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## How Review Valence Benefits Umrah Sales Performance: The Moderating Role of Price

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### Cover Page Footnote

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# How Review Valence Benefits Umrah Sales Performance: The Moderating Role of Price

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The influence of online consumer reviews on a firm's sales performance has not yet been investigated in the field of Umrah. In addition, the literature does not explain how price moderates the relationship between online consumer reviews and a firm's sales performance. Thus, the research objective of this paper is to examine the influence of Umrah online consumer reviews, specifically review valence, on Umrah operator sales performance, with Umrah package price acting as the moderator. 82 Malaysian Umrah operators were involved in this study. The secondary data for Umrah online consumer reviews were collected from Google Maps reviews, which matched Umrah operators' sales data in 2019. The data were examined using a descriptive analysis followed by multiple regression analysis. The Statistical Package for the Social Sciences software was used to analyse the data. Interestingly, the findings of this study indicate that review valence significantly influences Umrah operator sales performance. Positive and neutral valence positively influences Umrah operator sales performance, whereas negative valence does not. Surprisingly, the moderating effect of Umrah's package price was not significant. As a result, Umrah operators should work to maintain positive and impartial reviews and continuously monitor negative reviews and respond well to them.

**Key Words:** Umrah industry, religious tourism, online consumer reviews, review valence, sales performance

## Introduction

Umrah is a form of Muslim worship that can be performed in addition to Hajj. The difference is Umrah can be performed throughout the year, while Hajj is performed in the Islamic month of Zulhijjah (Azmana *et al.*, 2017; Muneeza & Mustaph., 2021). Many Muslims from around the world came to Mecca to perform Umrah worship. Several parties benefit from this industry, including airline operators, hotels, transportation providers, Umrah agency operators, and others (Ishak & Harun, 2019). This religious travel enables the Umrah operator country, Saudi Arabia, and other Muslim countries to benefit economically.

The Malaysian Ministry of Tourism, Arts, and Culture (MOTAC) recognises the importance of the Umrah industry for boosting the Malaysian economy. This industry value is more than 477 million US dollars (MOTAC, 2018). Millions of Malaysians performed

Umrah from 2009 to 2018 (Department of Wakaf, Zakat & Hajj, 2019). The highest volume was recorded in 2017 when more than 250,000 Malaysians performed Umrah (Tourism Malaysia, 2017). To meet demand, the number of Umrah operators has risen yearly (MOTAC, 2017), which demonstrates the significance of the Umrah industry as a key industry in the Malaysian economy.

However, the Malaysian Umrah industry faces numerous hurdles to surviving continuously. Umrah sales fell by 46 percent in 2018, which could be attributed to numerous fraud cases (Department of Wakaf, Zakat & Hajj, 2019; Berita Harian Online, 2019; Harian Metro, 2019; Star Online, 2018; Utusan Borneo, 2015). Customers may be hesitating to employ Umrah operators due to these fraud issues. As a consequence, most Umrah operators' sales performance declined. Therefore, it is crucial to conduct studies that can aid Umrah operators in resolving this issue, such as looking into Online Consumer Reviews (OCR).

The COVID-19 pandemic has had a substantial negative influence on worldwide business, including the travel industry (Muneeza & Mustapha, 2021; Raj & Bozonelos, 2020; Statista, 2022). Barriers to international travel have caused many companies to lose customers, including Umrah operators. Fortunately, by the time of writing this paper, Saudi Arabia's Ministry of Health has removed all COVID-19 restrictions, including mandatory quarantine for all visitors to the country (Bernama, 2022). The move was taken following a drop in cases, and the vaccination rate reaching 99 percent for all residents aged 12 and above. As a result, this action enhances the demand for Umrah.

In order to promote growth in this industry, exploring various aspects of marketing, such as the benefit to Umrah operators of evaluating OCR, should be the main focus of research into the quality of services provided by Umrah operators. Raj & Bozonelos (2020) stated that the pandemic is an opportunity for stakeholders such as Umrah operators to re-evaluate their customer service. This can be done in various ways, such as by exploring OCR. Therefore, research on OCR and a firm's sales performance in the context of the Umrah industry is very pertinent to be explored.

Furthermore, research on Umrah marketing in Malaysia is quite scarce. Some previous studies in Umrah have been conducted in fields other than marketing, such as technology application (Rahim *et al.*, 2013; Majid *et al.*, 2016; Al-Aidaros & Abdul Mutalib, 2015; Wahab, Ahmad & Jusoff, 2013; Thimm, 2018). For example, Majid *et al.* (2016) worked on applications that can help pilgrims remember the processes involved in performing Umrah, including prayers and steps. Another example is the study by Wahab *et al.* (2013) on Islamic finance in Umrah. In particular, Wahab *et al.* (2013) examined the role of socioeconomic characteristics in facilitating frequent visitors from Malaysia to perform Umrah. Thimm (2008) researched Malaysian women's shopping behavior when completing Umrah and visiting Dubai. Overall, the topic of Umrah marketing is still underresearched in Malaysia.

Even though there have been numerous studies on OCR, few examine how OCR influences a firm's sales performance context (Ishak & Harun, 2019; Kim *et al.*,

2016; Ghose & Ipeiritos, 2006; Chevalier & Mayzlin, 2006). Some earlier studies concentrate on the influence of OCR in the context of consumer product industries rather than firm sales performance (Kim *et al.*, 2015); for instance, studies by Chevalier and Mayzlin (2006) on book sales, Zhang *et al.* (2013) on camera sales, and Hyrynsalmi *et al.* (2015) on mobile application sales. Some Malaysian Umrah operators are questioning the effectiveness of OCR in driving sales to their agency. This illustrates the importance of examining the influence of OCR in a firm performance context.

Many studies relating to OCR and a firm's sales performance have been conducted in the context of hotels and restaurants (Chen, Wu & Yoon, 2004; Chevalier & Mayzlin, 2006; Dellarocas, Zhang & Awad, 2007; Forman, Ghose & Wiesenfeld, 2008; Ye *et al.*, 2009; Kaur & Singh, 2021). However, few OCR studies have been conducted in the context of the travel industry in general, and even less in relation to the Umrah industry in particular. Since every industry has unique circumstances, the conclusions regarding OCR in other industries cannot be generalised (Kaur & Singh, 2021). In this light, we suggest that conducting OCR research in the context of the Umrah industry can significantly contribute to this research area. The current study objective, thus, is to examine the influence of OCR, specifically review valence (e.g., positive valence, neutral valence, and negative valence) on Umrah operators' sales performance, Umrah package price acting as the moderator.

## Literature Review and Hypothesis Development

### *Online Consumer Reviews are Essential for Marketing*

Online Consumer Reviews (OCR) play some critical roles in digital marketing. They are an online resource for information that offers reliable customer feedback on effective products or services (Godes & Mayzlin, 2004; Ha *et al.*, 2015; Dellarocas *et al.*, 2007; Hu *et al.*, 2008). They are much trusted since they are created by customers who previously used a product or service. In the current study context, customers can learn more about the service quality of an Umrah operator by looking at the information in their OCR. Service quality is one of the essential factors influencing customers' choice of

Umrah operators in Malaysia (Othman & Harun, 2021). Apart from the quality of service, customers also express their satisfaction (i.e., feelings) with firms in the OCR. Consequently, other consumers can also see the firm image and reputation on OCR platforms. Therefore, firms should utilise OCR, particularly the review valence, which includes positive, neutral, and negative reviews.

### *The Relationship Between Positive Valence and Umrah Sales Performance*

Positive valence refers to the positive rating made by customers in OCR, and it is measured by four (4) and five (5) star ratings (Ewalda & Lu, 2014; Dellarocas *et al.*, 2007; Li *et al.*, 2013; Langan *et al.*, 2017). Previous studies found that positive valence significantly affects sales performance (Chevalier & Mayzlin, 2006; Basuroy, Chatterjee & Ravid, 2003; Dellarocas *et al.*, 2007; Ye *et al.*, 2009). For example, a study by Chevalier & Mayzlin (2006) on e-commerce sites (e.g., Amazon.com) found a positive influence of positive valence (i.e., 5-star rating) on the sales performance of books. Clemons *et al.* (2006) studied the craft beer industry and discovered that strongly positive valence would lead to significant growth in product sales. Positive valence is also more influential than others (Clemons *et al.*, 2006).

Basuroy *et al.* (2003) studied this in the context of motion pictures, which involved 200 films released between late 1991 and early 1993, and found that positive valence is correlated with weekly box office revenue. Dellarocas *et al.* (2007), in their study on a movie released in the United States in 2002, found that the positive valence of the film statistically has a positive relationship with future box office sales performance. Another study by Roy *et al.* (2017) on anti-virus software sold on e-commerce websites (e.g., Amazon-India and Flipkart), discovered that positive valence positively influences sales performance. Therefore, the studies above reveal that positive valence significantly influences sales performance. Based on that explanation, positive valence may positively influence Umrah operators' sales performance, and it is crucial to be examined. Thus, the present study postulates that:

**H1:** If the OCR platform received more positive valence, the sales performance of Umrah operators would be higher.

### *The Relationship Between Neutral Valence and Umrah Sales Performance*

Neutral valence refers to a moderate opinion about a product or service measured by three (3) star ratings (Park & Nicolau, 2015; Yang *et al.*, 2016; Xie *et al.*, 2014; Mafe *et al.*, 2018; Mudambi & Schuff, 2010). Prior studies found that neutral valence positively influences a firm's sales performance (Roy *et al.*, 2017; Sonnier, Mcalister & Rutz, 2011; Tang, Fang & Wang, 2014; Yang & Normal, 2018). For instance, a study by Roy *et al.* (2017) examined the influence of neutral valence and found that neutral valence positively influences sales performance on e-commerce websites. Another study by Sonnier *et al.* (2011) on firm sales performance found that neutral valence positively affects daily sales performance. They stated that this could be due to neutral valences spreading product or service awareness to consumers, enhancing sales performance (Sonnier *et al.*, 2011). Tang *et al.* (2014) found that neutral valence positively influences business sales performance; therefore, ignoring neutral valence may substantially overestimate the effect of positive and negative valence.

Yang & Normal (2018) conducted a study on the computer tablet market on Amazon.com and found that neutral valence can positively affect sales performance, which marketers need to use to persuade consumers. The researchers established that neutral valence could encourage optimal enthusiasm and be the most effective way to motivate review readers to process OCR information (Yang & Normal, 2018). The previously mentioned studies revealed that neutral valences in OCR could positively affect sales performance. Therefore, neutral valence may positively influence Umrah operators' sales performance, and it is essential to examine it. The present study postulates that:

**H2:** If the neutral valence received by the OCR platform increases, the sales performance of Umrah operators also increases.

### *The Relationship Between Negative Valence and Umrah Sales Performance*

Negative valence in the present study refers to consumers' negative feedback about a product or service



that is measured by one (1) and two (2) stars on the OCR platform (Mudambi & Schuff, 2010; Park & Nicolau, 2015; Xie *et al.*, 2014; Zhao *et al.*, 2015). Numerous prior studies found that negative valence in OCR negatively influences sales performance (Chevalier & Mayzlin, 2006; Zhang *et al.*, 2013; Basuroy *et al.*, 2003; Sonnier *et al.*, 2011). For example, a study by Chen, Wu & Yoon (2004) gathered data from e-commerce websites (e.g., Amazon.com) and found that negative valence (i.e., 2-star rating) negatively influences sales performance. A study by Chevalier & Mayzlin (2006) on book sales performance on Amazon.com also found evidence that an incremental negative valence of precisely one (1) star is more persuasive in diminishing book sales than a total of positive valence. Zhang *et al.* (2013), in their study on camera sales on Amazon.com, found that negative valence significantly harms sales performance. The study explained that negative valence, especially one (1) star, has more influence than a positive five (5) star rating.

Another study by Basuroy *et al.* (2003) found that negative valence in OCR significantly decreases film sales performance, especially during the first week of a film's launch. The study by Sonnier *et al.* (2011) demonstrated that negative valence negatively affects sales performance, which indicates that the higher the negative valence, the lower the daily sales performance. Negative valence will activate higher risk perception among review readers and a less favourable attitude than positive valence (Yang *et al.*, 2016). As a result, sales performance may decrease when the negative valence number increases. Therefore, based on that argument, negative valence may negatively influence Umrah operators' sales performance, and it is crucial to be examined. The current study postulates as follow:

**H3:** If the OCR platform received more negative valence, the Umrah operators' sales performance would decrease.

### *The Moderating Role of Umrah Package Price*

The price of an Umrah package plays an essential role in the relationship between OCR and Umrah operator sales performance. Based on Hyrynsalmi *et al.* (2015), consumers may survey product prices before making a purchase decision and rely strongly on OCR when the

price increases. Floyd *et al.* (2014) and Maeyer (2015) stated that the price of a product significantly influences customers' purchase decisions, which also affects sales. Floyd *et al.* (2014) found that different price levels influence consumer perception of the product or service. Even though they will rely on OCR, consumers will read cautiously when the price is higher, because it entails a more significant risk (Floyd *et al.*, 2014). In the context of Umrah, the minimum price of a package is \$US 1140, which involves high costs and risks (Department of Wakaf, Zakat & Hajj, 2014). As a result, Umrah customers may spend more time studying Umrah operators' OCR and Umrah packages before making a decision. Therefore, examining how Umrah package price moderates the relationship between OCR and Umrah operator sales performance is crucial.

Previous studies show that price as a moderator could influence the relationship between OCR and sales performance (Hyrynsalmi *et al.*, 2015; Ye *et al.*, 2009; Moen *et al.*, 2017; Archak *et al.*, 2011; Maslowska *et al.*, 2017). For instance, a study was conducted by Hyrynsalmi *et al.* (2015) in the context of a mobile application. The study examined the influence of price as the moderator on the relationship between OCR (e.g., overall rating, rating variance, and rating volume) and the sales performance of the mobile application. The study found that the relationship between OCR and sales performance becomes more crucial and effective when mobile application prices rise. However, literature in this area on this relationship is still limited. Moen *et al.* (2017) proposed future research to examine the moderating effect of price on OCR relationship with sales performance. Thus, the studies mentioned above show that a product's price might moderate the relationship between OCR and sales performance. Therefore, based on the above arguments, this study examines the moderating influence of Umrah package price on the relationship between OCR (e.g., review valence) and Umrah operator sales performance.

The following hypotheses were developed:

**H4:** The average price of the Umrah package moderates the relationship between dimensions of review valence and sales performance of Umrah operators.

**Table 1: Description of Variables in this Study**

Variables	Data Sources	Measurements
Positive valence	Google review platform	The number of 4-star and 5-star ratings (Park & Nicolau, 2015; Mudambi & Schuff, 2010; Chevalier & Mayzlin, 2006).
Neutral valence	Google review platform	The number of 3-star ratings (Park & Nicolau, 2015; Yang <i>et al.</i> , 2016; Xie <i>et al.</i> , 2014).
Negative valence	Google review platform	The number of 1-star and 2-star ratings (Park & Nicolau, 2015; Mudambi & Schuff, 2010).
Sales performance	Companies Commission of Malaysia (SSM)	Each operator's actual sales data in 2019 (Kim <i>et al.</i> , 2016).
Package price	Umrah Operators' website	Each operator's average Umrah package price (Hyrynsalmi <i>et al.</i> , 2015).

**H4 (a):** The average price of the Umrah package moderates the relationship between positive valence and sales performance of Umrah operators.

**H4 (b):** The average price of the Umrah package moderates the relationship between neutral valence and sales performance of Umrah operators.

**H4 (c):** The average price of the Umrah package moderates the relationship between negative valence and sales performance of Umrah operators.

## Methodology

The research population comprises 296 Malaysian Umrah operators registered with MOTAC in 2019. Out of 296 operators, 82 were selected. This study used a probability sampling technique to select Umrah operators to be included in the sample that are specifically stratified and systematically sampled (Sekaran & Bougie, 2010, p.297; Pandey & Pandey, 2015, p. 49). Since the independent and dependent variables were obtained from secondary data, sample selection was also based on the availability of sufficient secondary data (i.e., OCR, sales performance, and package price data) (Hyrynsalmi *et al.*, 2015).

In this research, there are five (5) variables: three (3) independent variables, one (1) dependent variable, and one (1) moderator variable. The independent variables are positive, neutral, and negative valence, while the dependent variable is the firm's sales performance. The price of the Umrah package is the moderator variable. A single item on the ratio scale was used to measure all variables (Kim *et al.*, 2016; Hair *et al.*, 2021). As shown

in Table 1, each variable was created using secondary data collected from their respective sources.

Based on Table 1, the positive valence was measured by obtaining the number of 4-star and 5-star ratings for each Umrah operator. The number of 3-star ratings for each Umrah operator was obtained to measure neutral valence, whereas the 1-star and 2-star ratings were obtained to measure negative valence. This measurement approach was adopted from previous studies (Park & Nicolau, 2015; Mudambi & Schuff, 2010; Chevalier & Mayzlin, 2006). The sales performance variable is the actual sales data from the Malaysian Companies Commission. Meanwhile, the moderator variable is each operator's average Umrah package price (Hyrynsalmi *et al.*, 2015). Table 1 shows that the variables in this study were obtained using secondary data, an approach adapted from previous studies.

To analyse the data, first, we presented descriptive statistics to show a detailed picture of all the variables in this study. We then discussed the results of normality and multicollinearity. Finally, we conducted a series of hierarchical multiple-regression analyses to examine the research hypotheses. We used IBM SPSS version 23 to analyse the data in this study. In addition, this study adopted the logarithmic transformation (i.e., log<sub>10</sub>) of the values for sales performance instead of the original raw values because the logarithmic transformation improved model fit in the linear regression (Kerckhoff & Enquist, 2009; Kim *et al.*, 2016; Zhang *et al.*, 2010). In particular, the logarithmic transformation makes data normal, whereas data normality is essential in multiple regression analysis. Overall, the data analysis in this

**Table 2: Descriptive Statistics of All Variables (n=82)**

Variables	Mean	Mode	SD	Skew.	Min.	Max.	Scale
Positive valence	10.18	2	16.88	3.49	0	93	Ratio
Neutral valence	0.73	0	1.08	1.71	0	5	Ratio
Negative valence	0.72	0	1.57	4.16	0	11	Ratio
Sales performance	10921627.49	41280	25000598.60	6.65	41280	211162134	Ratio
Package price	7146.30	7240	896.43	1.58	5590	10605	Ratio

study is appropriate. The following section discusses in detail the data analysis and findings.

### Data Analysis and Findings

The descriptive analysis for the current study is shown in Table 2 and provides a thorough picture of the secondary data gathered in this study. The minimum and maximum values show that all variables are continuous variables measured on a ratio scale. Ratio scales have an absolute zero value and continuously point along the range (Hair *et al.*, 2021; Cresswell, 2012). Therefore, all independent variables in this study have an absolute zero value, which shows that the variables were correctly measured.

For positive valence, the mean value of 10.18 showed that, on average, each Umrah operator obtained ten positive reviews in the year 2019. Compared with the minimum and maximum values, the value of 10 showed that the positive reviews received by Malaysian Umrah operators are at a low level. The neutral valence average score of 0.73 shows that, on average, Umrah operators received one (1) neutral review. The same goes for negative valence, which obtained an average score of 0.72 and showed that each Umrah operator received an average of one (1) negative review. This shows that neutral and negative valence is still at low levels compared to their minimum and maximum scores. The descriptive statistics show that Umrah operators received more positive reviews than neutral or negative ones in 2019.

In data distribution, the skewness values for all independent variables are between -5.0 and 5.0; thus, these values meet the normality assumption (Kim *et al.*, 2016). Normality is one of the necessary conditions that must be met to conduct a parametric analysis like multiple regression analysis (MRA) (Neuberger *et al.*, 2014). The validity of the analysis depends on this normality assumption (Ghasemi & Zahediasl, 2012). Therefore, the results of the normality test show that the current study has no issue with the assumption.

Another vital assumption for conducting MRA is the multicollinearity test. All independent variables must have a variance inflation factor (VIF) value of less than 5.0 or at least below 10 and a tolerance value of more than 0.1 (O'Brien, 2007; Hair *et al.*, 2021). The exceeding VIF value indicates collinearity problems that may affect the standard error as well as the significance of the relationship (Hair *et al.*, 2021). Thus, assessing the VIF value for independent variables in this study is essential. The result is presented in Table 3. In this study, the VIF values are between 1.139 and 2.021, and the tolerance values are between 0.495 and 0.878. Thus, there is no multicollinearity issue in this study.

We next performed hierarchical regression analyses to examine the influence of the review valence dimensions (e.g., positive valence, neutral valence, and negative valence) on Umrah operators' sales performance. These analyses consist of three steps. Firstly, we analysed the influence of the review valence dimensions on the

**Table 3: Collinearity Diagnostics (n=82)**

Independent Variable	Tolerance Value	VIF Value
Positive valence	0.495	2.021
Neutral valence	0.878	1.139
Negative valence	0.539	1.854



<b>Dependent variable</b>	<b>Variables</b>	<b>Std. beta</b>	<b>Std. beta</b>	<b>Std. beta</b>
<i>Sales Performance</i>	<i>Independent Variable</i>	Step 1	Step 2	Step 3
	Positive valence (PV)	0.281*	0.276*	0.271*
	Neutral valence (NV)	0.364**	0.376**	0.109
	Negative valence (NG)	0.121	0.119	-0.073
	<b><i>Moderating variable</i></b>			
	Package price (PP)		0.092	0.113
	<b><i>Interaction terms</i></b>			
	PP*PV			0.075
	PP*NV			0.238
	PP*NG			0.254
R <sup>2</sup>		0.36	0.369	0.434
Adjusted R <sup>2</sup>		0.336	0.336	0.381
R <sup>2</sup> Change		0.36	0.369	0.434
F Change		14.656	11.248	8.119
Sig. F Change		0	0	0

\*p < 0.05, \*\*p < 0.01

Umrah operators' sales performance. Then, we examined the influence of prices on the Umrah operators' sales performance. Lastly, we entered interaction terms between each dimension of review valence and price (e.g., independent variables  $\times$  package price) to examine the moderating effect. The results are presented in Table 4.

Table 4 below shows the result of hierarchical multiple regression analyses. Step 1 demonstrates that neutral valence strongly and positively influences Umrah operators' sales performance ( $\beta=0.364$ ,  $p<0.01$ ). Positive valence was also found to have a positive influence on Umrah sales performance ( $\beta=0.281$ ,  $p<0.05$ ). This result shows that H1 and H2 are supported. Surprisingly, negative valence was found to have no significant influence on Umrah sales performance. Thus, H3 is not supported ( $\beta = 0.121$ ,  $p < 0.05$ ).

In step 2, we discovered that the Umrah package's price does not positively influence Umrah's sales performance ( $\beta=0.092$ ,  $p < 0.05$ ). In step 3, we entered the interaction terms between the dimensions of review valence and price (i.e., the moderator). Surprisingly, we found that none of the interactions significantly moderated the relationship between review valence dimensions and sales performance. Thus, H4 (a), H4 (b), and H4 (c) are

not supported in this study. As a result, H4 is also not supported.

## Discussion and Implications

Malaysian Umrah operators need to appreciate the role of OCR in contributing to an excellent firm sales performance in today's Internet world. The OCRs in this study are positive valence, neutral valence, and negative valence. The present study found a significant positive influence of review valence (e.g., positive and neutral valence) on firm sales performance for the Umrah operators in Malaysia. The following subsections discuss in detail the implications and contributions of this study.

### Theoretical Implications

We discovered that positive valence (i.e., positive reviews) positively influences Umrah operator sales performance. This is in line with the previous study findings (Chevalier & Mayzlin, 2006; Basuroy *et al.*, 2003; Ye *et al.*, 2009; Dellarocas *et al.*, 2007). However, the current study findings provide some differences. This study revealed that positive review substantially influences consumer purchase decisions even though it involves higher risk; for example, higher product price. In the current study, the Umrah package price is higher

than in other industries (e.g., hotels and restaurants), which may indicate a higher risk to customers. However, most Umrah customers are still willing to purchase the package. This shows that even though the product is high-risk, due to cost, a customer may purchase it if the review is majorly positive. This indicates the importance of increasing the number of positive reviews. The large proportion of positive reviews demonstrated that the firms could be trusted, encouraging customers to buy the product (Dellarocas *et al.*, 2007).

In this study, neutral valence (i.e., moderate review) positively influences Umrah operators' sales performance as per the study conducted by Tang *et al.* (2014). However, the current study findings provide some direction in relation to the mixed findings of previous studies (Roy *et al.*, 2017; Sonnier, Mcalister & Rutz, 2011; Tang *et al.*, 2014; Yang & Normal, 2018). The positive influence of neutral valence on sales performance is because neutral valence is the midpoint of a rating established to be an appropriate measure of a middle-ground attitude (Mudambi & Schuff, 2010). Excluding neutral valence from the OCR system may systematically affect responses' relative distribution (Nowlis *et al.*, 2010). The neutral valence also spreads consumer product or service awareness, thus helps to enhance sales increments (Sonnier *et al.*, 2011). As a result, neutral valence was found to positively influence Umrah operator sales performance.

Surprisingly, negative valence did not influence Umrah operators' sales performance in this study. The large proportion of positive reviews in the OCR system causes the effect of a negative review on customers to disappear. This is supported by the study of Phillips & Barnes (2016) in the hotel context, which found no paths for negative valence toward sales performance. The current study shows that negative valence does not necessarily influence sales performance. However, marketers still need to monitor and respond to negative reviews since they can express a negative image on the OCR platform (Yang *et al.*, 2016; Zhu & Zhang, 2010). Firms must keep a close view of the review valence to preserve a positive online image and reputation.

Last but not least, this study discovered that Umrah package prices do not moderate the relationship between

OCR (i.e., positive valence, neutral valence, and negative valence) and Umrah operator sales performance. Although this result differs from the previous studies (Hyrnsalmi *et al.*, 2015; Moen *et al.*, 2017), it demonstrates that the OCR (e.g., positive review and impartial review) has a substantial direct influence on firm sales performance. This finding also exemplifies that customers care more about the company's service quality than the cost of the packages it offers, particularly in the context of the Umrah industry. As a result, the Umrah package price does not moderate the relationship between OCR and firm sales performance.

### **Literature Contribution**

This study contributes to the body of literature in three different ways. Firstly, this study extends the research on Umrah marketing, especially in Malaysia. As discussed earlier in the introduction section, most prior studies in the Umrah context focused on technology applications, finance, and economics rather than marketing. To our knowledge, this is the first study on Umrah marketing, specifically on OCR.

Secondly, this study broadens previous research on the influence of OCR on firm sales performance rather than product sales. The firm itself serves as the unit of analysis when analysing the company's sales performance. However, in product sales, the product serves as the analysis unit. A study such as this needs to be conducted from the firm's perspective to answer the questions raised by the industry players (Kim *et al.*, 2015). The current study thus, adds to the few earlier ones that looked into the effect of OCR on firm sales performance.

Thirdly, the current study adds more literature on the influence of OCR on firm sales performance in a new context, namely the Umrah industry. Since Umrah is a worldwide Muslim practice, it differs from other industries. One of the exciting findings in this study is that the price of the Umrah package does not moderate the relationship between OCR and Umrah operator sales performance, which is quite different from past studies in other industries (Hyrnsalmi *et al.*, 2015). This demonstrates that findings may vary depending on the industry. The literature on OCR can be further expanded by looking at OCR from this unique perspective.

## Conclusion

The present study gives a practical understanding, especially for Umrah operators who want to enhance their sales performance. These findings may also be useful to other industries. Firstly, the higher the number of positive and neutral valences, the better the firm's sales performance. To generate more positive and neutral valence, a firm should give the best services to customers and encourage them to share their feedback on trusted and independent review platforms such as Google map reviews. Firms can implement a customer incentive system to encourage more feedback. OCR is important, especially for millennials or generation Y, who prefer online media over offline media (Kim *et al.*, 2016). Thus, encouraging delighted customers to give feedback is essential and crucial.

Secondly, it was found that negative valences do not necessarily have a negative influence on firm sales performance. However, firms still need to closely monitor negative valence since it can give a negative image of firms (Chevalier & Mayzlin, 2006). Firms must respond wisely when facing negative valence, as other customers may see the replies. The negative image can be decreased if the replies and explanations are appropriate. Firms must maintain a high level of positive and neutral valence compared to negative valence.

Thirdly, this study found that product price does not moderate the relationship between OCR and firm sales performance. It indicates that the customers are searching

for quality of service information provided in the OCR rather than the product pricing. The customer wants the service received to be worth the price paid. Customers will only be satisfied if the quality of the services they receive matches the cost. Thus, firms must re-evaluate their service quality to meet customer expectations.

In a nutshell, to sustain and enhance the firm's sales performance, particularly in today's Internet world, OCR is of the utmost importance. Firms need to increase positive and neutral valence meanwhile decreasing and closely monitoring negative valence since it exposes a firm's image and reputation via online review platforms. Firms must also recruit personnel to handle and monitor OCR platforms. Generally, a marketer or business manager can use OCR to enhance sales for the company in the short or long term while also preserving the company's online reputation.

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