

# EXAMINING THE EFFECT OF SOCIAL MEDIA ON ONLINE REPUTATION MANAGEMENT OF HOTELS: SPECIAL REFERENCE TO DOWNSOUTH DURING COVID 19 PANDEMIC

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COVID 19 has halt the worlds' operations physically. All most all the industries in the world has collapsed, forcing them to decide whether to seized the business or continue. Social Media came in to the stage becoming a decisive factor in deciding the survival of the business and industries. Social media being the main influential factor in New Normal has created a massive need for all the industries operating in the world. COVID 19 has made the world virtual and penetrating, but social media supports in the smooth virtual operation of the world irrespective of the field. Hotel or the tourism field, dealing with the guest satisfaction needed special concentration in building the reputation and trust with the guests during COVID 19. In consonant with this, the study aims to examine the effect of Social Media on Online Reputation Management of the Hotels: special reference to Downsouth Sri Lanka. A sample of 8 hotels were selected among hoteliers in Downsouth based on the purposive sample method. The study employed the thematic analysis to analyze the outcomes of the interviews held between the hotels. Social Media Marketing Communication Mix considered as the parental theme, while, Social Media Marketing Strategies, Social Media Sales Promotion and Social Media Interactive Marketing being the sub themes of the study. The major findings of the study revealed that Facebook and Instagram plays a significant role in maintaining and acquiring Online Hotel Reputation, becoming the most influential factors. Less attention was seized by YouTube due to time factor being discussed. Through, Viral Intimacy Marketing Campaigns and Paid Advertising, the hotels have earned a significant and considerable online recognition and online reputation to optimize their occupancy levels. Viral Intimacy Marketing has acquired a core benefits to the hotel in advertising and sales promotion while being the least cost effective method. This study emphasize that Social Media is acting as the rescuer in pandemic situations due to uninterrupted service offered. Further studies on the mediating factor of WOW and WOM marketing and Customer Brand Insistence is needed to be carried out in Hotels in examining the effect on social media on On-line Reputation Management.

**Keywords:** *Social media; Online reputation management; COVID 19; New normal; Paid advertising; Viral Intimacy marketing*