys significantly boosts customer satisfaction and loyalty. This, in turn, strengthens brand equity and creates a personalized customer experience. The analysis emphasizes that incorporating customer feedback into service improvements is essential for maintaining high levels of satisfaction and engagement. Personalized services, shaped by this feedback, lead to memorable stays, further enhancing customer loyalty.

Moreover, real-time monitoring and timely responses to online feedback are crucial for preserving a positive online reputation. Advanced tools, such as Google Analytics, play a key role in addressing customer concerns promptly and making strategic adjustments. These findings underline the vital connection between value co-creation, customer experience, and e-reputation in driving hotel success. Hotel managers should prioritize these elements and adopt proactive strategies to continuously improve service quality and customer satisfaction. By leveraging customer feedback, engaging in active co-creation, and utilizing advanced digital tools, hotels can significantly enhance their online reputation and overall performance.

## AUTHOR CONTRIBUTIONS

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