

A Study of Negative Customer Online Reviews and Managerial Responses on Social Media— Case Study of the Marriott Hotel Group in Beijing

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Abstract

Putting customers at the center of business is the priority for the global hospitality and tourism companies. The importance of customer satisfaction and perceived higher quality of service dictate the branding images for global hotels within this era of social media. Managers need to understand the nature of online customers' reviews, which can help hotels to reflect on their operations and improve their service quality. The purpose of this paper is to explore the major reasons for hotel customers' complaints on social media, and discuss how hotel managers respond to these. Researches have showed that negative online reviews have much greater impacts on customers decision making compared with positive reviews in hospitality industry. Limited negative reviews can influence hotels business performance in a long period of time, while many hospitality organisations ignore this challenging issue or not pay enough attention. This study chooses the Marriott Hotel Group in Beijing as a case study. A quantitative content study of customers' online reviews and hotel managers' responses to these on TripAdvisor was conducted through a netnographic analysis process. The authors aim to analyze in greater detail the effects of hotel attributes on hotel business performance considering customers' voice as expressed through their negative reviews. It was found that employees' lack of empathy is the main factor underlying customer complaints, followed by reliability, tangible factors, amenities and availability. The managerial responses were analyzed to identify the patterns and key words. The outcome provides a guidance tool for hotel management regarding which service elements to improve and how to respond appropriately to negative reviews.

Keywords: Customer satisfaction, e-WOM, Service failure, Social media, Negative Reviews, TripAdvisor, Hospitality management, qualitative content analysis

Introduction

Social media are becoming increasingly crucial to the hospitality and tourism business as they facilitate two-way communication between consumers (Sigala, et al., 2012). Therefore, social media can reflect the most consumers' opinions in the decision-making process. Also, the World Wide Web now makes available a vast range of information from thousands of places worldwide (Theobald and Dunsmore, 2000, p.58). Furthermore, Samylin (2016) stated that the social media platforms are becoming the number one priority in the business environment, and an increasing number of businesses are realizing the need to engage in marketing communication with their customers via social media. Accordingly, social media have a strong effect on consumers' hotel bookings, so this study focuses on the major reasons underlying customer complaints on social media, and how hotel managers respond to these.

Social Media Marketing within the Hotel Industry

According to WTTC (2017), tourism and travel has become the world's largest industry, accounting for 9% of global GDP, and creating more than 6 billion US dollars and 225 million jobs worldwide. Tourism and hospitality services are commonly known as "time-based performances" (Aparna, 2004). These products have characteristics such as inseparability, intangibility, perishability and variability (Rust et al., 1996). In addition, Lovelock (1991; 2009) considers that products and services differ significantly, which makes the hospitality and tourism service difficult to standardize, and it is challenging to ensure that customers will be 100% satisfied with a service at all times.

Traditionally, customers who felt dissatisfied with a service complained directly to the frontline staff or in an indirect manner by writing a letter or making comments on a guest satisfaction card. Some customers did not complain to the management, but shared the incident with their friends and family instead. Nowadays, the increased use of travel reviews and social media websites has changed how customers express their dissatisfaction. The purpose of this study is to investigate the main issues that lead to customer dissatisfaction and negative reviews when they stay in luxury hotels, and how managers deal with these comments when a service failure occurs.

Social media currently have a strong impact on the customers' purchase behavior in terms of tourism and hospitality products, especially the millennial generation and generation X. With more than a million hotels listed, 453 million reviews and opinions and 390 million users, TripAdvisor is the top tourism and hospitality social media website and application, where users can read and write reviews about locations, restaurants and accommodation (TripAdvisor, 2017). Hospitality organizations worldwide, both big and small, are competing

intensively to acquire good reviews on TripAdvisor and other social media sites in order to attract more customers. Complaining on social media is faster, easier, and cheaper than the traditional methods. These e-reviews reach a wider audience and remain visible for a long time. Service providers' offerings are intangible, and therefore dependent on perceived image and reputation. Understanding customers and responding to their complaints online has become a critical activity for hospitality enterprises.

Social media play an important role in hotels' marketing plans, and social media marketing helps hotels to engage in two-way communication with their guests about their services and properties (Camaide, 2013). Also, social media are a crucial tool that enables hotels to target a wider customer base, with fewer geographical constraints, and engage in quality conversations with their customers via social media marketing (Dev, 2013). Therefore, social media are a convenient tool that helps hotels to build their communication with a wide range of customers about their services and properties.

Social media marketing plays several key roles in the hotel industry, including enhancing the communication, promotion and management strategy (Leung et al., 2013). Firstly, according to Leung et al. (2013), social media are a group that exists on the Web 2.0 platform to enable users to interact, communicate, and share their thoughts, so that hotels can create a fully interactive relationship with their guests via social media marketing.

Secondly, social media play an important role in helping consumers to obtain hotel-related information and can also advertise destinations as a tourism marketing tool (Leung et al., 2013). The development of social media helps hotels to promote their advertisement among their target consumers (Wilson, 2015). Finally, social media are a substantial source of strategic information about the management of hotels. For instance, they provide a valuable tool for collecting customers' comments (Leung et al., 2013). Also, according to Kang (2011), social media are a new marketing channel that enable hotels to develop a deeper understanding of their consumers' needs and preferences, and also allows them to respond to their consumers directly.

On the other hand, social media also suffer from several limitations in the hotel industry. For instance, another aspect of social media marketing is that some negative consumer responses may damage the management of the hotels, and non-constructive feedback cannot be ignored (Abrons, 2017). Therefore, the hotels should ensure that they manage the social media efficiently by responding to and counteracting any negative feedback to ensure that social media marketing plays a positive role in the hotel industry.

Social media can be defined as online tools/applications/networks/platforms that can provide consumers with the ability to interact with each other and share responses (Ali and Frew, 2013, p.123). Also, according to Sigala et al. (2012, p.87), there is a growing number of consumers who are consuming and participating in various online activities related to hotels via many types of social media. According to Connor (2010), customers can now access a variety of data to help them to evaluate and choose a hotel. Therefore, the review websites help guests to make choices and purchases within the hotel industry. For instance, the largest hotel-related social media website, TripAdvisor, allows hotels to respond to guests' comments in order to protect the hotel's reputation (Connor, 2010). Also, Xotels (2012) stated that the review websites are aimed at inviting consumers to share their reviews, which can influence businesses' online reputation in the hotel industry. Therefore, some social media websites (e.g. TripAdvisor) are contributing to the hotel industry.

The Impact of Social Media on Customer Decision-Making and Customer Satisfaction

Memarzadeh et al. (2015) stated that an increasing number of guests are interested in using social media to tell hotels about their experiences, which can lead to a wide variety of online comments. Also, during the process of customer purchasing, consumers often build a relationship with hotels and share their experience on social media. There are four key stages within the customer decision-making process regarding hotels, including consider, evaluate, buy, and enjoy or advocate (Hudson and Thal, 2013).

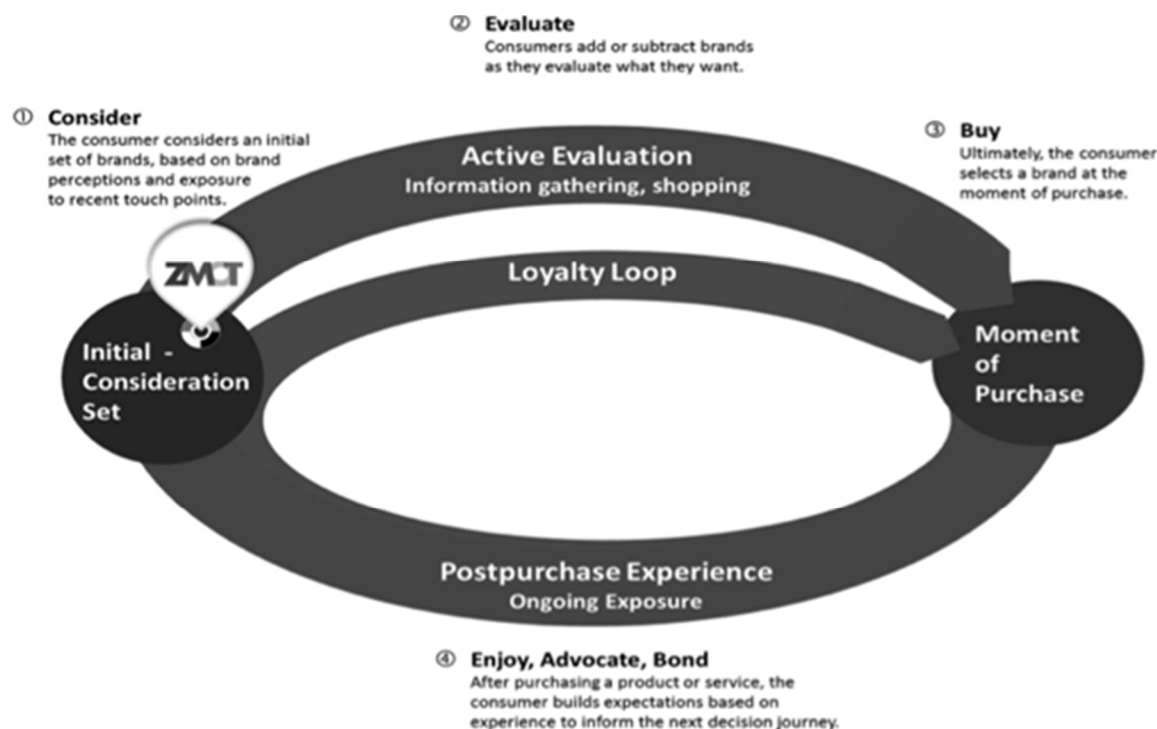


Figure 1. The Consumer Decision Journey Today, Source: Court et al. (2009)

Each of these stages has an increasing relationship with social media, and will influence consumer decision-making through social media. According to Hudson and Thal (2013), at the “consider” stage, consumers use social media campaigns to search for information. For instance, if consumers wish to search for information about or book a hotel in the UK, they will be invited to register on Visit Britain’s Facebook or Twitter pages, and will be shown various interesting new items about British hotels (Hudson and Thal, 2013). Therefore, some social media platforms might influence guests’ “consider” stage during the decision-making process. Secondly, Hudson and Thal (2013) found that online reviews play an important role when guests are evaluating their hotel options, as many consumers use what is ‘said’ in these reviews to inform their information collection process when selecting hospitality products, which means that online information searches and reviews are influencing customer behavior, especially with regard to hotel bookings (Sparks and Browning, 2010). Therefore, online reviews are an important factor that influences consumers when selecting hotels. Anderson (2012) states that guests can share their personal experiences via the TripAdvisor website, and these online reviews will influence other customers’ evaluation of their hospitality product options.

Customer satisfaction is the basic goal of hospitality enterprises, because this will lead to higher revenue for the company (Harrison-Walker, 2001; Shea et al., 2004). Having satisfied customers will help the business to expand, increase its market share and attract repeat purchases, which will reduce the costs and lead to higher profits. When customers compare their original expectations to their actual experience, the disconfirmation paradigm may occur (Oliver, 2010). If the expectation exceeds the actual experience, the service quality is perceived as unsatisfactory, resulting in a disappointed customer.

Service Failure

Hoffman and Bateson (1997) believe that a failure with regard to service delivery means that customer expectations of the service are not met. As long as the service providers meet or exceed the expectations of the customers, they will feel satisfied, but most managers believe that there is no complete service system (Cranage and Mattila, 2005). It is important to note, however, that a service failure does not always mean losing customers as, when customers complain and receive a response that is better than they expected from the service providers, they will feel satisfied and be willing to use the service again.

A failure regarding service delivery is a challenge for every service provider. Hess (2008) argued that it is very difficult to achieve zero errors within the service process. The result is that the planned service is not very well demonstrated, and the quality of the service fails to meet the expectations of the customers. Bell and Zemke (1987) suggested that, when customers encounter service failure, the service providers should resolve the failure as quickly as possible to avoid further damage.

Types of Service Failure within the Hospitality Industry

In the hotel industry, many authors have listed different types of service failure, and provide the corresponding service recovery methods (Hoffman et al., 1995; Zeithaml and Bitner 1996; Smith et al., 1999; Sparks, 2001; Dutta

et al., 2007), which are considered to be key in changing the negative attitudes of customers, and generating positive results including positive word of mouth, customer loyalty, and repeat purchase. Levesque and McDougall (2000) suggest that there are two areas of potential core service failure in hotels. One is when the service is unavailable (there is no room free, even if the customer has a reservation) and the other is service delay (the room or service is not provided on time). Furthermore, Sparks (2001) proposed seven types of service failure: the quantity or quality of service provision, its timing, agency, cost or pricing and location.

In addition, the behavior of employees is also a source of customer satisfaction or dissatisfaction (Dutta et al., 2007). These behaviors are mainly divided into three types. The first is the failure of the service system. The second is the failure to respond to the implicit and explicit customer needs. The third is the spontaneous behavior of employees without permission; for example, being rude to guests, making billing errors, and displaying a poor attitude.

Service Recovery Methods within the Hospitality Industry

Academics (Lewis and McCann, 2004; Maxham, 2001; Zemke and Bell, 1990) have discussed service recovery and its functions from various perspectives. In the hotel industry, service recovery involves explaining and apologizing to customers, providing compensation, and courtesy (Hoffman et al., 1995; Sparks and Callan 1996). Sparks (2001) advises that, if the service provider wishes successfully to compensate for the failure, then there is a need for explanation, apology, problem solving and customer compensation. Lewis and McCann (2004) suggest that there are nine methods for achieving successful service recovery: apology, explanation, correcting, empathy, compensation, acknowledgement, follow-up, exceptional treatment and managerial intervention. Hoffman et al. (1995) identified the following recovery methods: free food, a discount coupon, managerial intervention, replacement, correction, apology and doing nothing. Their study found that free food, discounts and coupons are effective compensation methods, while apology and doing nothing are considered to have no effect.

Miller et al. (2000) categorized the most important elements of the recovery process as psychological and tangible. Psychological elements are defined as the attempt by employees to resolve service failure by expressing concern for their customers and their needs, while tangible elements attempt to resolve service failure by correcting and completing the failed service (Lewis and McCann 2004). Miller et al. (2000) and Bell and Zemke (1987) indicated that psychological techniques, such as expressing concern by apologizing and showing empathy regarding the customer's needs, are critical and recommended within the service recovery process.

Expressing empathy in general is usually associated with delivering an apology to customers and is a fundamental aspect of service recovery procedures. Expressing empathy toward customers means that the service providers are displaying their concern about the problem, their willingness to fix it, and their desire to diminish the customers' inconvenience (Boshoff, 1999). Seawright et al. (2008) found that psychological elements sometimes suffice in the event of a service failure – usually a minor one – while customers usually expect some type of effort besides an empathetic apology to rectify service failure situations. Hence, if nothing is offered by the service provider, the customers seem to feel dissatisfied and believe that the apology was insincere (Miller et al., 2000). Therefore, tangible elements are considered to be more supported and important in resolving most cases of service failure.

Negative Reviews and Electronic Word of Mouth

Consumers' negative reviews on the web regarding services or products are likely to harm an organization (Van Noort and Willemsen, 2012). A growing number of consumers are now willing to write online reviews and these are attracting more and more attention from other potential consumers. When consumers search for hospitality services and find a provider with lots of negative reviews, they will naturally turn their attention elsewhere (Pan and Zhang, 2011), because the majority of consumers believe that online reviews are valuable and reliable. On the other hand, social media provide an important channel for organizations to understand the opinions of consumers regarding their products and services, and so the organizations can use the social media content to attract more consumers. Chen et al. (2012) suggest that, when consumers share negative reviews, the organization could seize the opportunity to show its service attitude and regain consumer confidence in the organization.

Many studies have found that negative reviews have a greater effect than positive ones (Boo and Kim, 2013; del Río-Lanza et al., 2013). Del Río-Lanza et al. (2013) advise that, if consumers are familiar with the brand, neither positive nor negative reviews affect their purchase decision very much while, when customers are unfamiliar with the brand, negative reviews can significantly affect their buying decision. Bruce and Solomon (2013) suggest that organizations should pay attention to managing their reputation on social media and respond to negative customer reviews, as these will influence potential consumers.

Word of Mouth is characterized by the existence of independent of companies (Goldsmith et al., 2008; Lomax and Stokes, 2002). When people choose an unfamiliar product or service, word of mouth is particularly important. It is vital in the tourism and hospitality industry because, prior to purchasing products or services, customers tend to have no real experience on which to base their choices. Therefore, the purpose of Word of Mouth marketing is to allow a trusted person to encourage the use of particular products and services (Silverman, 2001). According to Mason (2008), each instance of Word of Mouth publicity will enhance the image of the enterprise. In fact, word of Mouth is more effective and persuasive than the enterprise's own advertising.

Mills and Law (2004) claim that the influence of the virtual community is growing stronger in the tourism and hospitality industry. Consumers prefer to trust their peers rather than marketing managers. In the virtual travel community, it is easier for consumers to obtain information and make decisions (Buhalis and Laws, 2008). Therefore, they are more willing to share their experiences on the social media platform. In particular, before customers make a reservation, they will search for information about the hotel's reputation (Kim et al., 2011). Whether the reviews are positive or negative will affect the image of the hotel, thereby influencing the probability of customer reservations (Vermeulen and Seegers, 2009). As the social media play such an important role in hotel purchase decision-making, they provide an ideal marketing channel. Through these communities, tourism and hospitality companies can recognize and understand their consumers, and establish a consumer centric relationship.

Methodology

A qualitative approach was adopted for this research, which employs content analysis of negative reviews and managerial responses from TripAdvisor. Lee and Hu (2005, p.172) emphasize the need to use the qualitative approach in research on online complaints, claiming that "hospitality researchers need to explore qualitative online contexts since e-complaints are such context-specific experiences". Qualitative research assesses existing, observable facts, thereby enabling the researcher to develop new theories and/or formulate new hypotheses, and therefore is considered suitable for this study.

Langer and Beckman (2005) claims that quantitative content analysis can be used to describe the content of the system in a systematic way. This type of content analysis should be objective and record the frequency of the occurrence of each other. This is probably the best way to understand customers' perceptions of hotels, by analyzing their reviews and state (Pullman et al., 2005). In addition, the customers can freely express their views, so there is no impact on the attitudes of the customers and the researchers' reviews. This is considered as enhancing the validity of the research results.

In this study, customer complaints are divided into five categories: tangible factors (room appearance, appearance of the hotel, cleanliness, F&B, location); reliability (the perceived performance compared to the hotel's image); empathy of the staff (promptness and helpfulness, good communication and customer understanding, and friendliness); amenities (TV, the Internet, spa, pool, and fitness center); and availability (concierge and business services, car rental and chauffeur, and other services. There are nine key elements within the management responses among the data collected: 1) excuse (does not admit mistakes); 2) justification (admits mistakes, but does not compensate for the service failure); 3) apology (admits mistakes and compensates customer); 4) internal attribution; 5) external attribution; 6) the use of "we", "I" and "our company" in reply; 7) offers a refund or discount; 8) thanks the guests; and 9) agrees with guest and offers an explanation.

The Marriott Hotel Group in Beijing was chosen for the case study as it is the largest hotel chain in the world and Beijing is an important city for both tourists and business travelers. There are a total of 11 hotels in Beijing belonging to eight brands of the Marriott group. TripAdvisor allows customers to score their consumption experience from "terrible" (1 star) to "excellent" (5 stars). This study focused on negative customer review content (and the hotels' response to this) rated "terrible" (1 star) and "poor" (2 star). Finally the authors studied all of the negative reviews and management responses from a total of 6,039 customer reviews.

Ethnography is a type of qualitative content analysis where the results can be quantified by reading the text (Krippendorff, 2013). This approach was employed in this study. Netnography simplifies the analysis process to a certain extent, because researchers require only simple access to public websites (Langer and Beckman, 2005). The customer reviews employed in this study are all drawn from TripAdvisor. Compared to using face-to-face communication to obtain information, where customers may be unwilling to express their true thoughts, on the Internet, customers have fewer concerns and may feel better able to state what they really think (Goulding, 2003). In addition, compared to the traditional face-to-face mode, the advantage of netnography is that it saves time and is more cost efficient.

Results and Discussion

General Information about the Reviewers

Table 1. Customer reviews and managerial responses related to the Marriott Hotel Group in Beijing

Name	Brand	The number of reviews	The number of negative reviews	Proportion of negative reviews	The number of responses	Proportion of responses to negative reviews	The number of Helpful
The Imperial Mansion, Beijing	Marriott Executive Apartments	260	11	4.2%	10	91%	8
The Ritz-Carlton Beijing, Financial Street	The Ritz-Carlton	635	15	2.3%	8	53%	18
JW Marriott Hotel Beijing Central	JW Marriott	150	7	4.7%	4	57%	2
Renaissance Beijing, Wangfujing Hotel	Renaissance	195	8	4.1%	8	100%	7
Beijing Marriott Hotel, City Wall	Marriott	1360	41	3.0%	19	46%	27
Renaissance Beijing, Capital Hotel	Renaissance	1126	20	1.8%	9	45%	12
The Ritz-Carlton Beijing	The Ritz-Carlton	549	7	1.3%	2	29%	5
JW Marriott Hotel Beijing	JW Marriott	1006	21	2.1%	6	28%	43
Beijing Marriott Hotel Northeast	Marriott	433	10	2.3%	7	70%	10
Courtyard Beijing Northeast	Courtyard Marriott	266	10	3.8%	3	30%	2
The Sandalwood Beijing	Marriott Executive Apartments	59	1	1.7%	1	100%	1

Source: TripAdvisor 2017

Through studying the TripAdvisor website, a total of 6,039 reviews were found on 11 Marriott hotels in Beijing from 2008 to 2016, including 151 negative reviews, accounting for 2.5% of the total reviews. This means that the overall rating for the Marriott hotels in Beijing is positive. Seventy-seven managers responded to the negative reviews, accounting for 51% of the total negative reviews. In these 11 hotels, “JW Marriott Hotel Beijing Central” attracted the highest rate of negative reviews (4.7%), and “The Ritz-Carlton” the lowest one (1.3%). With regard to the hotel management’s responses, “Sandalwood Executive Apartments” and “Renaissance Beijing Wangfujing Hotel” achieved a 100% response rate to negative guest reviews. Although “The Ritz-Carlton” has the lowest rate of negative reviews, the management’s response rate is also the lowest. Regarding these negative reviews, 135 visitors to the TripAdvisor website stated that they found them useful.

Type of Complaint

Based on the content analysis, the authors categorized the major types of customer complaint as shown in Figure 2.

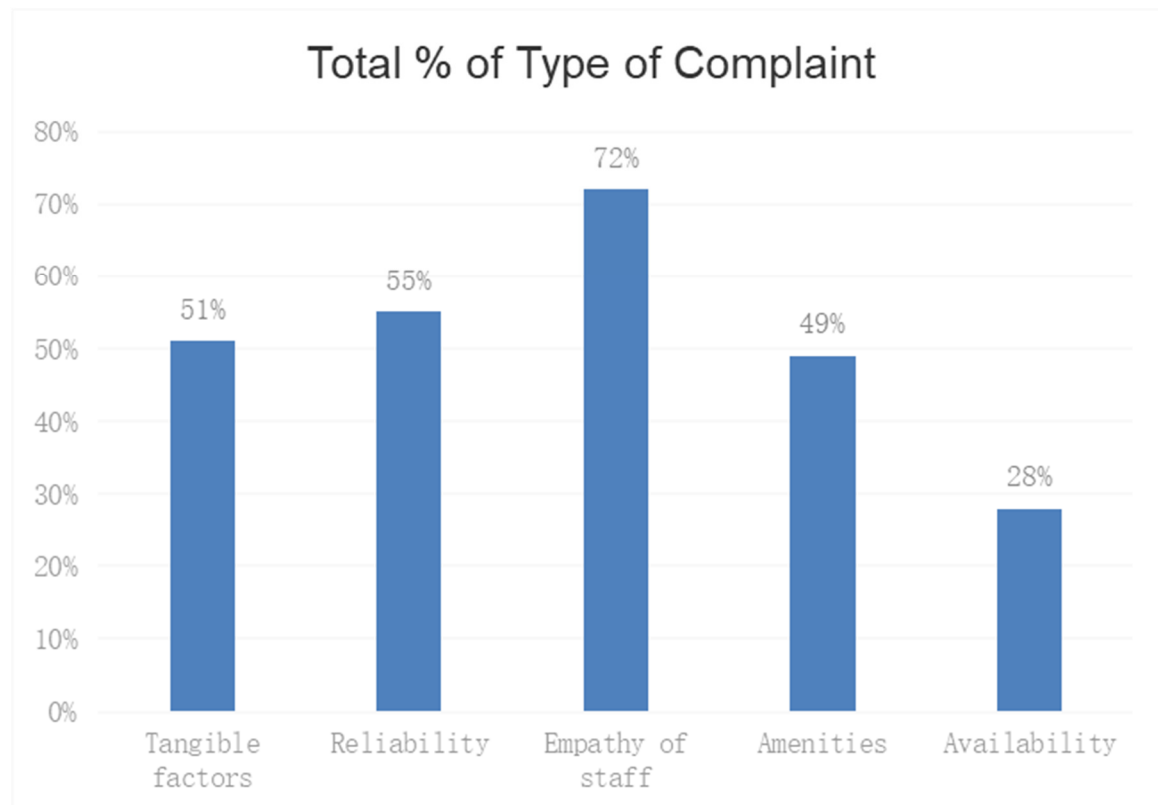


Figure 2. Type of Complaint (in percentages)

Empathy of staff

From the above figure, it can be seen that staff empathy is associated with the highest rate of customers' complaints (72%). This poses a serious challenge but could be controlled by the hotel group's recruitment procedure and staff training. In the content analysis, the authors found that the complaints about employees are concentrated on language ability. One reason for this is that the majority of TripAdvisor users are international travelers and often encounter a language barrier when they stay at a hotel and communicate with the local staff. Although the Marriott Hotel Group requires their employees to possess adequate English skills, the staff's foreign language ability can vary. Other major issues are service attitude, politeness, etc. Therefore, it is essential to strengthen the employees' training, including the service commitment and English language capability, in order to cater for the customers' needs more effectively and provide a better service.

Reliability

Reliability is the second high customer complaint issue. When the actual customer experience does not meet the customers' expectations, this will affect their image of the hotel and lead them to think that the service provider is unreliable. In one review, a customer wrote "never come to this hotel, not the five star standards". Customers have their own expectations of Marriott hotels' service standards, based on their own experiences. The hotel staff should act strictly according to the hotel operational standards to ensure consistency of service quality.

Tangible factors

Tangible factors are the third major issue regarding complaints, accounting for 51% of the sample. The majority of these complaints refer to the hotel's interior decoration, room size, F&B, location and cleanliness. Most of the customer complaints seem reasonable, but arise as a result of the customers' misunderstanding of the hotel facilities and service delivery. Due to restrictions on hotel building size, some hotel rooms are relatively small, but this does not affect the functions of the room. There are only a few complaints about room cleanliness, but they seem reasonable because this is a basic attribute and the minimum requirement for any hotel room, regardless of whether it is five-star or not.

Amenities

The amenities attract a complaint ratio of 49%. Most of the complaints relate to the Internet service. If a hotel fails to provide good WiFi coverage nowadays, this leads to major customer dissatisfaction. In addition, the hotel's network charges also give rise to customer complaints. It is worth mentioning that, in China, certain websites are restricted, so foreign users cannot use Google search, YouTube, etc., which causes some guests great inconvenience and so leads to customer complaints.

Availability

Availability was mentioned in 28% of the complaints. This is mainly related to overbooking, the check-in and

check-out times, and problems with the concierge staff. Customers complain that that the check-in and/or check-out takes too long, that the concierge staff do not take the initiative in helping them to carry their luggage, etc. In terms of overbooking, this is an important tool for hotel revenue management, particularly among hotels in major cities like Beijing. As there is a certain proportion of no-shows, hotels use overbooking to maximize the number of reservations, improve the occupancy rate and enhance the hotel revenue. Figure 3 shows nine types of key words that were used in the Marriott Hotel management's responses with regard to this topic.

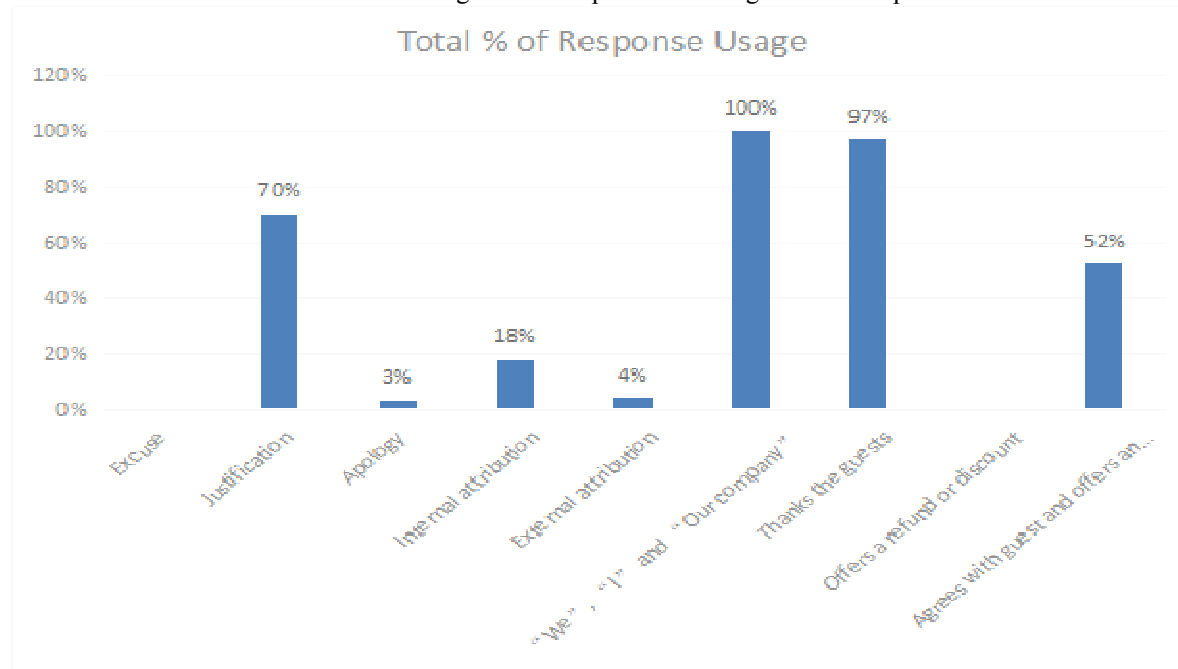


Figure 3. Key words used in responses (as percentages)

Excuse and offer a refund or discount

It was found that "excuse" and "offer a refund or discount" did not appear in the management response to customer complaints. This shows that the Marriott Hotel did not use an excuse to avoid their responsibility, which is good start in solving the problem. The employees' attitudes towards customer complaints will affect the hotel's image and change the attitudes of the customers. In addition, Marriott managers do not provide refunds or discounts in response to online customer reviews, as a widely recognized strategy to protect the hotel brand value and maintain customer equity. If the hotel managers responded to negative customer reviews by offering refunds or discounts, this would not only cause an immediate financial loss for the hotel, but also affect its brand image.

Justification

Justification was used in 70% of the responses, so this is a popular practice when dealing with service failure. According to Greenberg (1990), justification means admitting mistakes but not compensating for the service failure. In most cases, the justification for the perceived service outcome was accompanied by an apology because the management realized that complaints often arise due to misunderstandings, miscommunication and the subjective perspective of the customer. Justification is a good approach when carried out in a professional and considerate manner.

Apology

The apology rate was only 3%. According to Greenberg (1990), apology means admitting mistakes and compensating customers. As a result, the data were drawn from those responses that include an apology and compensation for the guest. It is worth mentioning that all of these data relate to Renaissance Beijing Capital Hotel. The manager apologized to the customers, and wrote "I know that you didn't have a chance to try our restaurant, then please accept my invitation to our Award-winning of the fat duck for the best Peking duck or our Italian restaurant for your next stay". Hotels are reluctant to offer detailed compensation to their customers online, simply because they have complained. As for the hotel management, they believe that, inevitably, some people will make exaggerated or even false complaints in order to obtain extra benefits.

Internal attribution

In the hotel complaints, internal attribution accounted for 18%. It is important that the managers take responsibility for the failure of the service and recognize the internal attribution, which means that the issue can be controlled. As McCole and Herwadkar (2003) point out, it is insufficiently merely to take responsibility and is equally important to minimize the chance of a similar failure occurring in the future. Bitner et al. (1990) also mention that, if the service failure is due to the failure of the service system (internal reasons), then customers are likely to

change the service provider in the long term.

External attribution

External attribution accounts for 4% of the customer complaints. The manager of Courtyard Beijing Northeast had a customer complain about the room temperature. The manager wrote, "Due to the seasonal change in Beijing, the air-condition system was under seasonal testing". In addition, when "the Ritz-Carlton Beijing" managers received customer complaints about noise, the manager responded, "Apologize for the inconvenience caused by the surrounding construction work". It is inevitable that hotel managers have to explain to customers even when they cannot change certain external factors.

"We", "I" and "our company" in the text

In the management replies, 100% used terms such as "we", "I" and "our company". "Thank the guest" also featured in 97% of them. This will make the customers feel that the response is personal to them and help to build a close relationship between the customer and the service provider. 'Thank the guest' is not only courtesy, but the complaint does indeed help the hotel to identify problems. It is an opportunity to improve the hotel service.

Agree with guest and offer an explanation

"Agree with customer and provide explanation" accounts for 52% of the total. Almost half of the managers disagreed with the customer complaint and provided an explanation. There are two reasons for this: 1) the management may not recognize the complaint, so be unwilling to take responsibility for the failure of the service. Service providers should always be as consistent as possible, provide a fair response, and promise to do better in the future; and 2) even if the management is aware of their mistakes, they may be unwilling to accept the complaint. Burke and Resnick (2000) stated that, even if a customer complaint is unjustified, managers should find a compromise that will satisfy the customers without harming the company.

In addition, the authors found a serious problem with the responses to the complaints. Some hotels do not pay attention to the content of individual customer complaints. Almost all of the responses to complaints use the same text. Hotel managers should be careful to deal with every complaint according to the specific content and provide an appropriate response, rather than using a business template.

Conclusion

Online hotel reviews are an important channel for obtaining customer feedback, and hotel managers should take the impact of these comments very seriously. In summary, it is very difficult for a service organization to eliminate all service failures, but the management can learn how to respond effectively to these. Reflecting on the data collected for this study, the authors believe that the ultimate goal of hotel management's responses to negative customer online reviews is to use the latter as an important tool for service recovery. This will help to solve customer problems, improve customer perceptions of the organization, restore customer confidence and eventually create more positive word of mouth, which is also a form of free advertising for the enterprise.

Managerial and industrial implications

This will help managers to analyze and improve customer satisfaction, thereby enhancing the competitiveness of the hotel and improving the brand's reputation. Positive electronic word-of-mouth is critical in customers' decision-making; therefore, it is beneficial for hotel managers to encourage customers to share their experiences via social media. At the same time, managers should monitor, track, and observe customers' online reviews to prevent or at least reduce the impact of negative ones. The hotel managers should devote greater efforts to social media marketing because this has an important influence on customers' hotel bookings, and also helps hotels to strengthen the positive and profitable relationships between customers and the hotel industry.

The hotel industry needs to pay more attention to the various negative comments made by customers via social media, such as TripAdvisor, because most customers refer to these online reviews when booking a hotel.

The hotel industry needs to be aware of the impact of customer reviews on social media (e.g. TripAdvisor), and many instances of exaggeration can be found in these comments, which will have a negative influence on customers when choosing a hotel. The hotel industry should pay more attention to ensuring the privacy and security of their customers' data, such as the security of clients' information on social media, which will also influence the online reputation of the hotels and customers' decisions when choosing a hotel.

Limitations of the study and future research

This study suffers from several limitations. Firstly, the relatively small sample size limits the generalization of these results. Secondly, the research method employed, qualitative content analysis, is suitable for the study of online reviews, but there could be self-bias among customers, who may post inaccurate reviews (Vázquez-casielles, 2009). The third issue is that not all online reviews may be created by genuine consumers, and some are likely to be written by competitors. Due to the fierce competition in the hotel industry, some hotels may post malicious reviews about their competitors to gain a competitive advantage. Future researchers might analyze positive and negative reviews regarding different locations and other brands, such as developed countries, such as destinations in America and Europe. In the real environment, positive reviews are important and beneficial, and managers need to understand the impacts of both negative and positive reviews. Future study will also use of sentiment analysis for specific positive and negative categories of customer reviews on hotel experience. Further research would

benefit from the analysis of customer characteristics and different customer groups, such as millennials, and more current and longitudinal data covering further period.

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