
| RESEARCH ARTICLE

Managing Rapport on *TripAdvisor*: Correlation of Negative Reviews and Response Voices on Online Business Platforms

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| ABSTRACT

This study explores the impact of negative reviews and responses on rapport management, synthesizing current research on this topic. Employing formulated research questions and statistical methods like *chi-square tests*, this study systematically analyzed collected data both quantitatively and qualitatively. Results indicate significant differences in response voices—accommodative, formalistic, and defensive—among various interpersonal relationship management styles when addressing negative reviews. These findings emphasize the complexity of managing interpersonal relationships amidst criticism, offering theoretical insights and practical guidance for improving customer rapport management in industries like hospitality. By examining how different management voices respond to negative reviews, this study contributes a fresh perspective to enhancing customer relationship practices in service sectors.

| KEYWORDS

Negative reviews; Response voices; *TripAdvisor*; *Chi-square tests*; Rapport management.

| ARTICLE INFORMATION

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1. Introduction

In the information explosion of the 2020s, people's daily life is inseparable from the internet. Electronic technologies are essential for completing both work and daily activities (Ho, 2018). For instance, electronic platforms enable communication through social media, transactions via Apple Pay or WeChat Pay, and satisfy dining and entertainment needs through various online networks. People can make reservations for venues or activities through the booking website. Given the invisibility of online bookings (Mazzarol et al., 2007), consumers place greater importance on online reviews. Particularly in the hotel industry, scholars studying hotel management, such as Argyris et al. (2021), have found that online reviews can spread rapidly like viruses, significantly affecting hotel reputations. Online negative reviews have even more severe consequences (Vásquez, 2011; Weitzl & Hutzinger, 2017; Zhang & Huang, 2024). Therefore, businesses must respond promptly to negative reviews (Zheng et al., 2009; Chan & Guillet, 2011), showcasing their problem-solving capabilities and efforts to improve services to mitigate the spread and impact of negative word-of-mouth (Brunner et al., 2018). Many studies in hotel management (e.g., Vásquez, 2011; Ho, 2014, 2017a, 2017b 2018, 2019, 2020, 2021; Zhang & Huang, 2024) draw on data from *TripAdvisor*, renowned as the world's leading platform for online reviews (O'Connor, 2010; Levy et al., 2012; Ho, 2017b; Zhang & Huang, 2024), which is more representative compared to other hotel booking websites such as *Qunar and Ctrip*.

TripAdvisor is popular among consumers and a momentous channel for many hoteliers to achieve their business objectives (Ho, 2018). This platform allows hotel managers to respond to negative reviews, engaging in rapport management through verbal interactions and other interpersonal communication strategies. In today's digital era, transactions often occur remotely, underscoring the importance of hotel managers cultivating and maintaining rapport with customers by building trust, loyalty, and satisfaction. Therefore, effective response strategies for rapport management are crucial. Rapport management plays a pivotal role

in digital business communication, influencing the dynamics of intimacy between customers and service providers (Cenni & Goethals, 2020). Effective rapport management can enhance customer engagement, facilitate information exchange, and ultimately drive positive business outcomes (Ho, 2017b, 2018; Shi, 2019). Hence, hoteliers should prioritize the implementation of rapport management, employing appropriate response strategies to address various types of negative reviews for effective public relations management.

In the business domain, particularly within the context of hotel management, there are numerous studies on rapport management (e.g., Ho, 2017b; Qian, 2021; Wang, 2022). Ho's research is especially notable, focusing on how hotel managers manage negative reviews to achieve service recovery (Ho, 2017a) and trust repair (Ho, 2019) through specific response strategies. While previous scholars had primarily explored how managers utilize language to achieve rapport management, this paper seeks to understand whether different types or severities of negative reviews require varying response strategies.

This study categorizes responses and negative reviews based on severity criteria to explore the relationship between different levels of customer complaints and business responses. The authors employ data coding and utilize SPSS chi-square tests to validate hypotheses concerning hotel managers' responses to negative reviews. Insights gathered from the analysis aim to provide valuable guidance for hotel managers to better understand and address customer complaints in the digital business environment.

2. Literature Review

2.1 Classification of Negative Reviews and Response Voices

In the expansive realm of online discourse, effectively managing negative interactions begins with a comprehensive understanding of negative review classification (Levy et al., 2012). These classifications serve as the foundation for developing detailed response voices aimed at fostering healthier online environments (Fan & Niu, 2016). Researchers categorized negative reviews based on various parameters, including buying inclination (Weisstein et al., 2017), emotional intensity (Lee et al., 2017), features (Yang & Li, 2022), and apparent degree (Abney et al., 2017). Buying inclination-based classification delineates reviews by purchase intention, such as consumers with purchase goals and consumers without purchase goals. Emotional intensity-based categorization delves into the emotional undercurrents, identifying reviews as slight, moderate, or intense. Features-based classification scrutinizes the characteristics behind reviews, covering the form feature, text feature, and reviewer feature of negative reviews. Obvious degree-based sorting assesses the reviews as direct mention and indirect mention. Moreover, a critical approach involves classifying negative reviews by relationship degree (Melancon & Dalakas, 2018), which classified negative reviews into three main categories, including early squabbles, on the rocks, and the exes, allowing for a nuanced understanding of their potential harm and facilitating tailored responses.

Similarly, response voices for mitigating negative reviews encompass a diverse array of methodologies tailored to address the multifaceted nature of online negativity. Currently, the common classification of response voices' main basis includes responsive attitudes (Sparks & Bradley, 2014), adaptation (Abney et al., 2017), and response modes (Lee & Cranage, 2012). Responsive attitudes involve acknowledgment, account, and action. Adaptation employs categories covering no response, indirect response, low adaptive response, and high adaptive response. Response modes initiate classification as an apology, causal explanations, and a combination of both. A more commonly used and significant classification method is based on the characteristics of the reply tone (Liu et al., 2020), including defensive voice, formalistic voice, and defensive voice.

In this research, a classification method that prioritizes negative or toxic reviews is advocated, considering the varying degrees of negativity they may cause. By categorizing these interactions based on the degree of relationship (Melancon & Dalakas, 2018), we tailor responses accordingly. Additionally, we classify response strategies based on reply tone (Liu et al., 2020) to effectively address different levels of negativity. This approach not only enhances our understanding of the relationship between negative reviews and responses but also informs more nuanced management strategies across diverse contexts.

2.2 Rapport and Rapport Management

The origins of rapport management can be traced back to research on Politeness from the perspective of language communication. Influential early works include Leech's (1983) research, which extended and supplemented Grice's (1975) Cooperative Principle with studies on conversational maxims. In Leech's (1983) research, he introduced the Politeness Principle and Politeness Maxims to explain how people use politeness strategies in daily conversations to maintain rapport. It is believed that applying the politeness principle in practical conversations is more complex and diverse than applying the cooperative principle (Leech, 1983). Additionally, Brown and Levinson (1987) published their Politeness theory, elaborating extensively on the concept of Face and proposing face management theory, which derived from Goffman's (1967) notion of face work. Although Brown and Levinson's (1987) politeness theory has broad applicability in various cultural contexts, they also acknowledge that understanding face and using politeness strategies may vary in different cultural contexts. Fraser (1990) also offered alternative interpretations of politeness phenomena in

their studies, viewing politeness not as a static behavioral norm but as a dynamic process influenced by specific speech contexts. Fraser (1990) proposed the conversational contract theory, emphasizing the gradual interaction between context and communicative parties, presenting a viewpoint distinct from previous theories of politeness.

At the beginning of the 21st century, there was a resurgence of politeness research (Chen, 2018), with notable studies such as Ellen's (2001) Critique of Politeness Theories and Locher and Watt's (2005) Relational work framework. Locher and Watt's (2005) relational work framework is considered a preferable alternative to Brown and Levinson's (1987) politeness theory due to its comprehensive and universal applicability (Ho, 2017b). However, Spencer-Oatey (2000, 2008) has endeavored to construct a rapport management framework concerning interpersonal relationships (Ran, 2012). This theory surpasses the previous studies on face and politeness, encompassing dimensions such as individual and societal dynamics, subjectivity and objectivity, and harmony and disharmony (Liu et al., 2022). According to Spencer-Oatey (2008), rapport refers to the (dis)harmony between interactants, primarily based on face, sociality rights and obligations, and interactional goals. Rapport Management refers to the involvement of language to maintain or threaten interpersonal relationships, encompassing management of the three aspects mentioned above.

Many Chinese scholars, such as Ran (2012), Yuan (2020), Chen (2018), and Liu et al. (2022), have conducted extensive research based on rapport management Theory. Notably, Spencer-Oatey's theoretical model still presents some unresolved issues for subsequent scholars to ponder (Chen, 2018). Therefore, Chen (2018), building upon the aforementioned three management dimensions (face, sociality rights and obligations, and interactional goals), supplemented the model with "Interest" and "emotion" (translated by Wang, 2023), proposing a more comprehensive and operational Model (Chen, 2018; Qian, 2023). However, in subsequent research, most scholars have continued to adopt Spencer-Oatey's theory. The road ahead for rapport management research remains long.

Previous case studies on rapport management have analyzed various contexts, such as business (Ho, 2017a, 2017b; 2018; Liu et al., 2022; Qian, 2021), academic fields (Ho, 2001; Ädel, 2011), and other professional domains (Holmes, 2006; Fletcher, 2014). In academic fields, Ädel (2011) conducted discourse analysis on group discussions involving student participation, while Ho (2001) analyzed communication discourse among teachers. It is evident that rapport management holds significant meaning across various domains. Additionally, in other professional fields, such as Holmes (2006) focusing on gender and politeness, differences in the use of polite language between genders in workplace dialogues were examined; Fletcher (2014) explored interactions and participation in community of practice and micro-community of knowledge, which foster good rapport and promote free flow and sharing of knowledge through managing sociality rights and obligations. In the business context, notable studies include Ho's (2017b, 2018) categorization and discussion of different types of review responses from a metapragmatic perspective, exploring how hotel managers conduct rapport management in response to customer complaints. Qian (2021) examines the speech acts implemented by businesses and the types of identities they construct from the perspective of speech acts and explains the relationship management function of businesses in constructing these pragmatic identities. This article will follow in predecessors' footsteps and discuss rapport management in hotel management.

2.3 Summary of Prior Research

Scholarly research has extensively explored how individuals and organizations respond to negative reviews online, examining a spectrum of responses from defensive rebuttals to conciliatory gestures (Lee & Cranage, 2012; Sparks & Bradley, 2014; Weisstein et al., 2017; Smith & Johnson, 2020). Despite this broad investigation, a significant gap remains concerning the relationship between negative reviews and the explanations offered in response. Empirical studies addressing this correlation and its underlying drivers are notably scarce. To fill this void, this study employs *chi-square test* correlation analysis to examine how different categories of negative reviews align with corresponding explanatory strategies, taking into account their severity. Furthermore, the study integrates rapport management theories to elucidate the mechanisms influencing this relationship, aiming to deepen our understanding of online interaction dynamics and offering practical insights for effectively managing negative reviews in digital environments.

3. Methodology

3.1 Research Questions

In light of the insights gleaned from existing research, three key research questions are formulated to guide the investigation.

- a) What types of negative reviews and response voices are commonly used?
- b) What is the relationship between negative review types and response voice types?
- c) Why is there a significant relationship between certain types of negative reviews and certain types of response voices?

This study explores the correlation between negative reviews from hotel customers and the response voices implemented by hotel establishments. The research hypothesis suggests a connection between the type of negative review and the corresponding response strategy. To test this hypothesis, a *chi-square test* was conducted, chosen for its effectiveness in analyzing correlations between categorical variables. Through this analysis, the study aims to offer empirical insights into customer review management dynamics in the hotel industry, contributing to a better understanding of effective response voices.

3.2 Chi-square test

The *chi-square test*, a fundamental statistical tool in the realm of hypothesis testing, serves as a robust method for analyzing the association between categorical variables within a dataset (Bryant & Satorra, 2012; Li et al., 2015). It operates under the premise of comparing observed frequencies of categorical outcomes with their expected frequencies to ascertain whether any significant correlation exists between the variables under examination. This test finds its utility across various fields, including but not limited to biology, sociology, and market research, where researchers seek to uncover relationships between non-numerical data points (Li et al., 2015). By quantifying the disparity between observed and expected frequencies through the calculation of a Chi-square statistic, researchers can discern whether the deviations observed are beyond what would be expected by chance alone. Consequently, the *chi-square test* offers a principled approach to assessing the significance of relationships between categorical variables, thereby facilitating informed decision-making and hypothesis validation. This study aims to improve the statistical rigor of the study, reduce the risk of false positives, and enhance the credibility and persuasiveness of the study. We set the significance level to 0.05.

Therefore, the null and alternative hypotheses of the *chi-square test* are as follows: H0: There is no correlation between the type of negative review and the response strategy. That is, the two variables are independent. H1: There is a correlation between negative review types and response voices.

3.3 Data Collection

Among online review platforms, such as *TripAdvisor*, *Qunar*, *Ctrip*, and *Booking*, *TripAdvisor* stands out as a leading global travel website, renowned for its extensive user base and comprehensive reviews (O'Connor, 2010; Vásquez, 2011; Levy et al., 2012; Ho, 2017). Notably, *TripAdvisor* facilitates interactive engagement, enabling users to submit detailed reviews and participate in discussions, fostering the sharing of nuanced accommodation experiences. Consequently, data for this study were sourced from *TripAdvisor*. Given Beijing's status as a key economic hub attracting both domestic and international travelers, this study focused on Beijing as the primary data locale. Moreover, our presence in Beijing affords logistical advantages for conducting interviews, on-site inspections, and validating research outcomes with ease and flexibility, thereby bolstering the study's credibility and feasibility.

The initial data source comprised the top 20 most popular hotels in Beijing, chosen for their substantial local and international patronage, thus providing a robust dataset for analysis. These hotels are expected to offer insights representative of a diverse range of guest experiences, facilitating a comprehensive investigation. Leveraging *TripAdvisor's* 5-star rating system, reviews, which were categorized as Terrible and Poor, were selected for analysis in alignment with the research objectives. A total of 388 negative customer reviews and corresponding responses were gathered from *TripAdvisor*, amounting to 105,878 words. This dataset enables a nuanced exploration of local hotel characteristics and issues, fostering connections with the broader social and economic context. To be clear, the reviews and responses were collected via the following procedures:

- a) Beijing was selected, giving the reason for the location.
- b) The decision to select the top 20 most popular hotels in Beijing was made to ensure a robust dataset for analysis.
- c) Terrible (1-star) and Poor (2-star) ratings were specifically chosen for analysis to address the research questions effectively.

3.4 Data Identification and Classification

Data recognition and classification in this study adhere to established protocols, primarily guided by two fundamental standards. Given the nuanced nature of online negative reviews comprising both reviews and responses, our approach involves a dual classification system. Drawing from prevalent methodologies in contemporary research (Melancon & Dalakas, 2018; Liu et al., 2020), negative reviews are categorized into three primary types: a) early squabbles, b) on the rocks, and c) The exes (see Table 1). Similarly, response voices are classified into three main types: a) defensive voice, b) formalistic voice, and c) accommodative voice (see Table 2). Each of these overarching categories encompasses several subcategories, enabling a comprehensive analysis of the data. To streamline our research process, these subcategories are opted to be consolidated into broader classifications, facilitating systematic analysis. Subsequently, we tallied the frequency of occurrences within each category across both negative review types

and response voice types, providing a robust foundation for our analytical framework.

Table 1. Types of negative reviews, working definitions, subcategories, and their examples

Negative reviews	Working definitions	Subcategories	Examples
Early squabbles	The issue underlying the review did not indicate that the relationship with the consumer might be in danger and that the consumers were still committed to the relationship.	The help seeker	“Why is it that me and everyone I know cannot place a call right now?????” “Is there any chance that womens/girls Alterego line is going to expand to superheroes other than Batgirl, Wonder Woman, and Supergirl?”
		The (unsolicited) advisor	“The jeans should come prepackaged with iron-on patches to repair the wholes which developed after just a few wearing’s and washes!” “I love my Chevy Equinox, but the only thing I don’t like...
On the rocks	The category involved relationships that were on the rocks, meaning the consumer had experienced a breakdown trigger that caused them to lose faith in the organization and to consider exit (Coulter & Ligas, 2000).	The social activist	“Reinstate the waitress you suspended... bigotry cannot be rewarded. I refuse to eat in your restaurant until you change this.”
		The Dear John	“I’ve been a loyal Delta supporter for 10+ year and Diamond for several, but with the new MQD requirement, I think I’m gonna be taking my business to a new carrier...
		The story of my life	“Arrived to the hotel 9 pm; the room i reserved was not available, so they decided to downgrade me after i protested; they let me wait an hour and half until this issue was resolved; it seemed they just couldn’t care less even though i am a gold member. No bell boy around to help with the luggage...
The exes	The category involved the customers who were actively severing their ties with the organization. These consumers were deeper into the termination phase.	The passive-aggressive	“Coke is a Joke on the world—creating Insulin Resistance One Drinker at a time.” “Just an FYI I will never do business with your institute and will discourage anyone else from doing business.”
		The whistle-blower	“Your artificial sweeteners in your diet products are NOT safe.” “EVERYONE STOP GOING TO TARGET THEY WILL STEAL YOUR CREDIT CARD INFO!”
		The troll	“Dear BMW, You keep taking my post off of your site. I think people should be aware of this situation. You never contacted me after I wrote to you. That’s OK; you just keep taking it off. I’ll post it on all other luxury car sites; they won’t take it off!”

Table 2. Types of response voice, subcategories, and their examples

Response voice	Subcategories	Examples
Accommodative voice	Confession	“We feel very sorry that you didn’t have the perfect experience. We apologize for the issue at the front door. Next time that shouldn’t be a problem...”
	Promise for corrective action	“Sorry to hear that. I’ll print out this review to share with our staff, and we’ll do our best to make improvements before your next visit.” “We’re so sorry you didn’t have the experience we aim for...”
	Compensation	“We must admit that we couldn’t have provided our promised service due to the unexpected situation. We would like to refund...”
Formalistic voice	Perfunctory apologies	“We are very sorry for the dissatisfactory experience, and thanks for your review.” “I have had a talked with that staff. Hope you can forgive her...”
	Auto-response	“Thanks for your stay. We look forward to seeing you again.” “Thanks for your valuable reviews. Wish you a nice journey!”
Defensive voice	Denying the existence of service failure	“We did our best. I don’t know why you say we were not hospitable.” “Although wooden bed is kind of hard, it is good for health” “Customers’ preferences for food differ from each other. It is impossible to perfectly meet every guest’s need”
	Making excuse for	“Unsatisfactory water supply is always a problem here during the travel season. We

the negative event	have complaint many times to water company.” “The noise was from the railway station. We really have no idea.” “Our hotel is nearby the river. That’s why the quilt is a little wet”
Accusing customers of their “unreasonable” requirement	“I would be happy to give you instructions if you had asked for it, but you said everything is fine when we talked.” “There are actually plenty of free street parking lots around the hotel as it says in the listing description. Didn’t you read it?”

Grounded in the classification criteria delineated above, this paper introduces a novel research framework illustrated in Figure 1. The framework is designed to enhance data classification efficacy, investigate interrelations among distinct classification categories, and provide visual representations of classification metrics. By employing this model, we endeavor to elucidate the intricate dynamics between negative reviews and corresponding responses, elucidating these interactions through the lens of rapport management principles.

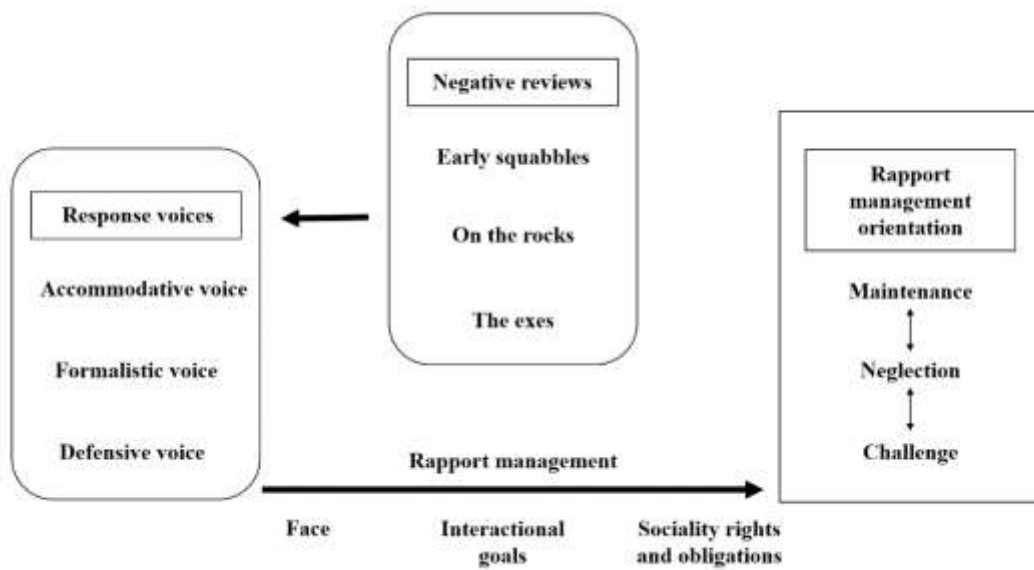


Figure 1. Reviews and responses upon rapport management framework

In this study, the model was employed to analyze a total of 388 negative reviews, along with their corresponding responses. The negative reviews and their responses were systematically categorized into three distinct classes based on predefined classification criteria. Notably, the key criterion for delineating the efficacy of each response was the presence of emotional words or phrases, which were deemed to contribute significantly when comprising at least 50% of the repair strategy within the response corpus. Prior to commencing the encoding process, a pilot study encompassing 10% of the entire dataset demonstrated a robust inter-encoder reliability of 95.4%. In instances where discrepancies arose, consensus was diligently achieved through comprehensive discussions and deliberations between the two coders involved in the study. This meticulous approach ensured the consistency and accuracy of the coding process, thereby enhancing the reliability and validity of the study outcomes.

4. Results and Analysis

4.1 Quantitative Results

IBM SPSS Statistics 23 software was used to process 388 encoded data, and the results showed that all 388 data were valid (see Table 3).

Table 3. Case Summary

Negative review type Response type	case					
	effective		deficiency		total	
	N	Percentage	N	Percentage	N	Percentage
	388	100.0%	0	0.0%	388	100.0%

The results of the frequency and percentage of each type of strategy in 388 reviews are presented in Table 4.

Table 4. Negative review type * response type crosstab

Response type	Negative review type	Negative review type				
		Early squabbles	On the rocks	The exes	Total	
Accommodative voice Formalistic voice Defensive voice Total	count	49	130	43	222	
	Percentage of total	12.6%	33.5%	11.1%	57.2%	
	count	25	88	14	127	
	Percentage of total	6.4%	22.7%	3.6%	32.7%	
	count	6	16	17	39	
	Percentage of total	1.5%	4.1%	4.4%	10.1%	
count	80	234	74	388		
Percentage of total	20.6%	60.3%	19.1%	100.0%		

By encoding and categorizing 388 pairs of negative reviews and their corresponding responses, a comprehensive understanding emerges regarding the diverse typologies of negative reviews, including "Early Squabbles," "On the Rocks," and "The Exes," alongside varied response voices such as defensive and adaptive voices. Notably, an intricate interplay between the formative and accommodative voices is observed. Firstly, negative evaluations characterized by early conflicts, exemplified by "Early Squabbles," often elicit accommodative voice strategies, representing 12.6% of the total responses. Secondly, the prevalence of "On the Rocks" reviews, constituting 60.3% of all negative evaluations, underscores the complexity and seriousness of issues encountered. In response to such challenges, accommodative voices dominate, comprising 33.5% of the total responses, indicative of their perceived efficacy in addressing substantial grievances. Lastly, negative evaluations associated with predecessors, as encapsulated by "The Exes," exhibit a predilection towards defensive voice strategies, representing 4.4% of responses. This inclination towards conciliatory approaches highlights a proclivity for relationship maintenance and conflict avoidance. Collectively, these findings illuminate a nuanced relationship between negative evaluations and response modalities, offering valuable insights for effectively navigating various contexts. Such insights hold significance for businesses, organizations, and individuals alike, guiding them in adeptly managing customer reviews, fostering healthy employee relations, and navigating public perceptions.

4.2 Hypothesis Testing

The results of the *chi-square test* are shown in Table 5

Table 5. *chi-square test*

	Value	Degree of freedom	Progressive significance (bilateral)
Pearson Square	21.632 ^a	4	.000
likelihood ratio	19.376	4	.001
Number of valid cases	388		

a. 0 cells (.0%) have an expected count of less than 5. The minimum expected count is 7.44.

In the conducted *chi-square test*, pivotal data were acquired, with 388 valid cases analyzed. *Pearson's chi-square* yielded a value of 21.632, while the likelihood ratio stood at 19.376388, both indicative of the test's robustness. With 44 degrees of freedom, the asymptotic significance (bilateral) was recorded as .000 or .001, denoting an exceptionally low level of significance, typically

considered significant when below 0.05. Crucially, all cell expected counts exceeded or equaled 5, with a minimum value of 7.44, affirming the fundamental assumption of the *chi-square test*. In essence, the markedly low asymptotic significance leads us to reject the null hypothesis, compelling us to infer a substantial disparity between the observed data distribution and the expected distribution.

Therefore, there is a correlation between negative review types and response voices.

4.3 Analysis of Correlation between Response voices and negative reviews

The analysis of the data reveals several notable patterns in the use of different response strategies across various types of customer complaints. First, in Early Squabble reviews, Accommodative voice responses are employed most frequently, accounting for 49 out of 80 instances (approximately 61.25%). This is higher compared to the usage in On the Rocks reviews, where Accommodative voice is used in 130 out of 234 instances (approximately 55.56%), and in The Exes reviews, where it is used in 43 out of 74 instances (approximately 58.11%). This indicates a managerial preference for a conciliatory approach when the customer relationship is still salvageable.

Second, in The Exes reviews, Defensive voice responses are used more frequently, appearing in 17 out of 74 instances (approximately 22.97%). This is significantly higher than in Early Squabble reviews, where Defensive voice is used in 16 out of 234 instances (approximately 6.84%), and in On the Rocks reviews, where it appears in 6 out of 80 instances (approximately 7.5%). This suggests that managers tend to adopt a more protective stance when the customer relationship has already deteriorated significantly.

Third, for On the Rocks reviews, formalistic voice responses are predominant, accounting for 88 out of 234 instances (approximately 37.61%). This is higher than in Early Squabble reviews, where Formalistic voice is used in 25 out of 80 instances (approximately 31.25%), and in The Exes reviews, where it is used in 14 out of 74 instances (approximately 18.92%). This indicates that when the customer relationship is at a critical juncture, managers often resort to standardized, less personalized responses.

Overall, regardless of the type of negative reviews, managers show a general tendency to favor accommodative voice responses, as these constitute the highest proportion across all complaint types. This predominant use of an accommodative voice underscores a commitment to customer-centric service and proactive rapport management, aiming to address and resolve issues amicably to enhance customer satisfaction and loyalty. This finding aligns with the broader literature that emphasizes the importance of a conciliatory and customer-focused approach to maintaining and improving customer relationships.

4.3.1 Accommodative Voice in Rapport Management

Accommodative voice is essential in rapport management as it demonstrates empathy, responsibility, and a commitment to improvement. By acknowledging faults and offering tangible solutions (Liu et al., 2020), hotels show customers that their concerns are taken seriously, fostering trust and satisfaction.

Extract 1 Please accept my most sincere and heartfelt apologies that your stay and breakfast experience, as well as my assurance that I have already addressed this matter with our Senior Management Team.

Extract 2 Upholding my commitment to provide a memorable experience with exceptional service, I would like to offer you free room upgrading for your next stay.

Extract 3 Your review is highly valuable to us and please be rest assured that I have addressed this with the team. We will continue to enhance our guest engagement, focus on check in experience, and work on the breakfast selections and quality.

Extract 4: We are profoundly sorry that we could not live up to your expectations. I appreciate your valuable voice, and please rest assured, that we take every review very seriously and will follow up with the team.

The extracts exemplify Accommodative voice through their specific language and expressions aimed at resolving issues and restoring positive rapport with customers. In Extract 1, the use of phrases such as "most sincere and heartfelt apologies", "assurance," and "addressed this matter with" reflects a genuine attempt to empathize with the customer and take responsibility. Extract 2 uses phrases like "upholding my commitment" and "offer you free room upgrading," demonstrating a proactive approach to remedying the situation and enhancing the customer's future experience. In extract 3, the acknowledgment "highly valuable to us" and the assurance that "we will continue to enhance our guest engagement" indicate a commitment to continuous improvement based on customer reviews. Extract 4's "profoundly sorry" and "we take every review very seriously" emphasize the

hotel's dedication to addressing the customer's concerns sincerely and effectively. These responses consistently use empathetic and proactive language, demonstrating a clear intention to rebuild trust and satisfaction.

This approach aligns with the principles of rapport management, which emphasize catering to customers' needs of face to build and maintain rapport through effective communication and responsive actions. By addressing issues proactively and showing a willingness to make amends, hotels can enhance customer loyalty and encourage repeat business (Min et al., 2015; Ho, 2018), thereby solidifying a positive rapport with their clientele.

4.3.2 Formalistic Voice in Rapport Management

A formalistic response suggests that service providers acknowledge the importance of responding to negative reviews, yet they rely solely on perfunctory apologies or automated responses without genuine sincerity or meaningful corrective measures (Liu et al., 2020). Although formalistic voice responses are less personalized, they achieve interactional goals by ensuring timely acknowledgment and addressing of customer reviews, thus playing a crucial role in rapport management.

Extract 5 We are honored that you choose our hotel for your stay.

Extract 6 Thank you for your loyalty and your great reviews about the hotel!

Extract 7 I would like to further discuss the matter with you; kindly contact me.

Extract 8 Your review has been shared with our team concerned immediately. We truly hope that you will give us an opportunity.

The extracts display a more standardized approach characteristic of a formalistic voice. Extract 5's "we are honored that you choose our hotel," and extract 6's "Thank you for your loyalty" are courteous yet impersonal, emphasizing respect and gratitude without deep personalization. Extract 7, "I would like to further discuss the matter with you, kindly contact me," shows a willingness to engage but lacks immediate, concrete action. Extract 8, "your review has been shared with our team concerned immediately," conveys prompt acknowledgment but remains formal and routine. These phrases highlight a respectful but standardized communication style, focusing on procedural correctness rather than individualized attention.

This approach helps prevent customers from feeling ignored, which is vital for sustaining a basic level of satisfaction and engagement. However, over-reliance on Formalistic responses can risk making customers feel undervalued if not balanced with more personalized interactions (Lui et al., 2018; Liu & Ji, 2019, 2022). Effective rapport management, therefore, requires a mix of personalized and formal responses to maintain rapport, especially in high-volume service environments.

4.3.3 Defensive Voice in Rapport Management

A defensive response voice encompasses the communication strategies typically used by service providers to deny service failures or make excuses (Liu et al., 2020). A defensive voice may be detrimental to rapport management, as it can convey an impression of disdain or confrontation, potentially exacerbating customer dissatisfaction. However, in certain situations, a defensive voice can defend the hotel's reputation and uphold the hotel's sociality rights and obligations.

Extract 9 On that morning, we had a few unique circumstances involving a larger party, and the team tried their best to accommodate everyone.

Extract 10 During the period from 0200 to 0500hours during your stay; our electricity supplies were temporarily suspended for the safety of our associates conducting the maintenance. We have taken necessary steps in ensuring that all of our guests has been informed upon check-in and a notification letter are placed in all rooms.

Extract 11 As required by Public Security Bureau regulations, safety and security interests of our hotel guests, all unregistered guests are required to leave the hotel before 2300hours.

Extract 12 After our careful investigation, we did not find any record of your stay or reservation with us.

The extracts reflect a Defensive voice through language that justifies actions and minimizes perceived faults. In extract 9, phrases like "unique circumstances involving larger parties" serve as excuses to rationalize service failures. Extract 10's "electricity supplies were temporarily suspended for the safety" and "all of our guests have been informed" deny the existence of a service failure by explaining it away. Extract 11's reference to "Public Security Bureau regulations" justifies a policy by citing external requirements,

while extract 12's "we did not find any record of your stay" outright denies the customer's claim. These defensive statements focus on protecting the hotel's stance rather than directly addressing customer's dissatisfaction. This approach is characterized by its focus on justification and deflection of blame rather than empathy or resolution.

There are situations where defending the hotel's position is necessary, especially to prevent misinformation or unfair criticism, and overuse of defensive responses can erode trust and harm the rapport with customers (Li et al., 2018). For effective rapport management, it is crucial to balance defensive strategies with empathy and a willingness to address customer concerns. This balance helps protect the hotel's reputation while also striving to maintain positive customer relations.

5. Discussion

5.1 Interpretation of Findings

Through the aforementioned analysis, we have identified some intriguing patterns. Firstly, in handling "Early Squabble" reviews, the use of an accommodative voice by managers is relatively the highest among the three types of negative reviews. This indicates that when the customer relationship has not yet completely broken down, managers aim to perform rapport management through positive communication and compensatory measures. By adopting strategies such as apologies, assurances, and compensation, they strive to restore the relationship between the customer and the hotel. Secondly, for "On the Rocks" reviews, the frequency of formalistic responses increases. This suggests that when customer relationships are on the verge of breaking down, managers often resort to standardized responses, including routine apologies and automated replies, to ensure a swift response to customer complaints. This prevents further escalation of discord and maintains basic harmony when personalized handling is not feasible (Min et al., 2015; Wei et al., 2013). Finally, for "The Exes" reviews, defensive responses are the most frequent. This reflects that when a customer has already decided to terminate the relationship or the relationship has already collapsed. Managers are more inclined to adopt a defensive voice to clarify and protect the hotel's image (Li et al., 2018). Although defensive responses might harm rapport, they are sometimes necessary to safeguard the hotel's public image. In today's era of widespread social media, a defensive attitude can prevent the spread of potentially harmful information, thus protecting the hotel's public reputation.

Despite this, accommodative voices are predominantly used for the three types of negative reviews, indicating that customer-centric service is the primary philosophy for most hotel managers. Managers tend to engage in proactive customer relationship management. When facing early squabble reviews, hotel managers establish deeper emotional connections with customers through sincere apologies and compensatory measures. Customers not only feel valued and respected but are also more willing to continue choosing the brand due to the hotel's sincerity (Rose & Blodgett, 2016; van Noort & Willemsen, 2012). This emotional bond is crucial for establishing and maintaining long-term customer relationships. When dealing with "on the rocks" reviews, hotel managers' proactive attitude towards problem-solving, rather than shirking responsibility or ignoring customer complaints, helps repair and improve customer relationships, thus preventing customer churn. Even for the exes reviews, an accommodative voice is an effective rapport management tool. It can promptly alleviate customer dissatisfaction and prevent issues from escalating (Ma et al., 2015). Especially in the age of widespread social media, positive responses and handling can prevent the spread of negative information (Li et al., 2018), thereby protecting the hotel's public image.

5.2 Implications for Hotel Management

With the rise of online consumption platforms, increasing attention is being paid to managers' responses to online customer reviews. Numerous studies have demonstrated the impact of responses on potential consumers (Lee & Cranage, 2014; Sparks et al., 2016; Crijns et al., 2017; Istanbuluoglu, 2017). This research provides new insights for hotel managers on managing a hotel's reputation and image by understanding how to use different response strategies for varying severity of negative reviews to achieve rapport management. Unlike previous studies that discussed the efficiency of response strategies (Ho, 2017b, 2018; Wang, 2022; Lee & Cranage, 2014; Van Lear & de Ruyter, 2010; Lee & Song, 2010), this study incorporates different severity of negative reviews into the considerations for hotel managers' rapport management.

The findings indicate that it is crucial for hotel managers to selectively implement different response strategies (accommodative voice, formalistic voice, defensive voice) when addressing various severity of negative reviews (early squabble, on the rocks, the exes) (Li et al., 2018). The study also found that, despite the different focuses in responses, there is a tendency to use an accommodative voice more frequently when dealing with high-consensus negative reviews. The data also indicates that this response strategy is particularly effective for rapport management (Lee & Song, 2010). These findings emphasize the importance of tailoring responses in maintaining rapport between hotels and customers (Li et al., 2018). It can help managers make informed decisions for successful rapport management. In all, the insights derived from this study hold significant practical implications.

6. Conclusion

In the competitive hospitality industry, effectively managing negative reviews is crucial for hotel managers. This study explores various dimensions of this challenge by examining the relationship between customer negative reviews and hotel responses. It investigates strategies employed by hotels to address different review types, emphasizing proactive and accommodating approaches. Through rigorous methodologies, including coding and *chi-square tests*, the study identifies significant correlations between negative reviews and response voices. It highlights effective tactics in rapport management that enhance customer perceptions and safeguard the hotel's reputation. Overall, this study provides valuable insights into navigating negative reviews in a competitive market, underscoring the importance of customer-centric service and proactive management strategies.

Regarding limitations and future research, simplified scoring and response categories may restrict the depth of analysis, and selective examples in rapport management could overlook crucial factors, limiting generalizability. Future research should refine frameworks with detailed classifications and explore specific factors more deeply. Additionally, focusing on one and two-star reviews from *TripAdvisor's* top 20 Beijing hotels introduces sample bias and methodological constraints, reducing generalizability. Future studies should use diverse sampling strategies, include reviews from various platforms and global locations, and increase sample sizes for robust findings. While our research emphasizes measurable negative review types and response voices, it may constrain a comprehensive understanding of evolving consumer attitudes. Future studies should broaden their scope to encompass a wider range of customer evaluations and employ trend analysis tools to track company performance and reputation evolution, incorporating theoretical frameworks like recency effects. Addressing these areas will enhance understanding of consumer behavior and its implications for businesses.

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