

## **Managing Reputation Online: Engagement with Customer-Generated Reviews (Egyptian Travel Agencies Perspective)**

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### **ABSTRACT**

Nowadays, in an internet-driven world, information travels very fast and instantaneously spreads around the world. Comments, reviews, opinions from customers through online review platforms determine a business online reputation. Reputation is the most valuable asset consists of past actions, direct experience and future expectations. Online Reputation Management (ORM) in tourism business is about being authentic and transparent about provided services and using customers' feedback to guide the areas that might need improvements. Therefore, setting up a strategy for effective management of online reputation can directly influence business performance. Hence; travel agencies have to take advantage of their online presence through maintaining an active attendance on major reviews sites and popular social channels. Engaging with Customer-Generated Reviews (CGRs), acting immediately on their feedback, having innovative website interface and being standby at all times are important issues for travel agencies that empower them to develop their business. This enables them to gain control of the situation, protect their valuable reputation and increase customers' trust which will result in achieving business goals and gaining competitive advantage. Therefore; the purpose of this research is to contribute to the limited researches on online reputation management by discussing the concept of ORM and its practices in the Egyptian travel agencies. Furthermore, it attempts to understand how they manage customer generated reviews on different review platforms, as well as, discovers the influence of managing reputation online on the tourism business. The study concluded that there are some practices related to ORM actually applied by Egyptian travel agencies, but haven't been done through a clear strategy or an announced plan. The findings of the study recommended that Egyptian travel agencies managers should consider an obvious plan for ORM determining its policies and tactics and update it continuously according to the requirements of online business environment. In addition; ensuring enough interaction with customers' generated reviews must be considered to identify their needs, expectations, satisfaction level and present their requirements. This study will be a starting point for additional studies in this area of research in the future.

**Keywords:** Online reputation management, Review Platforms, Customer-Generated Reviews, Review Sites, Tourism Business, Tourism Organization, Egyptian Travel Agencies.

## **6 INTRODUCTION**

Reputation has an intangible value and a massive significance for tourism business (Cole, 2012). It is the most important strategic and long-term organizational asset delivers value for any company (Petkevičienė, 2014; Tischer & Hildebrandt, 2014; Hang et al., 2012). This intangible asset is now increasingly seen as a driver of sustainable competitive advantage especially for the travel industry (Iwu-Egwuonwu, 2011, p: 197). Reputation has been documented by different authors as an evaluation that customers make about the organization over time (Gotsi & Wilson, 2001; Vollenbroek et al., 2014; Dolle, 2014). It is formed as a result of past actions and customer's direct experience and also influences others' expectations of the organization (Floreddu et al., 2014).

As people spend more time on the Internet, Online Reputation Management (ORM) becomes growingly important for tourism organizations (Ott & Theunissen, 2015). It is certainly influenced by the new business environment resulted from the dispersion of Information and Communication Technology (ICT) (Sotiriadis & Zyl, 2013; Buhalis, 1998; Lopes et al., 2014). This development encourages innovations in the tourism business and has a tremendous impact on reputation management (Østergaard, 2009). The popularity of different online review platforms induces tourism organizations to maintain a positive online reputation and manage the success of their business via electronic channels. In addition; customer-generated reviews have been continuously gaining credibility in the eyes of many people and has a great influence on others' decision making process (Proserpio & Zervas, 2016, p.2; Buhalis & Law, 2008)

To further describe of this new trend in travel industry, this study contributes to the limited researches on online reputation management in tourism business by discussing the concept of ORM and investigating the strategies and tactics that Egyptian Travel Agencies (ETAs) use to manage their reputation online. Furthermore, it attempts to understand how ETAs manage customer-generated reviews, as well as, discover the influence of online reputation management on tourism business. The researcher combined several data sources to add richness to this research. The results of this paper will contribute to the theoretical and empirical knowledge on ORM in travel industry and provide directions for future researches.

### **On-Line Reputation Management (ORM):**

There is no doubt that the technological advancement in the digital age affected the way services providers manage their business reputation. According to Dolle (2014) in past, before the widespread use of ICTs, organizations could control the available information about their business through traditional methods such as placed press announcements and good public relations managers in order to protect their reputation. Floreddu et al., (2014) also emphasized that organization reputation was formed only via unidirectional communications organizations distributed to stakeholders, who could

only marginally interact with and react to these messages. Consequently; organizations have no control when customers attack their business through negative opinions regarding hotels, travel destinations, and travel services. Hence; reputation damage can be the result, which may have harmful influences on the overall results of business (Horster & Gottschalk, 2012).

But now with the rapid growth of the Internet and WWW, organizations have the ability to observe and enhance their reputation online in order to achieve business success (Xiang & Gretzel, 2010). They could transmit information to a variety of people and deal effectively with customers' content on different review platforms (Dolle, 2014; Lopes et al., 2014; Schniederjans et al., 2013). Thus; business reputation is now made online. The concept of reputation management focuses to a greater extent on review sites and social networking sites and in consequence can be seen as online reputation management (Holve, 2014). As a result; Dolle (2014) stated that the concept of *Reputation Management* has expanded with *Online Reputation Management (ORM)*.

Hung et al., (2012, p:85) define online reputation management as “the process of analysis and management for people and organizations’ reputation represented by content among all kinds of online media”. However; Horster& Gottschalk (2016) described online reputation as a product of a communicative process which derived from direct experiences and influenced through information exchange and social interaction by customers and suppliers within social networks and review sites. According to Holve (2014, p:3) the tasks of online reputation management involve “interacting with people online, creating shareable content, monitoring what stakeholders are saying, keeping track of their dialogue, addressing negative content found online, and allowing up on ideas that are shared through social media”.

Online reputation management also can be considered as a set of policies and approaches that organization designed to organize and protect its online image and visibility. It is the mission of monitoring, dealing with, or correcting undesirable or negative mentions on the internet (Holve, 2014). This new approach of reputation management enables service providers to overcome time, distance and location constraints (Pires et al., 2006). Reviews, comments and opinions determine business online reputation. This can be very useful for the travel industry, which provides intangibles, unpreserved and heterogeneous services that cannot be evaluated before the consumption (Litvin et al., 2008).

It's vital to mention that ORM strategy is about creating a prominent online presence and be prepared all the time to respond and interact with customer-generated reviews. This may be accomplished by setting ORM plan or strategy and update it continuously according to the requirements of online business environment.

### **The process of Online Reputation Management:**

Litvin et al., (2008) illustrated that service providers in the tourism sector have to be very keen on designing strategies to manage their online reputation. They should have a prepared ORM strategy. This is due to the intangible features and the high risk involved in purchasing tourism services. Therefore; online reputation management process must be executed in an efficient way, in

order to proactively defend organizations from customers' attacks which certainly affected business's online image. This can be done through the following stages:

Managing reputation online initially requires an active presence in the social web (Lopes et al., 2014). One of the most important tactics for ORM is *managing content online*. At first; having a professional website with an innovative interface and creating basic profiles on major review platforms is a necessary part of doing business in today's information age. This empowers tourism service providers to develop their online presence. On the other hand; website is not just an information system, but also an interface with a vendor, that is potentially relevant relationship marketing tool (Gefen et al., 2003). In this regard; organizations have to protect their online accounts and thinking well before posting something on social networking sites as it could be shared within minutes around the world by someone.

Secondly, managing reputation online necessitate to *set up monitoring system* in order to examine the organization's image and how customers thinking about it. Holve, (2014) and Floreddu et al., (2014) demonstrated that tourism organization has to recognize its current level of reputation. Furthermore; its reputation should be compared with competitors in the tourism market. Nowadays, there are many different and free tools available to monitor all online mentions for business (Lopes et al., 2014). Tourism organizations can set up alerts to be notified when their business mentioned online to insure information in current such as E-mail alerts, Google Alerts, TripAdvisor alerts, Facebook alerts.... etc. Catching this content early allows tourism organizations to discover and respond to negative content resulted from customers' attacks and correct it before it worsens and turns into a crisis which probably could harm business reputation (Miguéns et al., 2008). What have to be monitored in this phase are searches, ratings, reviews, recommendations and customers' complaints (Holve, 2014). It can be a chance to handle problems and in the end make even disappointed customers happy (Benea, 2014).

The third fundamental phase of ORM is *customer engagement and feedback analysis*. This includes react to mentions, enter to online conversations with customers and respond quickly on their comments and questions (Floreddu et al., 2014).

Ultimately; ORM process includes *learning from the experiences faced by the organization and updating the ORM strategy*. It refers to learning and evaluation part. (Holve, 2014). This stage based on the assessment of the situation as a whole and the results or effects achieved from the current strategy. Recognizing the points of strengths and weaknesses in current ORM strategy is required to be avoided later. Also; it is necessary to modify and develop organization's ORM plan according to these experiences.

From the above stages; it can be claimed that there are few basic rules for effective ORM strategy should be taken into account. These rules are: presence online, monitor mentions, respond quickly, be transparent, be social, encourage dialogue, prepare for a crisis, address criticism, and finally customer service should be considered as a fundamental part of online reputation management (Floreddu et al., 2014; Holve, 2014; Benea, 2014; Coombs, 2007a). This proved what was found by Floreddu et al., (2014) as they concluded that business reputation is formed as a result of past actions and customer's direct experience and also influences others' expectations of the organization.

### **Engagement with Customer-Generated Reviews (CGRs):**

One of the main challenges for tourism business is the rise of some review platforms which are used by millions of individuals and tourists. These platforms are one of the most significant developments of so-called Web 2.0 revolution. The second generation of web based services is characterized by having customer-generated reviews, which allow customers to share information and shaping business reputation by using a variety of tools in the networked environment (Chaves et al., 2012; Kaplan & Haenlein, 2010; Zeng & Gerritsen, 2014). Online CGRs have been described by Ngai et al., (2015) as a recent addition for managing reputation online. These new forms of communication started replacing traditional sources of information (Fotis et al., 2012).

Nowadays, there are hundreds of platforms where customers can voice their opinions, interact and share information with others (Rathonyi, 2013). The most dominant platforms for online reviews can be divided in two categories: Review Sites such as Trip Advisor, Google plus and Yelp and Social networking platforms such as Face book, Twitter, YouTube and MySpace (Sigala et al., 2016; Zeng & Gerritsen, 2014). They are the most common sites and tools for online reputation management especially in the travel industry.

Its common practice for customers to post online review after their experience to express their opinions and ideas. Many tourists exchange opinions, criticize, ask for help, request information, make suggestions, rate products and services and review their experiences. They are able to share all kinds of information and feelings about services, brands, providers and destinations (Hoster & Gottschalk, 2012; Zeng & Gerritsen, 2014). So; Review sites are thought of as credible sources of information for travellers.

On the other hand; the way organization responding and dealing with customers reviews affects travellers' decision making process, especially potential customer (Méndez et al., 2015; Milano et al., 2011). Engaging with CGRs within these unrestricted virtual communities allowing tourism organizations to manage and improve the success of their reputation online (Stepchenkova et al., 2007; Sigala et al, 2016). It refers to the reaction of the organization towards customers' reviews. Tourism organization has to welcome all kinds of feedback after customer's direct experience and must has treatment strategies to handle customers' problems and complaints (Holve, 2014).

Customer- generated reviews are important sources of information not only for travelers, but also for tourism organizations. They provide significant feedback regarding each component of provided services (Cox et al., 2007; Rathonyi, 2013). Listening and engaging with customers' reviews and acting immediately on their feedback could directly increase positive outcomes of business and achieve successful reputation online (Benea, 2014). Tourism services providers shouldn't wait until the crisis happen, they have to reply and handle negative comments and promote the positive ones. In addition; transparency is an important issue in ORM. It means if customer posts a negative comment on organization's site, deleting this comment or ignoring it will bring down the positive one. So; tourism organization should make sure that the problem is successfully addressed and talk about the procedures taken in public for everyone to see. It should react to customer's complaints without delay to prevent a crisis. This can be accomplished by apologizing, responding as fast as possible, promising to fix the problem, offer solutions and informing customers what actions have been taken to address the situation (Holve, 2014). This creates a kind of credibility and reassurance towards the organization.

Accordingly, tourism organizations have to engage with customers' online reviews, analyze opinions, respond rapidly to their feedback, appreciate and thank positive reviews and try to handle negative ones. This ultimately leads to business success and improve organizational performance. As well; Benea (2014) demonstrated that tourism organizations ought to be remembering that ORM is not about perusing and reacting to everything posted about business on the web or attempting to downplay negative comments. It's about ensuring that all information available on organization's business properly sets customers' desires.

### **The impacts of ORM on the Tourism business:**

The importance of the ORM for the travel industry has been discussed by various authors, illustrating different issues in managing reputation online in order to obtain strategic benefits for tourism business. Tourism organizations set ORM plan and interact with CGRs on review platforms in order to improve their brand reputation, increase sales and maximize their profitability (Buhalis & Jun, 2011).

Recommendations, comments, opinions, complaints, some tips and ideas expressed, can be very important for those tourism organizations who want to be innovative and creative (Lopes et al., 2014). Organization can form a clear picture of its business online; determine strength and weakness; and focus on where is the need for improvement.

ORM gives the opportunity for tourism organization to be closest to customers. This has positive impacts for tourist business (Dolle, 2014). Many organizations are able to interact directly and dynamically with customers at reduced costs (Coombs, 2015b). A research related to Coombs (2015b) showed that this new trend in managing business online facilitates regular two way communication between organizations and customers; generates a high credibility and mutual understanding. Customers liked to be listened and like to get responses to their feedback. They are searching for a place they can trust, where they know they are going to be treated well, that is truly what influenced them. This undoubtedly maintains a good online reputation for tourism business, ensure customer's loyalty and attract new customers which lead to business success.

Inversini et al., (2010) & Stoktosa et al., (2013) confirmed that one of the most important impacts of online reputation management in tourism business is the online conversations which taking place all the time. It makes tourism organization available to react directly at once if a conversation contains negative content.

Dickinger (2010); Hills & Cairncross (2011); Ye et al., (2009) argued that if organization analyze and manage CGRs sufficiently, various competitive benefits can be achieved for tourism business. Some of these benefits are: identifying customer's needs, expectations and satisfaction level; presenting their requirements; solving problems; facilitating solutions for potential problems that organization might face as a result of customers' attacks. In addition; it allows enhancement in some products or services and adoption of new policies or procedures in business (Loureiro & Kastenholz, 2011; Serra Cantallops & Salvi, 2014; Dolle, 2014; Cox et al., 2007).

In this context, some studies conducted in an attempt to demonstrate the impacts and the importance of online reputation management in the travel industry. It was found that there are few studies consider the practices of ORM and its impacts on tourism business, especially in Egypt. A set of

researches (Inversini et al., 2010; Stoktosa et al., 2013; Miguéns et al., 2008) discussed one important aspect of online reputation management in terms of tourism destination. However; most studies in this area focus on online reputation management with regard to the influence of social media in the hotel industry (Proserpio& Zervas, 2016; Benea, 2014; Tuominen, 2011). Their results confirmed the significance of ORM and proved that management's reactions towards customers' feedback affect its online reputation. While the study of Coombs (2015b) discussed online reputation management during crisis. He presented some guidelines that organizations should be aware of and use when attempting to build a positive reputation with its stakeholders during crisis.

However; the previous discussion show that there has limited research exists on ORM in the travel industry. The majority of existing studies focused on specific point of ORM and didn't discuss its practices, benefits and impacts in the Egyptian travel agencies. So; this research has not been studied before.

### **RESEARCH METHODOLOGY:**

After demonstrating, through the previous literature review, the process of ORM and its value for the tourism business, it is important to enhancement the theoretical part by conducting the field study. A descriptive analytical methodology will be used for this study to describe related aspects of the phenomenon under study.

The aim of the research is to explore the importance of Online Reputation Management among Egyptians Travel Agencies and discusses some of its practices and benefits in the travel industry. In addition; to investigate how Egyptians travel agencies respond to CGRs on review sites and to what extent they are affected by customers' online reviews through different platforms. Along with a discussion of the effects of ORM on the tourism business.

### **Research Sample and Data Collection Techniques:**

The current study is a type of quantitative research approach. A survey based on standardized questionnaire had been directed to a selected sample from the target population of this study which includes the Egyptian Travel Agencies. The study depends on the "survey" as a method within the quantitative methodology approach. An online questionnaire was designed as the survey instrument for collecting data. All the questionnaire items were measured on a five point Likert scale.

The questionnaire discusses two main ideas. Firstly; a set of questions evaluate the ORM practices and to what extent they are actually done in the targeted sample. Secondly; the other group of questions discover the influences and benefits of these practices on the tourism business. All of these questions on a scale from 1 to 5 (1 representing never while 5 representing always).

Besides that; some other questions aimed at exploring the opinions of respondents regarding ORM process and the importance of CGRs, on a scale from 1 to 5 (1=strongly agree and 5 = strongly disagree).

The population for this study contained 1167 Egyptian Travel Agencies category (A) where identified in Egypt by Egyptians Travel Agents Association (ETAA, 2016). In this study, random sample was

used as one of the sampling techniques in order to achieve the aim of the research. Four hundred and sixty six (466) questionnaires were forwarded, among them 393 forms were collected and analyzed, with a response rate representing (33.7 %) from the total population.

The survey was conducted during January and February 2017 and focused on the Egyptian Travel Agencies in Cairo, Giza and Alexandria, where the majority of travel agents are located (ETAA, 2016). Statistical Package for Social Sciences (SPSS) was used to analyze and compute the data. Frequency counts, percentage distributions and correlations were calculated and analyzed.

To establish the reliability of the questionnaire in this study, "Cranach's coefficient Alpha" was calculated to examine the internal consistency of the scale. The scale was found to be internally reliable, ( $\alpha=0.878$ ) which is considered an acceptable level of internal reliability as its safely and sufficiently higher than the cut point of (0.70) (Gay et al., 1992).

### **Results and Discussion:**

The study illustrated that there are some practices related to ORM actually applied by Egyptian travel agencies, but haven't been done through a clear strategy or an announced plan. To clarify if respondents manage their content online or not, as the basic tactic of ORM, a set of questions evaluate this point. Table (1) shows that most of respondents (69%) updating and renovating business website frequently. In addition; the majority of the sample (78.1%) agreed that having a professional website is a necessary part of doing business in today's information age. After that; respondents were asked if they managed content on major review sites and social networking sites where customers post their comments, reviews and opinions about their experiences in order to achieve effective ORM. A high percentage of respondents (68.2%) showed that they actually doing that. This confirmed what was found by Lopes et al., (2014) that one of the most important tactics for ORM is managing content online and activating online presence through developing an innovative website, creating basic profiles on major review platforms and constructing online communities which is widely applied in the surveyed sample. This helps any travel agency to reach and engage with existing and potential customers.



**Table (1) Managing Content Online**

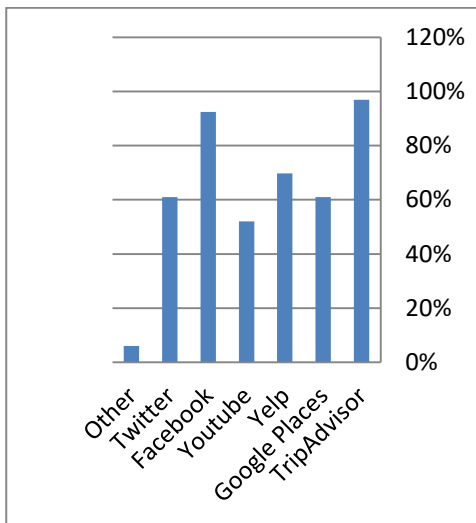
<b>Indicator</b>	<b>Frequency</b>	<b>(%)</b>
<b>Regularly update website</b>		
Never	7	1.78
Rarely	8	2.04
Neutral	63	16.03
Frequently	271	68.96
Always	44	11.19
<b>Manage content on major review sites</b>		
Never	4	1.02
Rarely	21	5.34
Neutral	41	10.43
Frequently	59	15.01
Always	268	68.19
<b>Regularly monitor where and when business is being mentioned online</b>		
Never	10	2.54
Rarely	12	3.05
Neutral	39	9.92
Frequently	302	76.84
Always	30	7.63

The results showed that there is a significant positive correlation between establishing online communities and enable customers' engagement (Pearson Correlation coefficient =.643, Sig. (2-tailed) =.000). This means that creating online communities is a starting point to reach and engage with customers. From Aschoff et al., (2010) perspective, these communities allow engagement and interaction with customers, whether from the social side, which involves the creation of friendship or knowledge-based relationships that involve information exchange. This is important for any travel agency seeking to establish mutual relationships with customers and disseminate the right information about its business in order to build a good reputation on the long run. In addition to the above; the high percentage (79.1%) of the surveyed sample emphasized that presence continuously online on different review channels enables them to manage and control the success of their reputation online.

Besides; the results proved that there is a significant positive correlation between regularly monitoring where and when business is being mentioned online and gaining knowledge of how customers perceived business (Pearson Correlation coefficient =.587, Sig. (2-tailed) =.000). Holve, 2014 clarified that monitoring social channels and review sites is very important in the travel industry to gain understanding of what customers like and dislike and how business is positioned online. Therefore; travel agency can know its ratings and rankings online through examining and monitoring social channels and review sites which can be a good indicator for its performance.

By asking the sample concerning the most important review sites on the social web from their point of view, the results in fig (1) showed that TripAdvisor and Facebook are the two most dominant platforms for online reviews at a rate (97%), (92.4%) of the sample in that order. Fig (1) also reflects an increased ratios of some other sites such as Yelp which reached (69.8%) of the respondents, Google

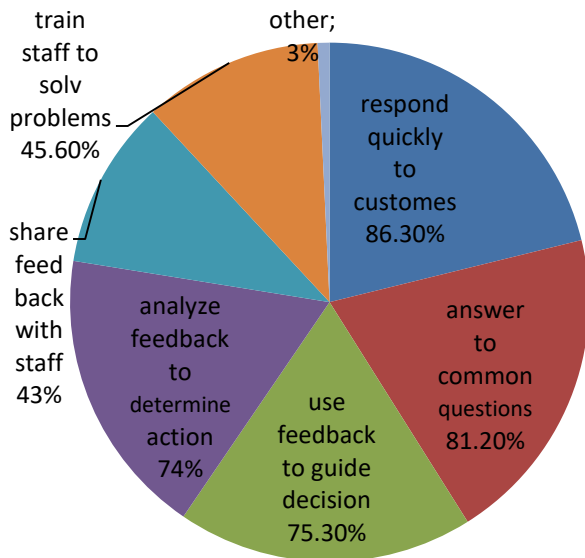
Places and Twitter at the same percentage (61%) for each of them, then YouTube (51%). These answers signify the importance of review platforms for the business of Egyptian travel agencies.



**Figure 1: The most dominant platforms for customers' reviews**

In addition; (77.3%) of respondents confirmed that they setting up online alerts such as TripAdvisor alert, Google alert, Facebook alert .. etc, to be notified when someone posts a review of our business even when the travel agency is not logged on to the social networks. In this regard; Miguéns et al (2008) clarified that these alerts enable travel agencies to access early to CGRs and respond quickly to their comments and queries as soon as they are written. Thus; the results showed a significant positive correlation between setting online alerts and react directly before someone else does (Pearson Correlation coefficient =.762, Sig. (2-tailed) =.000). Rapid actions are required from the travel agency, especially in the networked environment, before giving anyone a chance to inflame the situation, spread negative publicity or raise doubts about its business online. It is worth mentioning that customers' feedback and opinions have become more credible than any other source of information through electronic word of mouth (EWOM), especially if those comments are negative (Lee et al. 2008). This contributes to the achievement of effective ORM.

**Regarding the strategies and tactics towards CGRs,** results showed that there are four strategies are ranked on the top as shown in fig (2). These are responding quickly to customers (86.3%), followed by answer to common questions (81.2%), then use feedback to guide decision (75.3%) and analyze feedback to determine action (74%).



**Figure 2: Some of travel agencies' strategies towards CGRs**

Moreover; in terms of how Egyptians travel agencies engage and respond to CGRs on review platforms to manage their reputation online and to what extent their business affected by their strategies in this regard. To discover that, respondents were asked about the tactics they followed in engaging with CGRs as an essential part of ORM process and the benefits they have gained on their business as a result. **Analyzing the answers statistically represents the following results:**

Results showed that there is strong positive correlation between encourage dialogue and communication with customers through review platforms and attract new customers (Pearson Correlation coefficient =.864, Sig. (2-tailed) =.000). It builds a positive online image of the travel agency. The way customers are treated via review channels attracts the attention of potential customers and influences their decisions (Wirtz et al., 2013). This attitude from the travel agency confirms for potential customers that customer's relationship is not limited to providing service but also extends to engage, communicate and respond to their reviews and requirements, which creates mutual understanding and long relationships with customers. The travel agency seeks to maintain a positive reputation online for its business, brand and services. This is not only for current customers who voice their opinions on review sites, but also for those people who will be judging its business on the way in which the reviews were received and handled.

Therefore, the respondents were questioned about replying immediately in the case of customer's attack. The outputs obtained from questionnaire reflect that there is a significant positive correlation between responding quickly during customer's attack and prevent crisis which may lead to reputational damage (Pearson Correlation coefficient =.752, Sig. (2-tailed) =.000). The effect of customers' negative reviews could be relatively damaging to business's brand. Travel agency's direct response will defend its brand from any harmful hits that could cause a crisis threatens its online reputation.

Furthermore, according to some studies which have shown that the organization's action towards customer complaints significantly affects customer's behaviour towards the travel agency. So; the

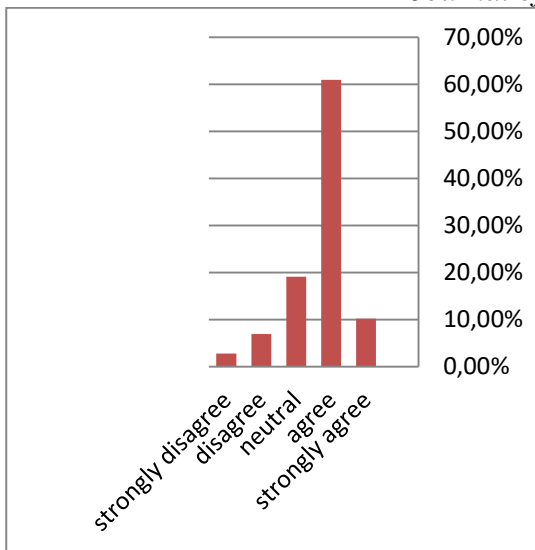
questionnaire aimed at clarifying this point and examine this relation which had also a great impact on travel agency's online reputation.

In this regard, the results confirmed a significant positive relationship between apologize and find solution for customers' complaints and gaining customers trust and loyalty (Pearson Correlation coefficient =.713, Sig. (2-tailed) =.000). This is consistent with what was found by Zheng et al. (2009) ; Kozak and Tasci (2006) that customers wish to address their complaints at once. So effective handling of customers' complaints can be an opportunity for travel agencies to provide services exceed customers' expectations. Dealing well with the angry customers and show empathy with their problems at once can be resulted in loyal customers. Thus it can be said that through engaging with CGRs on the social web, travel agencies could be able to determine non- satisfied customers and find out the reasons of their dissatisfaction.

On the other hand; there is a significant association between considering recommendations suggested by customers as a guide to some improvements and making changes in provided services (Pearson Correlation coefficient =.659, Sig. (2-tailed) =.000). The results reflect that there is a positive effect of suggestions recommended by customers and using them to make changes in provided services especially with negative content. Travel agencies need to realize customer's recommendations and considering them as opportunities to make changes in provided services in order to improve their performance and achieve a high level of customer satisfaction.

The outputs of the questionnaire revealed that there is important positive correlation between perform competition benchmarking and, upgrade services and improve position in tourism market. Through reviews sites travel agencies can recognize what is on the Internet about top competitors. As a result; they will be interested in developing and raising the quality of their services in order to improve their position in the tourism market (Pearson Correlation coefficient =.718, Sig. (2-tailed) =.000).

Besides that; the results reflected a positive correlation between considering customer- generated reviews as an important source of information and knowing customers' needs and expectations (Pearson Correlation coefficient=.837 &Sig. (2 tailed) =.000). Respondents indicated that when they engage with CGRs, they could identify customers needs, expectations, then present their requirements, as well as, they considered CGRs a source of determining strength and weakness in their business (Pearson Correlation coefficient =.734 &Sig. 2=-.000). Moreover, for (61%) of the respondents, CGRs considered as a key performance indicator as shown in fig (3).



**Figure 3: CGRs as a key performance indicator**

It was demonstrated from the results that there is also a strong positive correlation between sharing positive reviews and strengthen reputation online (Pearson Correlation coefficient=.798 &Sig. (2 tailed) =.000). Customer feedback is not limited to negative comments, but there are also many customers tend to share their positive experiences. Sharing these positive reviews by travel agencies on different platforms and thanking customers contributes in strengthening and enhancing their online reputation.

**Finally; to conclude all the above,** Pearson's Correlation of the two main variables online reputation management and business success was conducted in table (2) to discover the impact of ORM practices and strategies followed by Egyptian travel agencies, which mentioned previously, on the success of their business. The results showed a significant positive correlation between managing reputation online especially customers' engagement and gaining positive impacts which leads to business success (Pearson Correlation coefficient =.869, Sig. (2-tailed) =.000).

**Table (2) Pearson's Correlation of the variables Online Reputation Management and Business Success Correlations**

	<b>ORM</b>	<b>Business Success</b>
Pearson Correlation	1	.869**
Sig. (2-tailed)		.000
N	393	393

\*\* . Correlation is significant at the 0.01 level (2-tailed).

Source: SPSS

## **CONCLUSION**

Recent web technology and internet applications have enabled travel agencies to manage their reputation and business online. Coombs (2015b) confirmed that review platforms are playing major part in organization's reputation management. The outcomes of the study showed that most of Egyptian travel agencies are increasingly rely on the internet especially review sites to build positive reputation and recognize what customers are saying about its brand, products and services in order to achieve business success.

The results confirmed that Egyptian travel agencies monitor, assess and try to control the perception of their reputation online to a great extent. It can be concluded that there are different practices followed by Egyptian travel agencies to achieve effective ORM such as manage content online, engage with customers... etc, but haven't been done through a clear policy or an obvious plan. The study also confirmed that CGRs have become an important source of information for most of the Egyptian travel agencies to know customers' requirements and points of strength and weakness, thus making corrective procedures on their products and services.

Therefore; service providers can no longer ignore the role of online review platforms not only for building positive online reputation but also for keeping it overtime. Furthermore, review sites are becoming increasingly popular and expected to be the primary online travel information sources.

So; tourism organizations have to face the threat of losing their reputation resulted from negative evaluations which can cause reputational damage (Horster and Gottschalk, 2012). Understanding the current customers, ensuring their loyalty, but more importantly predicting how to attract those tourists in future converting them from observers to buyers, will crucially impact how tourism organizations manage, develop and market their reputation online (Sotiriadis and Zyl, 2013; Cox et al., 2007).

It could be concluded that the challenge Egyptian travel agencies face in tourism sector is how to be integrated in the various review sites and ensuring that they have enough interaction with customers and tourists, as well as, reach to all online review data to make successful management of their online reputation.

## **RECOMMENDATIONS**

Based on the results of this study, the following recommendations should be considered:

- All actors in the tourism business have to be aware of the importance of ORM which affected business success.
- Each travel agency should have a clear plan for ORM and update it continuously according to business requirements.
- Travel agencies have to take advantage of their online presence through maintaining an active attendance on major reviews sites and popular social channels
- Tourism organizations should gain control of the situation, protect their valuable reputation from crisis and increase customers' trust which will result in achieving business success and gaining competitive advantage.
- Make sure that staff has a clear understanding of the ORM concept, strategy and its proper application.

- Staff must be trained to empower them how to deal with CGRs through effective organized programs.
- Ensuring enough interaction with customer-generated reviews must be considered to identify their needs, expectations and present their requirements.
- It is necessary to engage with CGRs and solve their complaints. This will maintain loyal customers with an obvious vision of their role in the marketing process and their contribution to the success of business.

#### **LIMITATION:**

The study showed that ORM in the travel industry is therefore a direction for future research. This can be done by evaluating each step of ORM at travel agencies separately, in order to get a clear picture of each stage. Also; an investigation of ORM practices in different regions in Egypt is required. As well; comparison between these regions should be done to find out the best application of ORM. On the other hand ORM during crisis is an important point of research especially with the frequent crises which affecting the tourism sector.

Also; it is helpful to make future studies to handle the concept of CGRs in the Egyptian travel industry, determining the appropriate policies and procedures for customer engagement. Besides that, different types of travel agencies should be investigated to discover whether they have ORM plan or not.

Additional future studies might discover the situation in the governmental tourist organizations such the Ministry of Tourism and the Egyptian Tourist Authority. Furthermore; investigate how to make cooperation between public and private tourism sector to design a successful plan for online reputation management at a destination level (DORM).

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