

COMMENT AND COMMENT RESPONSE STRATEGIES - AN ANALYSIS OF GAY HOTEL GUESTS' COMMENTS AND MANAGERS' RESPONSES

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Abstract

Purpose – This study explores the strategies that hotel customers and managers/representatives use to complain/compliment and respond to complaints/compliments.

Design – The study employed both the customer- and manager-generated contents posted on an online travel community as its data.

Methodology – The study involved two gay oriented hotels of the Axel Corporation. The data were deductively analysed to understand the discourse strategies underlying Axel hotel customers' complaints/compliments and managers/representatives' complaint/compliment responses.

Findings – The outcome suggests that Axel hotel guests' online written compliments and complaints are nearly the perfect reflections of their spoken acts. Together the online hotel guest community can potentially form a powerful market force. Axel hotel managers/representatives, although trying to actively manage guest comments, seem to lag behind in terms of both linguistics and managerial strategies.

Originality of the research – Previous studies have examined what customers complain and compliment about, but have neglected the topic of how customers complain and compliment. They have also overlooked the topic of how business managers/representatives respond to customer complaints and compliments. Moreover, no composite attempt has been made to simultaneously investigate these issues using the approaches of both business and linguistics researchers. These theoretical gaps were addressed in this study.

Keywords (dis)satisfaction, hotel attributes, comment/response strategies, content analysis, English

INTRODUCTION

The era of product- and company-oriented businesses has long been over (Kotler and Armstrong, 2014). Today's business is largely dominated by marketing orientation, and customers have an impressive and true power (Kotler and Armstrong, 2014; Pitt et al., 2002). The Internet has provided them with access to information sources and the forums to exchange their opinions. Customers now can write, post, respond to and share their own and others' comments/reviews about any products/services and their providers. Customer comments can either generate important inputs for the development of new business opportunities, or pose many significant threats to the operations of existing companies (Füller et al., 2006; Kerr et al., 2012). Consequently, businesses have to

actively manage customer comments to eliminate the impacts of the negative comments (complaints), and to take advantage of the positive comments (compliments).

On the one hand, customers complain because they are unsatisfied or unhappy with the delivery of a product or service of a company (Fornell and Wernerfelt, 1988; Gilly and Hansen, 1985; Singh and Widing, 1991). Analysing the complaints, therefore, can help identify *what* customers complain about (Levy et al., 2013; Manick and Shea, 1997; Zheng et al., 2009), or *what* makes customers dissatisfied with their experiences (Berezina et al., 2016; Limberger et al., 2014; Lu and Stepchenkova, 2012). Outcomes of the analysis give product/service providers the answers to the question of what must be corrected and/or improved. In addition, by responding to customer complaints in a timely and thoughtful manner, business managers can secure their future successes (Istanbulluoglu, 2017; Xie et al., 2017). However, the question of how to respond to such complaints remains largely unanswered. In a recent study, Ho (2017) identified two general strategies of managerial response and denial response. These strategies, nevertheless, don't produce any recovery solutions (Hoffman and Chung, 1999). Moreover, the effective response methods cannot be selected if business managers don't understand how their customers complain. In their seminal attempt, Cenni and Goethals (2017) explained how customers pragmatically express their complaints (retrospective acts, future-oriented acts, meta-pragmatic acts; upscaling-descaling). Nonetheless, the actual strategies that customers use when complaining have not been revealed yet.

On the other hand, customers compliment when they are satisfied or happy with their experiences. Assessing compliments helps determine *what* (the attributes of a product/service that) make customers satisfied (Berezina et al., 2015; Khoo-Lattimore and Ekiz, 2014; Kraft and Martin, 2001; Lu and Stepchenkova, 2012; Payne et al., 2002). As a result, these attributes can be further promoted. However, researchers in the fields of business seem to ignore compliments. How customers compliment and how business managers respond to customer compliments, therefore, have been largely overlooked.

Traditionally, comments and commenting behaviours are one of the major topics of linguistics researchers (Chen et al., 2011; Herbert, 1986; Ho, 2017; Holmes, 1986; Prykarpatska, 2008; Vásquez, 2011; Yuan, 2002). However, with their importance to businesses, customer comments and commenting behaviours have also been examined by business researchers (Lau et al., 2005; Levy et al., 2013; Limberger et al., 2014; Lu and Stepchenkova, 2012; Tronvoll, 2011; Zheng et al., 2009). Nevertheless, the majority of studies on comments and comment responses have been implemented in the former context. Only a few have been conducted for the latter in general, and for hotels in particular. In addition, no composite attempt has been made to simultaneously examine guest compliments/complaints and hotel manager responses. It should be noted that these issues are interrelated, and business managers in general cannot isolate consumer compliments and complaints, as well as their corresponding responses.

In recent years, the hotel market has become more and more diverse. While most hotels use apparent background criteria to segment their guests (e.g., age, budget, nationality, sex), gay hotels rely on a hidden criterion of sexual orientation (the tendency to be attracted sexually to a person of one sex or the other; Harley et al., 2000, p.5). In other words, guests at gay hotels may be externally homogenous (sexual orientation display),

although internally heterogeneous (sexual orientation practice). For example, gay guests explicitly express that they want to have the same experiences that non-gay guests have at hotels (Poria, 2006). In addition, non-gay customers who use gay products/services (e.g., parallels) are supposed to possess tolerating and positive attitudes toward gay customers and their culture (Buford, 2005; Cole, 2000). However, social norms still have their significant influences on the openness of gay customers, and the acceptance of non-gay customers (Drumheller and McQuay, 2010; Tungol, 2013). For example, customers may prefer non-gay providers to gay providers (Russ et al., 2002), while gay employees are still discriminated by non-gay employees (King and Cortina, 2010; Mays and Cochran, 2001; Priola et al., 2014). Such differences in preferences and behaviors may pose challenges to the projection of the gay-friendly image of gay hotels. Nevertheless, gay hotels' managers have several tools in hands to build up a more positive image, for example, the active management of customer comments (Sparks et al., 2016; Zhang et al., 2010). Unfortunately, except a few studies on gay guests' preferences and expectations of hotel service (Berezan et al., 2015; Poria, 2006), no research has been attempted to examine gay hotels' guest comments and gay hotels' manager responses.

Taking into account the abovementioned observations, this study aims to explore the strategies that hotel guests and managers use to complain/compliment and respond to complaints/compliments using some gay hotels as the case study. The outcomes can help hotel managers manage their responses in a more effective and persuasive way. In particular, they can assist gay hotel managers in their projection of a positive image of their business by thoroughly understanding how their customers compliment and complain.

1. LITERATURE REVIEW

1.1. Hotel guests' complaints and compliments

Hotel guests may complain when they are unsatisfied with one or several attributes of a hotel, and vice versa. Their evaluations, as a result, have important impacts on their overall satisfaction and consequent behaviours (Berezan et al., 2013; Kandampully and Suhartanto, 2000; Ladhari, 2009). Nowadays, guest complaints and compliments are not only circulated among onsite guests and managers but can be brought to a larger audience through the Internet-based social networking sites (Pitt et al., 2002). Such online complaints and compliments (i.e., comments) also have their own impressive power. Specifically, online comments are well correlated with a business's popularity (Zhang et al., 2010), sales volume (Ye et al., 2009), and even market share (Duverger, 2013). A study in the Netherlands added that exposure to hotel comments could significantly affect future guests' awareness and consideration of a hotel; the effects were greater in the cases of positive comments and lesser-known hotels (Vermeulen and Seegers, 2009). However, the comments' helpfulness to their readers varies case by case, and is affected by their ratings, depth, product type, and manager responses (Kwok and Xie, 2016; Mudambi and Schuff, 2010).

With regard to the complaining methods, Chen et al. (2011) examined American and Chinese students' behaviours and found six patterns, including opting out, dissatisfaction, interrogation, request for repair, and threat. Similarly, Yuan (2002) interviewed Kunning Chinese speakers and determined two formulas of compliment, including explicit compliments and implicit compliments. More specifically, Yuan (2002) identified six compliment strategies of explanation, information question, future reference, contrast, advice, and request. Later studies have adopted Yuan's model and ascertained its applicability in the English speaking environment (Zhang, 2013).

Concerning the complaint response strategies, Ho (2017) examined Beijing hotel managers' responses to guest complaints posted on tripadvisor.com from a linguistics approach. It was revealed that the two underlying strategies are complaint management (acknowledgement, explanation, apology, rectification, feeling expression, appreciation, imposition minimization), and complaint denial (challenge, isolation, rebut, suggestion/recommendation, highlight, emphasis). Of the two, complaint denial strategies were slightly favoured over complaint managerial strategies by Beijing hotel managers. Alternatively, from a business point of view, Hoffman and Chung (1999) identified five general and eleven specific strategies, including no action, empathy (apology), correction (replacement, correction, substitution), management (intervention), and compensatory (gratis, discount, coupon, free upgrade, free ancillary) that hotels and restaurants employed. The best strategy for restaurants is managerial intervention, while those for hotels are discounts and free upgrades. In addition, Hoffman and Chung (1999) found that these strategies are associated with guest retention. With compliment response, Holmes (1986) suggested three general and twelve specific strategies when analysing compliment exchanges of New Zealanders. Accordingly, the strategies include acceptance (appreciation or agreement token, agreeing utterance, downgrading or qualifying utterance, compliment returning), deflection/evasion (credit shifting, informative comment, ignorance, legitimate evasion, reassurance/repetition request), and rejection (disagreeing utterance, accuracy questioning, sincerity challenge). Holmes's (1986) model was later applied by Payne et al. (2002) to the business context.

Business managers, fortunately, can apply some handling strategies to take advantage of the compliments, and to reduce the impacts of the complaints (Kraft and Martin, 2001; Mitchell, 1993). Specifically, Sparks et al. (2016) realized that manager responses to customer complaints are related to businesses' trustworthiness. In addition, Istanbuluoglu (2017), after examining companies' responses to customer complaints on Facebook and Twitter, suggested that a speedy response could increase customer satisfaction. Moreover, Xie et al. (2017) discovered that timely, lengthy and high quality (in terms of customer ranking) responses could enhance future financial performances of hotels. However, that effect might be reduced when the volume of complaints increased.

Business managers may personally respond to customer complaints and compliments; otherwise, they can authorize an in-house representative, or an outsource responders to respond to guest comments (Campbell, 2014; Martinez, 2016). When in-house comment management is in service, business managers and/or their representatives have the knowledge of the events that happened which made their customers (un)happy; their responses can be quickly changed into policies to maintain and/or improve the current performances. However, business managers' and their representatives' workload is

significantly increased, and many of them don't have the ability of a good writer to tackle the issues correctly and tactfully. When comment management is outsourced, outside responders can help create less biased and less emotional responses; consequently, they can help improve the images of businesses. Nevertheless, these responders may not have enough background knowledge of the businesses, and may not be able to produce prompt responses in case they need to ask for further validations and/or instructions from business managers.

1.2. Gay/non-gay consumers and gay-related business

From the demand perspective, gay customers form a segment of the LGBT (lesbian, gay, bisexual, and transgender) market. Together this market is usually considered an affluent one, with an estimated population of 450 million people, and an estimated annual spending power of 3.7 trillion USD (Community Marketing & Insights, 2015; LGBT Capital, 2015). However, not all LGBTs can earn more and/or have better lives than their non-LGBT counterparts (Campbell, 2005; Gates, 2014). LGBT and non-LGBT consumers have similar demands for product and service attributes, and similar social values (Fugate, 1993; Kazyak, 2011). Nevertheless, there are some certain differences between gay and non-gay or straight customers. For example, Sha et al. (2007) found that gay men have a higher level of interest and involvement in fashion compared to straight men; yet, this finding is more applicable to those gay men who have open interactions within their community. Similarly, Vandecasteele and Geuens (2009) discovered that gay men tend to purchase significantly more new products than straight men. In this sense, gay consumers are usually regarded as trendsetters (Fuller, 2013; Thomas, 2015).

From the supply perspective, more and more businesses are targeting the LGBT market to exploit their expanding potential. It has been observed that whatever that has been sold in the straight market can be seen in the LGBT market (Human Rights Campaign, 2014). However, LGBT consumers may have more distinguishable wants and needs for social (e.g., travel, entertainment, bars, night clubs, health spas), living (e.g., condominiums, retirement communities), financial (e.g., financial planning, insurance), and personal (e.g., counseling, crisis interventions) products/services (Fugate, 1993). In addition, some products are more successful than others when penetrating into the LGBT consumer market. For example, the tobacco industry directly targets gay and lesbian smokers through their advertising campaigns, outreach efforts, community promotions, and event sponsorships (Stevens et al., 2004), while the entertainment industry straightforwardly portrays gay characters on their TV shows (Avila-Saavedra, 2009). Some companies are even recognized as more LGBT-friendly than others, for example, Amazon, Apple, HBO, Netflix, and Starbucks (Community Marketing & Insights, 2015; Marzilli, 2015).

However, the projection of a gay-friendly image is faced with several internal and external challenges. For example, in the service sector of education, students (customers) thought that they could learn more from a straight-identified instructor than from a gay-identified instructor (providers) (Russ et al., 2002). In addition, students gave the straight instructor more compliments, and the gay instructor more complaints; in other words, the gay instructor was less favored (Russ et al., 2002). Similarly, LGBT employees often

report that they are discriminated against by their non-LGBT counterparts in the same organizations (King and Cortina, 2010; Mays and Cochran, 2001; Priola et al., 2014). In such cases, non-LGBT staff members use their protected civil rights (e.g., religion) to advocate their attitude toward the LGBT staff (Kaplan, 2006). Consequently, the creation and maintenance of a harmonious relationship between gay and non-gay customers and employees, and the projection of a gay/straight-friendly image are no doubt very difficult tasks.

2. METHOD

2.1. Research questions and case selection

In this study, the approaches of both business and linguistics researchers are combined to understand the strategies underlying guests' comments, and managers' and/or their representatives' responses (the representatives may be in-housed or outsourced). Accordingly, the following four research questions (RQ) are answered by this study.

RQ1. What strategies do hotel guests use to compliment?

RQ2. What strategies do hotel managers and/or their representatives use to respond to guest compliments?

RQ3. What strategies do hotel guests use to complain?

RQ4. What strategies do hotel managers and/or their representatives use to respond to guest complaints?

Following previous attempts (Cenni and Goethals, 2017; Chua and Banerjee, 2013; Limberger et al., 2014), this study used tripadvisor.com as the source of data. As mentioned in the previous section, this study chose to use some gay hotels as the case study. The result of the search on tripadvisor.com suggested two oldest hotels of the Axel Corporation (Barcelona and Berlin) as the most popular gay hotels. In addition, almost all of the guest comments were responded to by the Axel hotel managers and/or their representatives. This provides a crucial condition for the analysis of compliment/response and complaint/response strategies in a same setting.

Axel Corporation, the owner of these hotels, is now running five other units in Barcelona (Axel 2), Berlin (Axel 2), Maspalomas (Canary Islands, Spain), Ibiza (Balears, Spain), and Madrid. The Axel hotels focus their businesses on the gay community. However, they define themselves as hetero-friendly instead of gay hotels. In their own words, "Axel is designed for the gay audience, but is opened to everyone" (Axel Hotels, 2017).

2.2. Data collection and analysis

A total of 1,412 units of comment and response related to Axel Barcelona/Axel Berlin and written in English were manually collected in March 2016. In addition, the numerical evaluations (1 to 5) of the six hotel attributes (cleanliness, location, rooms, service, sleep quality, value), the overall evaluation of hotel experience (1 to 5), and the reviewers' profiles were also gathered. The first comment entry was dated January 2011, and the last December 2015. In other words, the data were collected over a five-year period.

This study defined Axel hotel guest compliments as those comments whose overall evaluations were 4 or 5 points, and complaints as those evaluated at the 1-2 point level. Therefore, the neutral comments (overall evaluation of 3 points) were eliminated. In addition, all the comments which (1) did not provide the numerical evaluations, or (2) provided the same numerical evaluations for all the six hotel attributes were also removed. The cleaning of the data thus produced a set of 74 complaints and 429 compliments. The number of complaints only made up approximately 17% of that of compliments. Therefore, 89 compliments (approximately 20% of the total number of comments) were randomly selected by SPSS to combine with all the 74 complaints and form the final set of data. The descriptive analysis revealed that the complimenterers and complainerers evaluated Axel hotels' attributes differently (Table 1). Consequently, the final data can be considered as a valid set in terms of both overall and specific evaluations. Among the six attributes, location can be considered as the best asset that the hotels have (mean values were above 4 out of 5 points).

Table 1: Guest evaluation of hotel attributes

	Complainers (n = 74)	Complimenters (n = 89)	Difference
Cleanliness	m = 2.80 (STD = 1.135)	m = 4.35 (STD = 0.740)	<i>t</i> = 10.107 (<i>p</i> = 0.000)
Location	m = 4.04 (STD = 0.851)	m = 4.66 (STD = 0.521)	<i>t</i> = 5.493 (<i>p</i> = 0.000)
Rooms	m = 2.14 (STD = 0.849)	m = 4.07 (STD = 0.688)	<i>t</i> = 15.747 (<i>p</i> = 0.000)
Service	m = 2.01 (STD = 1.104)	m = 4.36 (STD = 0.757)	<i>t</i> = 15.496 (<i>p</i> = 0.000)
Sleep quality	m = 2.58 (STD = 1.047)	m = 4.27 (STD = 0.687)	<i>t</i> = 11.906 (<i>p</i> = 0.000)
Value	m = 1.80 (STD = 0.827)	m = 4.01 (STD = 0.715)	<i>t</i> = 18.081 (<i>p</i> = 0.000)
Overall	m = 1.64 (STD = 0.485)	m = 4.29 (STD = 0.457)	<i>t</i> = 35.940 (<i>p</i> = 0.000)

After the final set of data was generated, the content analysis was implemented in a deductive way (Elo and Kyngäs, 2008). The strategies suggested by Chen et al. (2011), and Hoffman and Chung (1999) served as the coding schemes of complaints and complaint responses. However, the complaint strategy of opting out, and the complaint response strategy of no action were not employed since they do not provide any practical implications. In addition, the original proposals of Yuan (2002) and Holmes (1986) guided the coding of the compliments and compliment responses. It should be noted that although a compliment might include some complaints, only the compliment strategies were detected and coded. Similarity, there might be some compliments within a complaint; yet only the complaint strategies were identified and marked. The same coding tactic was applied to the compliment and complain responses.

All the coding of the comments was manually mastered in an Excel file. Each strategy was given a column, and its employment in a comment was marked by a representative value of 1 (the unemployment had a value of 0). Initially, the researcher coded all the comments twice to ensure its intra-coder reliability (Given, 2008). Later, approximately

20% of the compliments/responses and complaints/responses were given to two independent coders to check the inter-coder reliability (Given, 2008). As a result, a 100% of agreement was reached among the coders. Consequently, the coding of the researcher can be considered as reliable.

In the analysis, a differentiation between gay and non-gay guests was not attempted for two reasons. First, gay customers have a preference for similar products and services preferred by non-gay guests, while non-gay customers find references for trendy products and services from gay customers (Buford, 2005; Cole, 2000; Poria, 2006). This, in theory, makes the customers of a gay-friendly business somewhat homogenous. Second, the profiles and the reviews did not reveal enough obvious information to separate gay from non-gay guests. This, in practice, leaves the research population somewhat identical.

3. FINDINGS

The results of the compliment/response analysis are presented in Table 2. According to Yuan (2002), there are six strategies that speakers can use to express their compliments. The analysis revealed that five of them were adopted by Axel's guests; request was the only strategy unused. Almost all the reviewers explicitly explained how they were satisfied with the hotel services. More than half of them stated some future intentions, for example, return and recommendation. Approximately 10% of the reviewers also suggested some changes to make the services better.

Explanation strategy: *They advertise as being "hetero-friendly" and indeed there were many male-female couples staying there. The rooms were big, clean, bright and my room had a great balcony big enough to walk out on and the suites on the 7th floor have their own large kitchen-sized tables with 4 chairs and room for more.* (nickname LONEREIGNER, male, business-type guest, aged 50-64, USA)

Future reference strategy: *Thanks for making my stay so enjoyable and I would recommend this Hotel and will stay here every time I visit Barcelona.* (nickname LEIGH181, male, friends-type guest, aged 25-34, UK)

Advice strategy: *Breakfast very average, great service, but at the price point for breakfast (12-15 euros) could be better.* (nickname CATWOOD, male, friends-type guest, aged 35-49, Spain)

Information question strategy: *So, why choose another hotel if you know Axel exists?* (nickname MARCOBEN71, male, solo-type guest, aged 35-49, Italy)

Contrast strategy: *Also I found quite surprising that despite the note whenever I left my towel on the hook it was still exchanged for a new one.* (nickname JUSTI P, unknown sex, business-type guest, unknown age, UK)

In addition, while Holmes (1986) suggested eleven compliment response strategies, the managers and/or their representatives at Axel hotels only employed the two strategies of appreciation and informative comment. Using the former, they thanked the guests for their compliments. With the latter, the managers/representatives provided some additional information about their other services.

Appreciation strategy: *First of all I would like to thank you for staying with us during your last visit in Barcelona. Also thank you for your opinion and share it with all travellers on Trip Advisor. Your opinion it's very helpful for us and we really appreciate you take your time and give us your point of view about us.* (responded to nickname LUCAN C, male, family-type guest, aged 35-49, Belgium)

Informative comment strategy: *I would like to take this opportunity to inform you that this year, Axel Hotel Barcelona will have more advantages and benefits to make you enjoy a complete experience of the Circuit Festival, which will happen from August 8th to 18th in Barcelona.* (responded to nickname VIAJERODENOCHE, unknown sex, solo-type guest, unknown age, USA)

Table 2: Compliment and compliment response strategies (n = 89)

Compliment strategy	Frequency	Average	Compliment response strategy	Frequency	Average
Explanation	87	0.98	Appreciation	89	1.00
Information	2	0.02	Agreement	0	0.00
question			Downgrade	0	0.00
Future reference	47	0.53	Disagreement	0	0.00
Contrast	2	0.02	Question	0	0.00
Advice	12	0.13	Challenge	0	0.00
Request	0	0.00	Shift credit	0	0.00
			Informative comment	37	0.42
			Ignorance	0	0.00
			Legitimate evasion	0	0.00
			Request reassurance	0	0.00

Moreover, outcomes of the complaint/response analysis are presented in Table 3. It is revealed that Axel hotels' guests used all the five strategies observed by Chen et al. (2011) when complaining. Every reviewer explained in an explicit manner why he/she was dissatisfied. More than 80% of them blamed the hotels for their unsatisfactory experiences, while nearly 60% threatened the hotels by stating their future behaviours of no return and bad word-of-mouth. Some of the guests even repeated their request for repair.

Dissatisfaction strategy: *The interior is a bit run down with a stale taste of pre-recession gloss. The rooms are a bit like staying in a dormitory with uncomfortable beds and tacky furnishings. The worst part is the fact that you can literally hear every single room surrounding you and everything that is going on in there from snoring to pooping. Plus you get the lovely aroma of cigarette smoke drifting in under your door to top off the less than enjoyable experience.* (nickname STEPHYSAN, unknown sex, solo-type guest, unknown age, UK)

Accusation strategy: *I usually never complain any of the costs, because why travel if you don't have money to do that, budget travellers can use one or two stars accommodation if needed BUT I expect decent service at least, especially in a four star hotel. Please don't promise something to the customers if you can't make it.* (nickname TRAVSUNNY, male, solo-type guest, unknown age, Finland)

Threat strategy: *We stayed there once and will never stay there again as it is not worth what you pay for at all... Would not recommend this hotel.* (nickname GERHARD R., male, couples-type guest, aged 35-49, Austria)
 Request for repair strategy: *The cleaning staff was very bad. Everyday some towels were missing and by calling the reception the answer was that all the towels are at the laundry and they do not have any in stock????????* (nickname GERHARD R, male, couples-type guest, aged 35-49, Austria)
 Interrogation strategy: *There was place to put the bathrobes and if they got dirty, imagine the cost to be paid for the damage? Maybe for 40 euros extra a day, I would have gotten another hanger?* (nickname XCHOCOLATEX, male, solo-type guest, unknown age, Argentina)

Table 3: Complaint and complaint response strategies (n = 74)

Complaint strategy	Frequency	Average	Complaint response strategy	Frequency	Average
Dissatisfaction	74	1.00	Gratis	0	0.00
Interrogation	5	0.07	Discount	0	0.00
Accusation	62	0.84	Coupon	0	0.00
Request for repair	16	0.22	Free upgrade	2	0.03
Threat	43	0.58	Free ancillary	1	0.01
			Managerial intervention	12	0.16
			Replacement	0	0.00
			Correction	8	0.11
			Substitution	1	0.01
			Apology	63	0.85

Furthermore, the analysis found that Axel hotel managers and/or their representatives only mentioned six recovery strategies in their responses. The potential strategies, as recommended by Hoffman and Chung (1999), are ten. Interestingly, not every complaint received an apology from the service providers. Only twelve comments got a managerial intervention, and only eight comments had a correction response.

Apology strategy: *I am really sorry that your stay at the hotel was not to your liking.* (responded to nickname CLHSCOTT, male, couples-type guest, aged 25-34, UK)

Managerial intervention strategy: *Please let me assure you I already was talking to the housekeeping department about this in order to not let something like that happen again.* (responded to nickname CITYBREAKGUY, male, friends-type guest, aged 35-49, UK)

Correction strategy: *... we changed a few things in the Spa in order to not have any noises on the floor below again.* (responded to nickname RYAN C. unknown sex, friends-type guest, unknown age, USA)

Free upgrade strategy: *... we did an upgrade to you ...* (responded to nickname MARCO_MAZZEI, male, couples-type guest, aged 35-49, Italy)

Free ancillary strategy: *We try to apologize with the Drinks and the bottle of sparkling wine but it seems that you are not fine with that.* (responded to nickname ARINIC, male, couples-type guest, unknown age, France)

Substitution strategy: *So we try at least to offer you a non-smoking suite for the day after...* (responded to nickname ARINIC, male, couples-type guest, unknown age, France)

4. DISCUSSION

Vásquez (2011) proposed that complaints tend to occur as a speech act set, which combines two or more discourse strategies. The findings of this study supports Vásquez's (2011) observation. When Axel hotel guests were unsatisfied and complaining, they always declared the causes. In addition, they blamed the hotels for their wrongdoings, and put more pressure on the hotels by stating the consequent actions. The request for repair, however, was the description of the actions they actually undertook onsite. When responding to guest complaints, only a few managerial recovery actions were restated. The dominant response strategy was an apology, although it was not used in every case. Thus, from a linguistics perspective (Ho, 2017), Axel hotel managers and/or representatives were trying to manage the complaints rather than denying them.

This study also extends Vásquez's (2011) observation to the compliments and compliment responses. Specifically, Axel hotel guests used several discourse strategies to show their tributes. When they were satisfied and complimentary, they obviously stated the causes. This compliment strategy of explanation, thus, is similar to the complaint strategy of dissatisfaction. In addition, they declared their favourite future intentions. This compliment strategy of future reference, however, reverses the complaint strategy of threatening. In responding to guest compliments, Axel hotel managers and/or their representatives thanked their guests at least once in each of their responses. They, however, did not apologize to their guests in 15% of the complaint cases. Axel hotel managers and/or representatives applied the multi-discourse-strategy approach in 42% of the compliment cases, while employing the single-discourse-strategy approach in the remaining. When doing this, they overlooked the majority of the response strategies mentioned by Holmes (1986). Their speech acts, therefore, are simplified and uniformed.

4.1. Theoretical implications

Hotel guests' online written comments and hotel managers' and/or representatives' online written responses can be considered as speech acts (Vásquez, 2011). Hotel guests may use almost all of the spoken discourse strategies (Chen et al., 2011; Yuan, 2002) when writing their compliments and complaints. Hotel managers/representatives, otherwise, eliminated many spoken discourse strategies (Holmes, 1986) when composing their responses. This study, thus, agrees with a prior opinion which implies that the whole community of consumers is a powerful force (Füller et al., 2006; Kerr et al., 2012). Specifically, while each guest is probably not a linguist, all of them, however, possess the ability to be a linguist. They know and use all the discourse strategies to compliment or complain, and can support or injure the involved businesses (Füller et al., 2006; Kerr et al., 2012). Business managers/representatives, on the other hand, are not linguists themselves either. Their responses to both customer compliments and complaints are inefficient and ineffective in many cases. A more proactive and professional approach toward comment management, therefore, is of critical necessity.

4.2. Practical implications

The outcomes of this study suggest business managers in general and hotel managers in particular should pay more attention to the management of guest comments. From a linguistics perspective, the responses to guest compliments may be standardized with the use of the appreciation and informative comment strategies. However, other strategies may also be useful, such as agreement (i.e., we agree with what you write), downgrade (i.e., we are working to make our services better), and shift credit (i.e., we have good providers).

Otherwise, the responses to guest complaints should be careful and thoughtful. Each and every complaint must be acknowledged and apologized to, and whenever possible a corresponding recovery strategy should be stated. Responding to guest complaints, eventually, is a proactive and professional action which helps increase the image of a business (Kwok and Xie, 2016). An assertive response (e.g., challenge, rebut) may satisfy its writers, yet will destroy all the efforts that the hotels have made. The following strategies (Ho, 2017), therefore, should be avoided at all cost.

Challenge strategy: *We got so many good comments and really good review[s] about our service and friendliness of the staff that I [do] not agree with this and will ignore this totally.* (responded to nickname CANARIO VIAJERO, male, couples-type guest, aged 25-34, Spain)

Rebut strategy: *Referring to the chair, table or anything associated with the decor of your room, I repeat [that the concept] will not suit all tastes ... and does not warrant that you have a better or worse quality service.* (responded to nickname FLEEINGDC, male, couples-type guest, aged 35-49, Italy)

Emphasis strategy: *I know black is not the colour for everybody and maybe you didn't [feel] comfortable in our Hotel because of the Darkness. But this is our Design, and we can't and will not change this, because it is also unique.* (responded to nickname MRIJAY, male, friends-type guest, aged 25-34, India)

Moreover, guest complaints may be outnumbered by guest compliments. However, that does not mean the services are flawless. Guests' explanation (compliment strategy) and dissatisfaction (complaint strategy) show how subjective and imperfect the services are. Acknowledging this natural characteristic of service, thus, should be the very first step of service quality management (Shostack, 1982).

With Axel hotels in particular, a more tactful response strategy is necessary in order to create and maintain a friendly image of the gay-hotel concept (whether the image is gay-friendly or hetero-friendly). The managers and/or representatives should spend more time to improve their analysis and writing skills if they are to continue an in-house service. Otherwise, Axel hotels may consider outsourcing comment management to a third-party to have a better service. This approach can help unite the task of comment management of the individual units within the Axel chain; thus, it can produce proper and consistent responses to guest comments in all cases (Campbell, 2014). However, in case the comment management task has already been outsourced, a re-evaluation of the current responders is strongly recommended.

CONCLUDING REMARK

Axel hotel guests' online written compliments and complaints are nearly the perfect reflections of their spoken speech acts. Together the online hotel guest community can potentially form a powerful market force. Axel hotel managers/representatives, although trying to actively manage guest comments, seem to lag behind in terms of both linguistics and managerial strategies. There is, therefore, a need to revise and improve the current response strategies.

The findings of this study, however, cannot be generalized to include other hotels and businesses. The reasons for this are twofold. First, the data are limited to one hotel chain. In other words, only one case was examined by this study, while other cases were overlooked. Second, this study assumed that the guests and the approaches to comment management at the two Axel hotels are alike. In reality, the members of a business chain are likely to have different characteristics and/or to implement different managerial strategies (Jia and Rutherford, 2010). Consequently, any differences in the comments and comment responses between the two Axel hotels could not be detected. However, a limited sample of comments/responses (74 complaints/responses and 89 compliments/responses) could not be utilized to do such a complicated task. Data produced in a longer period of time (e.g., ten years) may provide better conditions for a proper comparison. In addition, a larger pool of data, which involves more hotels or cases, should be targeted in order to re-evaluate the observations of this study.

As another limitation, this study did not investigate the difference in the evaluations of gay and non-gay guests of hotel attributes. Future studies, thus, can explore this topic to produce more meaningful managerial implications for hotels in general, and gay/straight-friendly hotels in particular. Furthermore, this study only looked at the one-way discourses (guests to managers, and managers to guests). Future studies can facilitate the research on customer comments and manager responses by examining customer responses to manager responses. Such efforts can help business managers/representatives choose the correct strategies when working with customer comments, especially their complaints. Finally, but probably not least, this study did not examine the complaint strategies within guest compliments and the likes. Consequently, although the four issues of compliment/response and complaint/response were simultaneously investigated, they were separately treated. Future studies may consider this shortcoming and explore the use of multiple compliment/complaint strategies in the bidirectional comments and comment responses.

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