Managing Deviant Customer Behavior in an Online Context: A Comparison of Hotels' Response Strategies

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AFFIDAVIT

I hereby affirm that this Master's Thesis represents my own written work and that I have used no sources and aids other than those indicated. All passages quoted from publications or paraphrased from these sources are properly cited and attributed.

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ABSTRACT

In light of the possibility granted to costumers to publically share their negative hotel experiences via online travel platforms and the fact that effective responses strategies to this kind of User Generated Content become necessary, this study found that, although often considered as inappropriate, defensive response strategies can represent an alternative to accommodative response strategies. For this research, 150 responses - including accommodative and defensive ones - to very negative hotel reviews posted on *TripAdvisor* were analyzed and compared regarding their politeness, empathy, and standardization. The analysis showed that while accommodative responses were, in general, a little more polite than defensive responses, they were often very generic. In contrast to this, whereas many defensive responses also contained polite passages, some exhibited rude phrases. However, defensive responses were overall much more likely to contain direct references and detailed information. Based on the findings, implications for managers include that when opting for accommodative response strategies, the responses should be detailed and individualized. Moreover, when deciding to provide a defensive response, responses should still be polite and consistent regarding their content.

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1 INTRODUCTION

Since the advent of the Web 2.0, the internet enables dissatisfied customers to share their negative experience with a great number of people via websites, blogs and other online forums (Wirtz & Lovelock, 2017). Although, according to the Customer Rage Study (2017) in the US in 2017, with 70% by far the biggest share of dissatisfied customers still preferred to complain over the phone, the impact of the 12% of customers complaining via the internet and spreading negative word of mouth on online platforms cannot be underestimated. Compared to an offline negative word of mouth with an average reach of 12 people, e-word of mouth can reach an average of 825 people (Customer Rage Study, 2017). Once word of mouth goes online, its scale and anonymity require more than conventional methods for analyzing and handling complaints (Litvin et al., 2008).

Especially in the tourism industry, third-party platforms such as *TripAdvisor* are providing the perfect setting for dissatisfied customers to share unpleasant experiences by posting negative reviews. Due to their range, straightforwardness, convenience, and anonymity, online travel platforms are gaining in popularity and, as a result, also in importance (Sparks et al., 2015). A study by Gretzel and Yoo (2008) has shown that tourists perceive peer-to-peer reviews as more trustworthy than information provided by marketers. Moreover, according to Mauri and Minazzi's (2013) research, more than 75% of potential customers consider customers' online reviews prior to booking a hotel. Also, Litvin at al. (2008) found that word of mouth serves as the most important source of information in the tourism industry when it comes to travelers' decision-making process. They attribute this finding to the intangible nature of products in the tourism industry, which makes their evaluation before the actual consumption very difficult. Given this, negative reviews have the power to harm a hotel's reputation and decisively influence potential customers (Zhang & Vásquez, 2014).

Regarding the reasons why customers seek to share their negative experiences, Nyer (1997) found that one of the main objectives is to vent negative feelings connected to the dissatisfying service encounter. Moreover, Hennig-Thurau et al. (2004) and Verhagen et al. (2013) identified that, especially in case of sharing negative opinion online, customers often intend to warn others and to spare them making the same dissatisfactory experience. Additionally, customers might want to seek revenge both individually and collectively (Hennig-Thurau et al., 2004).

In many cases, negative online reviews are a result of customers experiencing anger during their service encounter (Customer Rage Study, 2017). As the Customer Rage Study (2017) found, the number of customers experiencing rage during a service encounter or with a product is very high. 91% of participants reported that they had felt frustrated, 84% had felt disap-

pointed and 62% had experienced anger with a product or service. Connected to this, deviant customer behavior referring to customers expressing their anger by verbally attacking the service provider in online forums comes into play, which calls for effective methods of handling the situation (Fullerton & Punj, 2004; Greer, 2015; Wirtz & Lovelock, 2017).

In order not to lose the complaining customer and, in this case, more importantly, to keep and win over observing customers, very negative reviews need to be addressed in an appropriate way (Einwiller & Steilen, 2014). Regarding this matter, research shows that accommodative responses are often considered the most effective way of dealing with negative online reviews, while defensive responses is often attributed a lack of politeness and empathy (Einwiller & Steilen, 2015; Lee & Song, 2010; Grégoire et al., 2015; Zhang and Vásquez, 2014; Purnawirawan et al., 2015). However, while accommodative responses manage to contain a certain level of politeness, they are in many cases very standardized and could, therefore, convey a low level on interest in the reviewers' problems (Min et al., 2015).

The objective of this thesis is to investigate whether defensive responses to negative hotel reviews containing verbal attacks on the part of the customer on *TripAdvisor* really fail to politely and empathetically address the complainant's problems or if they might actually represent an alternative to accommodative responses broadly seen as the better choice when handling a negative online review. In order to find an answer to this research question, a comparison between accommodative and defensive responses is drawn regarding the factors considered as polite and empathetic in accordance with the academic literature as well as regarding their level of standardization.

While a similar study was conducted by Min et al. (2015), where responses to negative reviews on *TripAdvisor* were analyzed regarding their effectiveness towards readers, this thesis seeks to draw a comparison based on the responses' content instead of their effect on the complainants themselves or observers. Another difference is that the focus of the present study lies in responses to reviews that exhibit rude customer behavior by writing in an extremely negative and sometimes exaggerated way about the hotel experience. Based on the results of the analysis, this thesis seeks to suggest managers which factors have to be considered when choosing how to respond to a very negative hotel review.

In the remainder of this thesis, first, the relevant topics underlying the analysis will be discussed in order to define a frame of reference. In a next step, the research method used will be presented. In addition to this, some explanations regarding the sample and the procedure of the analysis will be given. Furthermore, the results will be presented and discussed and overall conclusions regarding the comparison of the two response strategies will be drawn. In the last step, a summary of the findings, managerial implications, limitations of the research and suggestions for future research will be presented.

2 LITERATURE REVIEW

2.1 Costumer complaining behavior and word of mouth

2.1.1 Costumer complaining behavior

Wirtz and Lovelock (2017) identified three possible reactions of dissatisfied customers to a service failure. First, they mention customers reacting in public by complaining either directly with the service provider, with a third party or by taking legal action. Moreover, dissatisfied customers can react privately by switching to the competition or spreading negative word of mouth. While Wirtz and Lovelock (2017) stress that these reactions can appear individually or in any combination, the third option suggested is that customers simply do not show any reaction to the dissatisfactory service encounter. With regards to this, they mention that the most common way of customers reacting to a service failure is not taking any action at all, especially if they do not expect any positive outcome.

When it comes to the question of which consumer group is more prone to voice a complaint, studies proved that customers with a high level of education and a higher income represent the group that is most likely to complain in case they are not satisfied with a service. Among the reasons for this, there can be listed that those customers feel more confident and are most probably better informed in order to confront an employee with the unsatisfactory situation (Stephens, 2000; Susskind, 2015). Wirtz and Lovelock (2017) also draw a connection between customers that present more knowledge about a given product and service and those who are more likely to complain.

Moreover, Barlow and Møller (1996) found that the more a customer spends on a product or service, the more likely they are to complain. This is explained based on the observation that the more money is spent, the more it is worth it to go through the inconveniences a complaint brings along. Whereas the complaining customer might not return to the firm to make another purchase, it is in their best interest to actually get what they were willing to spend a big amount of money on. As opposed to this, customers who purchased an inexpensive product or service are more likely to choose the more convenient option of accepting the dissatisfactory purchase and not going through the hassle of complaining (Barlow & Møller, 1996).

Tax and Brown (1998) found that the proportion of customers who actually complain after being exposed to an unsatisfactory service encounter is rather low and lies only between 5% and 10%. Wirtz and Lovelock (2017) support this finding and mention that, in some cases, this percentage is even lower. Also, Barlow and Møller (1996) found that the most preferred option chosen by dissatisfied customers is to stay quiet and to switch to another company or

service provider based on the fact that it is considered the easiest way. The following table lists several reasons why customers are in many cases reluctant to complain:

1. Customers feel that nobody would listen to the complaint anyway.
2. They do not want to ruin the experience for others who are with them.
3. They think that the service failure is not severe enough to justify a complaint.
4. They feel that they would need to defend their statement in case their complaint was questioned.
5. They argue that the expenses to complain are higher than the ones for the actual purchase.
6. They fear that complaining would draw too much attention to them.
7. They do not know who to complain to.
8. They fear that they are treated badly.
9. They would have to wait for a long time in order for the complaint to be addressed
10. There was nobody to complain to.
11. They did not keep the receipt they would need in order to voice a complaint.
12. They do not want anybody to lose their job because of the complaint.
13. Complaining feels too personal
14. They feel that they contributed a share to the dissatisfying situation.
15. They do not have time to complain.
16. They feel if they complain too often the people who they complain to might have a negative opinion about them.
17. They had a bad experience when they complained about another situation.

TABLE 2-1 REASONS WHY CUSTOMERS DO NOT COMPLAIN (BARLOW & MØLLER, 1996)

Also, Chebat et al. 2005, Stephens and Gwinner (1998), as well as Bodey and Grace (2006), identified several reasons why customers prefer not to complain. First of all, they found that customers are not willing to invest time in complaining and this even more so if they do not ascribe much importance to what they have purchased. Second, customers cannot be sure whether their complaint will actually be addressed and often do not expect any outcome from complaining. Third, in many cases customers do not know who to turn to when they want to complain and, lastly, customers feel uncomfortable complaining since they do not want to be confronted with the unpleasant situation.

According to Barlow & Møller (1996), the firms themselves are responsible for the fact that customers prefer to refrain from complaining. They argue that complaint handling strategies often discourage customers to talk openly about their unpleasant experience, since in many cases no satisfactory solution can be found. Among these ineffective strategies, they list a mere apology where more recovery procedures would be required, shifting the blame to the customer, no reaction at all, rude treatment, passing the complaint on to somebody else, shifting the blame to somebody else, giving complaining customers the feeling they are wasting the

employee's time, asking the customer a long list of questions that might not all be necessary for the service recovery and, lastly, questioning the customer's credibility.

In addition to conveying the feeling to customers that their critique is not wanted, companies often make it hard for customers to go through the process of complaining. Sometimes companies do not indicate clearly where and with whom to complain. Moreover, firms sometimes attach a lot of inconveniences to the process of complaining such as making complainants personally go see the person responsible for complaint handling. In other cases, customer complaints are simply not addressed, which will most likely lead the customer not to try to complain again (Barlow & Møller, 1996).

2.1.2 Channel choice

Wirtz and Lovelock (2017) stress that 99% of customer complaints are expressed in direct conversations or over the phone. According to their findings, not even 1% of the complainants used online channels such as company websites, e-mails or third-party platforms or other offline channels such as letters or questionnaires.

Connected to this, Mattila and Wirtz (2004) found that while customers who seek to get a refund or compensation would choose direct channels such as a face-to-face conversation or a telephone conversation, customers who want to express their frustration and do not necessarily expect any outcome would choose online channels or would send a letter.

As Tripp and Grégoire (2011) showed, dissatisfied customers who have already tried to directly complain with an employee but have not received a satisfactory service recovery, are very likely to draw on online channels to share their complaint.

2.1.3 Word of mouth

As already discussed, complaining publically brings along a lot of inconveniences, therefore, customers might use private channels in order to share their negative experiences by spreading negative word of mouth (Wirtz and Lovelock, 2017).

When marketing research on word of mouth first started in the 1960s, definitions identified it as a private act of communication within a small group of consumers. In the early definitions, those conversations took place face to face (Arndt 1967; Carl 2006; Litvin et al., 2008). More specifically, the concept of word of mouth referred to a communicative act between various parties in a private setting who share their opinion on given goods or services (Fornell & Bookstein, 1982). Later on, Westbrook (1987, p. 261) broadened the concept of word of mouth and defined it as "all informal communications directed at other consumers about the ownership, usage, or characteristics of particular goods and services or their sellers."

Litvin et al. (2008) stress that the most important characteristic of word of mouth is the fact that its source is independent. They argue that this is especially crucial when considering to-day's presence of information technology. Therefore, they provide another definition of word of mouth and elaborate that the concept refers to "[...] the communication between consumers about a product, service, or a company in which the sources are considered independent of commercial influence" (Litvin et al., 2008, p. 3).

The evaluations of the goods and services that are discussed can either be positive, negative or neutral. Positive word of mouth can, for example, encompass vivid stories on satisfactory experiences as well as recommendations to friends, family, and other consumers. In contrast to this, negative word of mouth might refer to sharing negative impressions during unpleasant service encounters, spreading rumors about goods or services or firms and providers as wells as to complaining privately with family and friends (Anderson, 1998).

Regarding the intention behind sharing word of mouth, Hawkins et al. (2004) argue that consumers voice opinions and impressions in order to either motivate their peers to purchase given goods or services with specific providers or, in contrast to this, direct them away from products, services or firms.

2.2 Complaint handling and service recovery

2.2.1 Complaint handling

The way complaints are handled decisively determines a company's level of service quality and influences a customer's decision whether to stay with a company or to switch to the competition following a service failure (Bell & Luddington, 2006; Wirtz & Lovelock, 2017).

A decisive point when it comes to handling complains is to understand the customers' point of view. While customers tend to shift the blame for a service failure to the providing firm, managers are prone to making the customer responsible for the unsatisfactory situation. In many cases, complaining customers are not given credibility due to the fact that nobody ever has complained about a specific aspect. However, managers need to have in mind that customers, in the majority of cases, would try to avoid complaining due to the hassle and negative feelings connected to it. As a result, a customer who complains has most probably a very good reason to do so and needs to be taken seriously (Barlow & Møller, 1996).

As a result, in order to be able to handle complaints effectively, managers should be aware of the reasons why customers complain (Wirtz & Lovelock, 2017). One of the reasons identified by Chebat et al. (2005) is to get a refund or compensation to make up for a financial loss. Wirtz and Lovelock (2017) furthermore list that complaining customers seek to vent their rage when confronted with service encounters perceived as unfair and with employees acting in an indifferent or rude way. They argue that in this case, the customer's self-esteem is affected nega-

tively and he or she consequently react emotionally. Another reason they mention refers to customers intending to help the firm make improvements to their services. Similarly, some customers want to prevent negative service experiences from happening to other customers. Therefore, they seek to create awareness of a problem in order for it to be sorted out for future service encounters (Wirtz & Lovelock, 2017).

According to Barlow & Møller (1996), in the majority of cases, customers complain about aspects that are important to them and address weaknesses they think their feedback could have a positive influence on. While managers and service providers tend to think in a negative way about complaining customers, they forget that a complaint is actually an opportunity to improve what potentially a number of other customers perceive as unsatisfactory. Moreover, the mere fact that there is no customer who complains does not imply that there are only satisfied customers. This can pose a serious threat since companies will not become aware of their weaknesses. Therefore, it should be perceived as positive if customers are willing to share their experience with the firm (Barlow & Møller, 1996). Also, Bell and Luddington (2006) stress that while complaints often tend to be seen as a negative occurrence, they actually bear an opportunity of delivering better services and getting to understand the consumers' needs. Finally, also Wirtz and Lovelock (2017) mention that one should have in mind that a complaining customer represents an opportunity and not necessarily a threat. This is based on the fact that they give the company a chance to make up for the dissatisfactory service, to build a stronger relationship with the complaining customer and to implement changes according to the complainants' feedback (Wirtz & Lovelock, 2017).

However, it has to be taken into account that bad complaint handling is would likely cause more damage to a company than no complaint handling at all (Customer Rage Study, 2017). Therefore, effective service recovery strategies are essential to satisfactory complaint handling.

2.2.2 Service recovery

Barlow & Møller (1996, p. 73) define service recovery as "the process of making right what went wrong". In detail, the process of service recovery refers to measures implemented after a service failure in order to turn the complaining customer's dissatisfying experience into a satisfactory one and, in the best case, thereby creating customer loyalty (DeWitt et al., 2008).

The findings of the Customer Rage Study (2017) conducted in the US depict how important satisfactory service recovery is. The result showed that out of 40% of participants who stated that they had been dissatisfied with the way their complaints had been handled, only 3% indicated that they were willing to buy again from the same products or service provider. Contrary to this, 68% of complainants who had been satisfied with the service recovery said that they would stay with the company.

Having in mind that product or service failures sometimes cannot be avoided, it is decisive that firms learn about recovery strategies. Successful service recovery already starts with the promises made to a customer when purchasing the service. A company needs to convey the message to the customer that if a problem occurs it will be handled in a fair way. In case the customer is not satisfied, they are then much more likely not to blame the company for what went wrong and to be cooperative during the recovery process (Barlow & Møller, 1996).

In order to be able to develop satisfactory service recovery strategies, Wirtz and Lovelock (2017) discuss three crucial aspects. First of all, the process for customers to give feedback to the firm should be easy and uncomplicated. As already mentioned earlier, customers are rather reserved when it comes to sharing their negative experience with the service provider. Therefore, firms have to directly address the factors that keep customers from complaining. Strategies for this could include offering a toll-free customer service line, providing special links on the company website or other online platforms or making customer feedback cards available. Moreover, companies could also stress if an improvement suggested by a customer has been put into practice and share this information with all other customers (Wirtz & Lovelock, 2017).

Secondly, firms have to make sure that service recovery strategies can be realized effectively. With regards to this, Wirtz and Lovelock (2017) suggest four dimensions that service recovery strategies should contain. First, service recovery needs to be done proactively. This refers to the idea of the service failure being recovered right after it happened before the customer even can complain. Therefore, front-line employees should be attentive to customers who could be possibly having a negative experience. In this case, the employee should address the problem immediately and should offer a solution. Second, there should be guidelines on how to react to specific service failures. Also, Homburg and Fürst (2005) suggest that service recovery strategies for service failures that happen repeatedly and sometimes cannot be avoided should be planned. As a result, Wirtz and Lovelock (2017) recommend that companies identify the areas where it is most likely for service failures to occur and develop response strategies accordingly. As a third dimension, Wirtz and Lovelock (2017) mention that employees need to be instructed in order to be capable of handling the situation effectively. Connected to this, the fourth dimension is that employees need to be empowered, so they have enough room to react in a satisfactory way and do not always need to ask for permission to recover the failure with measures the employees themselves consider as appropriate (Lewis, 1995). This is also underlined by Bernoff and Schadler (2010), who argue that employees need to be allowed to take own decisions in extraordinary cases where there are no guidelines in place. They also mention that employees should have the permission to spend money in order to make up for the service failure. Moreover, they refer to the online context where employees should be empowered to respond to online reviews by offering solutions for the service failure.

The third aspect refers to the possibility of compensating dissatisfied customers. While in some cases an honest apology is enough to make up for the service failure, in other, more severe cases compensation might be considered as an appropriate recovery strategy. In order to identify how costly compensation should be, Wirtz and Lovelock (2017) propose that the right amount of compensation should be determined based on three factors. First of all, the position of the firm plays a major role. Whereas a company that is focused on the luxury market would need to invest a rather big amount of money to compensate the dissatisfied customer, a firm that has its background in mass production is likely not to be expected to compensate a complaining customer financially. The second factor refers to the severity of the occurrence. While a minor service failure will not demand a generous compensation, a failure that led to major inconveniences will require a compensation of significant value. Third, it is important to consider who the affected customer was. Whereas a long-term customer is likely to expect a bigger compensation, a customer who purchased for the first time will be satisfied with less. However, it is crucial to also treat one-time customers in a fair way since they can potentially turn into loyal customers when satisfied with the service recovery (Wirtz & Lovelock, 2017). Additionally, firms should also have in mind that generous compensation might send the wrong message since deviant customers could take advantage of this generosity by intentionally provoking services failures (Wirtz & McColl-Kennedy, 2010).

As a result, managers as well as employees should be prepared and should know how to react when faced with a complaint by a dissatisfied customer. Communication skills, as well as instructions on how to handle a complaint, are crucial for front-line employees to effectively deliver service recovery (Wirtz & Lovelock, 2017). The following table lists the strategies Wirtz and Lovelock (2017) suggest that front-line employees follow in order to recover a service failure successfully.

1. Employees should react fast. In the best case, employees can react during the service encounter. If this is not possible, it is recommended to react within the first 24 hours of the service failure.
2. Employees should express their understanding towards the customer in order to build a relationship with them.
3. Employees should not start an argument with the complaining customer.
4. Employees should try to put themselves in the customer's position in order to understand them better.
5. Employees should identify objectively who was responsible for the failure and admit their wrongdoing and apologize in case they caused the problem. They should not react in a defensive way since this might convey the message that the company has something to hide and consequently cause mistrust.
6. Employees should not question the customer's credibility. Even if there is the suspicion that a customer might not be truthful they should be taken seriously and only after investigating

the case carefully conclusions should be drawn.
7. Employees should inform the customers about the steps that will be taken in order to make up for the service failure.
8. Employees should keep the customer up-to-date during the service recovery process.
9. In some cases, employees should have compensation in mind as a possible recovery strategy.
10. Employees should be persistent when it comes to restoring the customer's trust.
11. Employees should use the feedback from complaining customers to improve service delivery processes where improvement is actually needed.

TABLE 2-2 COMPLAINT HANDLINGSTRATEGIES (WIRTZ & LOVELOCK, 2017)

The Customer Rage Study (2017) found that 23% of complainants were satisfied when offered only an apology, compared to 73% of satisfied complainants who were offered financial compensation in addition to an apology. Barlow & Møller (1996) also found that an apology is not enough to make up for a service failure except for cases where it is already too late to do anything else than offering an apology.

With regards to this, whether a service recovery is perceived as satisfactory depends on three dimensions of justice. The first dimension refers to the procedure of the service recovery. Procedural justice is connected to the firm accepting responsibility for the service failure and proceeding flexibly and individually adapted to the complainant's needs with the service recovery. The second dimension encompasses the employee's behavior towards the complainant. Within the dimension of interactional justice, a reason for the service failure should be given as well as a solution should be provided. The treatment should further be polite and honest. The third dimension referring to the outcome justice includes the redress the complainant receives for the service failure as well as all inconveniences connected to it (Tax & Brown, 1998).

Connected to this, also Seiders and Berry (1998) argue that customers who complain expect to be treated in a fair way. In case their expectations are met, they will most likely be satisfied. However, customers often perceive the treatment as unfair and consider given service recovery measures inappropriate. In this case, customers tend to show emotional reactions (Seiders & Berry, 1998).

Finally, there has to be considered that from a long-term perspective, investing in satisfying dissatisfied customers can be seen as profitable. Whereas a dissatisfied customer is very likely to switch to the competition and might also spread negative word of mouth, a customer who has received satisfactory service recovery will most probably stay with the company and share their positive experience with others (Wirtz & Lovelock, 2017).

2.2.3 The service recovery paradox

The service recovery paradox refers to the phenomenon when a very satisfactory service recovery is performed on a complaining customer who, as a result, is more satisfied with the company than a normal customer who did not experience a service failure (De Matos et al., 2007). However, the assumption that service failures might actually be something positive so the firm has the chance to even surpass the customers' expectations by well-handled service recovery can be misleading since the service recovery paradox does not work universally (Michel & Meuter, 2008). A study by Maxham and Netemeyer (2002) showed that when a service failure occurred more often than once, the service recovery paradox did not apply anymore. While the customers were delighted after the first service failure had been recovered in a very satisfactory way, they were disappointed if a service failure occurred for the second time and were not willing to forgive the firm as for the first occurrence of a problem. The study also proved a connection between customers who experienced a very satisfactory service recovery and their high expectations in case a second service failure occurred.

With regards to this, Wirtz and Lovelock (2017) also stress that the service recovery paradox depends on how easily a service failure can be recovered. While in some cases it is impossible to recover a service that has already been delivered in a poor way such as ruined wedding pictures, other situations provide more room for successful recovery and the chance to delight the dissatisfied customer. An overbooked flight where a customer is offered an upgrade to the business class would be an example for this. Consequently, in case a superior service is offered as a replacement for the originally purchased one that cannot be delivered, customers are very likely to be satisfied with the service recovery and might hope for a repetition of the service failure (Wirtz & Lovelock, 2017). However, Wirtz and Lovelock (2017) also underline that the best strategy for delivering satisfactory services is to make it right from the start.

2.2.4 Service guarantees

Another way for firms to handle service failures is to offer service guarantees which promise to compensate the customer by replacing the service, giving credit to the customer or refunding them in case certain criteria were not met and, consequently, they were not satisfied with the service. By having service guarantees in place, the process of service recovery becomes easier. Moreover, they allow for learning effectively from wrongdoings and quickly putting improvements to practice (Wirtz & Lovelock, 2017). The following table lists the reasons why service guarantees can be effective when it comes to recovering service failures:

1. In order to set up service guarantees, firms have to be aware of what customers expect, which requires a close analysis of customers' wishes.
2. By using service guarantees, companies define clear guidelines and that way inform customers as well as employees about the company's principles. Financial compensation for service

failures stresses how costly poor service delivery can be and makes managers understand the impact of this issue.
3. In order for service guarantees to be offered, firms have to make sure customers can give their feedback easily.
4. Service guarantees help define possible weaknesses, which can then be worked on.
5. By offering service guarantees, the risk for customers to take the wrong purchase decision is reduced and customer loyalty is encouraged.

TABLE 2-3 REASONS WHY SERVICE GUARANTEES ARE EFFECTIVE (HART, 1998)

Service guarantees moreover lead the customer to expect that employees will show a willing-ness to help and to make up for the service failure in a satisfactory way and, therefore, facili-tate the process of complaining and encourage customers to complain. Especially the promise to deliver the service at no cost in case the customer is not satisfied is a very successful tool. On one hand, new customers can be won over and, on the other hand, current customers will stay loyal, since they know they will be most likely very satisfied with the service (Wirtz & Lovelock, 2017).

According to Hart (1988), there are six characteristics which are essential for well-designed service strategies:

1. Service guarantees should hold under any condition without surprising the complainant in a negative way.
2. Service guarantees should be easily understandable and communicated clearly.
3. Service guarantees should be provided for services that are important to customers and the amount of compensation should be appropriate for the type of service.
4. It should be easy for customers to solicit the service guarantee.
5. It should be easy for customers to actually get the service guarantee.
6. The type of compensation should be realistic.

TABLE 2-4 FACTORS OF EFFECTIVE SERVICE GUARANTEES (HART, 1988)

Wirtz (1998) argues that while full-satisfaction guarantees are widely considered the best op-tion when it comes to designing service guarantees, they can sometimes be confusing for the customer. Confusion can arise because it is not clearly defined what complete satisfaction is supposed to mean and if a service subjectively perceived as unsatisfactory is a reason to in-voke the service guarantee. However, guarantees referring to one specific aspect of the service such as a pre-defined delivery time can be too limited and might, therefore, be less attractive for customers (Wirtz & Kum, 2001). Therefore, Wirtz and Kum (2001) suggest mixing the two options based on the assumption that a mixed version offers the comprehensiveness of the full-satisfaction guarantee as well as clear definitions of attribute-specific guarantees. In such a case, the full-satisfaction guarantee is used in general and the specific guarantee applies if a certain part of the service is dissatisfactory (Wirtz & Lovelock, 2017).

However, it is not always advisable to introduce a service guarantee. Therefore, a service provider should be aware in which areas its performance is strong and in which areas it is rather weak. Ostrom and Hart (2000) argue that companies that are already known to deliver very satisfactory services should refrain from providing service guarantees since they are expected to handle complaints satisfactorily even without a service guarantee in place. Moreover, they suggest that companies that have not yet reached a high level of service quality should first improve their service quality in order to prevent too many customers from using the service guarantee once in place. They also mention that firms whose service delivery partially depends on forces that cannot be controlled or influenced should not consider offering a service guarantee. Furthermore, they recommend that firms that operate in markets where little risk is connected with purchasing a service should not offer service guarantees since they are costly while customers might not see much value in it. Lastly, companies that have many competitors with very similar services and service guarantees in place should only consider offering a service guarantee if it is very different from what is already offered by others.

Although complaints should be seen as something positive and customers should be encouraged to invoke service guarantees in given situations, firms also face the risk of dishonest customers taking advantage of the firm's service recovery measures (Wirtz and Lovelock, 2017).

2.3 Deviant customer behavior

2.3.1 Deviant customer behavior and jaycustomers

According to Fullerton and Punj (2004, p. 1239), deviant customer behavior can be defined "[…] as behavioral acts by consumers, which violate the generally accepted norms of conduct in consumption situations, and thus disrupt the consumption order". They mention a long list of deviant or dysfunctional customer behavior, also referred to as consumer misbehavior or misconduct, encompassing acts such as shoplifting, physical attacks, vandalism, fraud, generating and spreading rumors as well as abusing an employee verbally and making false claims in order to benefit from it.

A similar list can be found with Greer (2015). She lists six types of misbehavior which include abusive behavior against the property, fraudulent behavior, verbal abuse, physical aggression as well as under- and over-participation.

Also, Wirtz and Lovelock (2017) identified seven categories of misbehaving customers. Especially in case, a firm offers very generous compensation, customers might falsely claim that a service failure happened. Such customer behavior might encourage other customers to complain as well. Wirtz and Lovelock (2017) refer to such customers as "jaycustomers".

The first group of deviant customer behavior identified by Wirtz and Lovelock (2017) refers to customers cheating on the service provider. Among examples of cheating, there can be enlist-

ed customers who complain without a reason in order to get compensated or refunded or exploit service guarantees. Another example mentioned here would be a customer buying a piece of clothing to wear it to a specific event and then returning it to the store. The big difficulty with regards to dysfunctional customer behavior is that firms can hardly identify in which case a customer is truly dissatisfied with the service or simply wants to take advantage of service recovery strategies in place.

The second group of jaycustomers encompasses customers who intend to steal or get significant price reductions by questioning receipts or switching price tags. This form of deviant behavior does not only include shoplifting, but also misbehavior such as using public transportation or entering the cinema without a ticket or leaving the restaurant without paying. The challenge with regards to this is to differentiate between customers who unintentionally forget to pay and those who consciously commit theft. Moreover, other customers should not be affected by measures seeking to prevent jaycustomers from stealing (Wirtz & Lovelock, 2017).

Third, Witz and Lovelock (2017) mention customers who intentionally break rules. This often refers to rules that serve for the customers' safety. Examples mentioned include customers who avoid sticking to rules regarding air travel safety or skiers speeding on skiing slopes and not listening to the instructions of the ski patrol team. In order to keep customers from wanting to break rules, managers need to put in place a small number of important and clearly defined rules.

The fourth category of jaycustomers includes customers who freely express their rage in public by yelling at staff members, insulting or threatening them. In case employees do not know how to handle the situation, it might even come as far as the customer attacking the employee physically. In order to prevent that other customers are affected by the situation, the angry customer should be brought to a separate area. Managers should then mediate between the two parties. Another example of raging customers is those who shout during a conversation on the phone. In this case, Wirtz and Lovelock (2017) recommend suggesting the customer end the phone call and start a new conversation sometime later (Wirtz & Lovelock, 2017).

The next category as a subcategory of the raging customers refers to customers starting a fight with family members or other customers. With regards to this, the difficulty is to identify in which case it is recommended to intervene and in which case getting involved in the argument would make it worse (Wirtz & Lovelock, 2017).

Another type of jaycustomer described by Wirtz and Lovelock (2017) are customers who vandalize by damaging furniture or breaking glasses for example. As prevention, customers can be informed about the appropriate use of things and can also be sanctioned in case of causing damage. Moreover, it can be made sure that the things provided to the customer are either protected or durable.

The last category refers to customers who refuse to pay on time. To prevent this from happening, companies can ask for a pre-payment, the credit card number or can insist on the customer to pay at the same time as the service is completed. In this case, companies should consider the reason why customers do not pay on time. In case a customer is not able to pay immediately due to financial problems, the company could grant more time to effectuate the payment and could that way create customer loyalty and positive word of mouth (Wirtz & Lovelock, 2017).

The following table gives an overview of the various forms of consumer misbehavior identified in the academic literature. The table shows that verbal attacks on employees, vandalism and fraudulent behavior can be found with each research offering a classification for deviant customer behavior. Moreover, stealing and physical aggression are mentioned in two of the three columns.

Fullerton & Punj (2004)	Greer (2015)	Wirtz & Lovelock (2017)
Verbal attacks	*Verbal abuse*	*Verbal aggression against employees*
Vandalism	*Abusive behavior against the property*	*Vandalism*
Fraud	*Fraudulent behavior*	*Cheating*
Physical attacks	*Physical aggression*	Verbal aggression against family members or other customers
Shoplifting	Underparticipation	*Stealing*
Spreading rumors	Overparticipation	Breaking rule
False claims		Late payment

TABLE 2-5 DEVIANT CUSTOMER BEHAVIOR AND JAYCUSTOMERS

A research by Wirtz and Kum (2004) found that customers who perceived the way they were treated by the service provider as unfair are more prone to complain in order to get compensation or a refund. Another finding was that customers rather choose large companies to exploit their service recovery policies over smaller firms due to the assumption that a large firm will get hurt less financially. They also were able to identify a difference between customers who purchase from the service provider repeatedly and those who use their service only once, the latter is much more likely to take advantage of service recovery. The same finding is valid for customers who are somehow related to an employee and therefore present a lower risk of cheating on a firm than customers without any personal relationship. Also if the service quality provided by a firm is high, there is a good chance of customers not taking advantage of the company. Moreover, the study showed that guarantees to return the money in case of an unsatisfactory service are not exploited more frequently the higher the promised percentage of the refund.

Based on these findings, Wirtz any Lovelock (2017) conclude that firms should provide fair service recovery strategies, large companies should be aware that they are more likely to become a victim of customer fraud and put prevention in place accordingly and since there is no higher risk of dysfunctional customer behavior if satisfaction guarantees are at a high percentage, firms can offer a 100% refund. Moreover, it can be considered that loyal customers are not likely to present fraudulent behavior and, therefore, they can also be offered guarantees. Lastly, service providers delivering high-quality services will very likely be safe from customer fraud compared to firms providing regular service. Wirtz and Lovelock (2017) moreover argue that although it is important not to question the customer's credibility, it is also recommendable to keep an eye on customers who frequently complain and expect to be compensated or get a refund.

2.3.2 The effects of deviant customer behavior

There are various effects that deviant customer behavior can have on the parties involved. As stressed by Fullerton & Punj (2004), deviant customer behavior has an impact on how other customers experience an interaction with a given firm. Moreover, the negative effects of consumer misbehavior on the organization itself can range from financial or material damage to psychological damage regarding the employees.

In accordance with this, Harris and Reynolds (2003) identified that consumer misbehavior can have consequences on employees as well as other customers and the organization itself. With regard to employees, their study showed that an encounter involving dysfunctional customer behavior can lead to long-term psychological damage. These consequences encompass feelings of humiliation and low self-esteem as well as different forms of stress disorders. Also, Yagil (2008) found that such behavior can cause the affected employee to develop emotional exhaustion, depression, and burnout. Harris and Reynolds (2003) moreover revealed that a large number of employees experienced an impact on their short-term emotional state including negative effects on their mood or situations of emotional labor.

Furthermore, there can be listed a number of behavioral consequences in employees in response to misbehaving customers. These include presenting low motivation or taking revenge on customers. However, such situations can also have positive effects, since it can strengthen the employees' team spirit (Harris & Reynolds, 2003).

Apart from the consequences already mentioned, a service encounter with a dysfunctional customer can lead to physical violence towards employees or the property (Harris & Reynolds, 2003).

When it comes to the consequences deviant customer behavior can have on other customers witnessing the situation, customers either express their sympathy for the employee or service provider in general and support them or they feel encouraged by a dysfunctional customer to

behave the same way (Harris & Reynolds, 2003). According to Harris and Reynolds (2003), the latter phenomenon mainly occurs when it comes to complaints. Apart from that, dysfunctional customers can negatively influence the observing customers' experience with the encounter also affecting the functional customers' loyalty (Harris & Reynolds, 2003).

Regarding the effects dysfunctional customers can have on the organization itself, there have to be mentioned mainly financial consequences. On one hand, deviant customer behavior can negatively influence employees' job satisfaction and may cause a high employee turnover rate which then also influences the working climate. This also leads to higher costs for recruiting new employees and training them as well as to lower customer satisfaction and loyalty. Expenses such as legal costs and compensation payments to complaining customers whose claim does not necessarily reflect the whole truth also have to be listed among financial consequences. These costs have an effect on the organization's profitability (Harris & Reynolds, 2003).

With regard to the online world, negative online behavior can seriously harm a service provider's reputation and consequently its competitiveness and performance. Moreover, reviews that seem to be fake can have a negative impact on the credibility of travel platforms (Sigala et al., 2016). Since tourism can be found among those industries where the internet and specifically social media play a major role, deviant customer behavior expressed online can have a decisive impact on the value creation for all parties involved (Sigala et al., 2016).

To conclude, it can be said that dissatisfied customers can destroy the value a firm retrieves from a service by spreading negative word of mouth, which can damage the organization's image (Plé & Chumpitaz Cáceres, 2010). This can go as far as that consumers' misconduct can pose a threat to the organization's existence (Fullerton & Punj, 2004).

2.3.3 Value co-destruction

While the two parties involved in a service exchange most likely tend to co-create value, there can occur situations where the value is co-destroyed (Plé & Chumpitaz Cáceres, 2010). According to Plé and Chumpitaz Cáceres (2010, p. 431), "value co-destruction can be defined as an interactional process between service systems that results in a decline in at least one of the systems' well-being." Thus, the value can either be destroyed for the consumer, for the organization or for both.

Plé and Chumpitaz Cáceres (2010) further elaborate that value co-destruction occurs when one of the parties involved - firm or customer - does not use either the firm's resources, the customer's resources or both in an appropriate way. In such a case, the value is destroyed for at least one of the parties.

In this regard, Plé and Chumpitaz Cáceres (2010) mention an example of a good that needs to be maintained. If the customer who has purchased this good does not maintain it, he or she destroys value for him- or herself. In case the customer then makes the providing firm responsible for the malfunctioning good and spreads negative word of mouth, the value of the firm is destroyed due to the image damage this might cause.

Such misuse of resources can either occur accidentally or intentionally. An accidental misuse of resources can, for example, refer to restricted knowledge or skills of one of the parties, which might cause the destruction of value. An example of this could be a costumer not knowing that employees have limited time for asstisting each customer and, therefore, insisting that the employee dedicates more time to help him or her. Intentional misuse in most cases is practiced in order for one party to retrieve the value and to destroy value for the second party. This could refer to a customer making false claims in order to get compensated or refunded (Plé and Chumpitaz Cáceres, 2010).

It can, therefore, be concluded that customers have a big share in creating value for both themselves and the goods or services providing firm. Equally, they can also contribute to destroying value for both parties. One possibility of value co-destruction can be deviant customer behavior where the value for the providing firm can be destroyed by dissatisfied customers influencing other potential or actual customers (Plé and Chumpitaz Cáceres', 2010) example.

2.3.4 The reasons for and factors of deviant customer behavior

While there can be found a number of reasons for customers to present a certain form of deviant behavior such as the lack of purchasing power, the thrill connected to misbehaving, a restricted moral understanding, negative feelings towards specific organizations, provocative circumstances as well as opportunistic goals (Fullerton & Punj, 2004), when it comes to customers misbehaving in a way that they spread negative word of mouth, complain to third parties or boycott the organization, Matilla and Wirtz (2004) identify dissatisfaction as the main reason. Moreover, they stress that dissatisfied customers complaining about the organization seek to either get compensation or to express their frustration.

This goes in line with the findings of Rose and Neidermeyer (1999) who conclude that showing aggressive behavior can be explained by a person's wish for punishing or eliminating the cause of his or her frustration. When it comes to aggressive behavior, such customer behavior can be explained based on the assumption that affected customers are likely to hold the actor causing an unpleasant event responsible for this situation and not other circumstances that might as well be the cause for the event (Rose and Neidermeyer, 1999).

Apart from that, a cognitive approach could also serve as an explanation for customers to show misbehior. This refers to customers acting according to behavioral scripts they have developed throughout their lives based on experiences (Rose & Neidermeyer, 1999).

According to Harris and Reynolds' (2003) findings, female customers exhibit a greater tendency to misbehave towards other customers involved in a dissatisfying situation. Thus, gender could also play a role when it comes to examining deviant customer behavior. Related to this, Rose and Neidermeyer (1999) identified that customer misbehavior is moreover related to factors of personality.

An important factor in this regard, is the channel customers choose in order to voice their dissatisfaction. Matilla and Wirtz (2004) found that the choice of which channel is best to share one's complaint mostly depends on the customer's goal. Connected to this, the online world provides various channels for customers to complain to or about an organization and to influence the opinion of observers.

2.4 User Generated Content

2.4.1 The relevance of User Generated Content

The Web 2.0 has granted consumers the power to freely and easily share opinions and complaints online with a large number of readers (Hong & Lee, 2004). As a result, the online world provides consumers with an additional option to gather information provided by other consumers and also enables them to interact with each other via electronic word of mouth (Hennig-Thurau et al., 2004). One of the most important aspects one has to have in mind considering the consumers' power in the online world is that a satisfied customer is likely to share their experience with some people, a dissatisfied customer, however, will share their experience with as many people as possible (Chatterjee, 2001).

Especially for the tourism industry, consumer-generated content is highly influential. Information provided online is growing in importance when it comes to tourists making their travel decisions. Additionally, it is expected that decisions will be more and more influenced by consumer-generated content as opposed to information provided by marketers (Gretzel & Yoo, 2008). This is based on the fact that consumers are more likely to trust consumer-generated information than content made available by companies themselves (Bickart & Schindler, 2001).

2.4.2 Online complaints

The online world including social media, blogs, review platforms and YouTube provides an additional space for consumers to complain to companies, which is connected to a whole new world of challenges for the affected organizations (Istanbulluoglu, 2017; Grégoire et al., 2015).

Online complaints can appear in various forms. First of all, online complaints can be sent directly to the service provider via social media platforms. In this case, service providers get the chance to make up for the service failure, which can have a positive effect on the company's performance as it may result in customer satisfaction and loyalty. If a customer is highly satis-

fied with the service recovery, he or she might even share their positive experience with effective complaint handling online and will therefore also positively influence the company's reputation (Grégoire et al., 2015).

In other cases, dissatisfied customers can complain to third parties such as consumer agencies asking for help without getting in touch with the organization in question. This is a very dangerous form of online complaint since service providers do not get the chance to approach the complainant and manage the complaint accordingly (Grégoire et al., 2015).

Furthermore, online complaints can also be posted on social media or review platforms without contacting the service provider beforehand. Dissatisfied customers might even go as far as to produce viral *Youtube* videos in order to share their negative experience with as many people as possible (Grégoire et al., 2015).

Online complaints where service providers are not contacted directly can pose a serious threat since the company might not even be aware of the complaint's existence. This might give competitors the chance of contacting the complainants and steal them and other customers from the initial service provider. These complaints take the form of negative e-word of mouth where the complainant is likely to seek revenge and harm the company's reputation (Grégoire et al., 2015).

2.4.3 Deviant customer behavior in an online context

Applied to the online world, deviant customer behavior can take the form of fraudulent online behavior by posting untrue content or fake reviews (Sigala et al., 2016). Another form of online misbehavior includes posting negative reviews containing rude expressions and an abusive tone using insulting comparisons and metaphors (Fullerton and Punj, 2004). With regard to this, Grégoire et al. (2015) mention the phenomenon of cyberbullying where customers talk negatively about specific employees. Although considered a mild form of deviant customer behavior, a simple online complaint can also be found among the various forms of consumer misbehavior (Harris & Reynolds, 2003).

Other forms of consumer misbehavior to be found in the online world are cyber attacks such as for example denial-of-service attacks, data theft, spreading a virus and credit card fraud (Fullerton & Punj, 2004). However, since this study focuses on verbal content spread on the internet, these kinds of behavior are not relevant in this context.

The concept of deviant customer behavior applied for this study refers to complaining customers using words that paint an extraordinarily bad picture of the service encounter. Customer comments can either be untrue or exaggerated where the customer intends to take revenge and harm the service provider or can be a rage episode where customers try to put in words

their extreme dissatisfaction with a specific service (Greer, 2015). The research, however, does not intend to claim whether the use of these expressions is justified or not.

2.4.4 Negative e-word of mouth and its reasons

Negative e-word of mouth is any negative statement made public on the internet by a person somehow related to the goods or service provider (e.g. current or former customer) about a product or service. Moreover, this statement is made available to a large number of readers (Hennig-Thurau et al., 2004). Negative e-word of mouth can be one of the consequences of a negative customer experience due to a service failure and has the power to cause serious harm to a goods or service provider (Matilla & Wirtz, 2004).

In comparison with traditional word of mouth in the offline world, the volume of online word of mouth is far bigger. Moreover, if and to which extent a consumer is exposed to e-word of mouth is exclusively under his or her control and is determined by the time a consumer look-ing for information is willing to invest (Chatterjee, 2001). Additionally, although depending on how committed a customer is to a given brand, Ahluwalia (2002) showed that negative word of mouth is likely to be given more weight than positive word of mouth.

Considering the characteristics of online communication including anonymity, the fact that content is made available with no time limit and a large number of people can access it, e-word of mouth has to be paid considerable attention (Hennig-Thurau et al., 2004).

The reasons for dissatisfied customers to spread negative e-word of mouth are numerous. Bearing in mind how many consumers can be reached via online platforms, blogs, and social media, one of the reasons for spreading negative e-word of mouth is the intention to harm a given company (e.g. Grégoire et al., 2015; Hennig-Thurau et al., 2004; Hong & Lee, 2004). Con-sumers can even go as far as to boycott a company requesting an entire community to no longer consume a given product (Makarem & Jae, 2016).

Nyer (1997) moreover identified that consumers are likely to share dissatisfying experiences in order to get rid of their negative feelings which may lead to stress and worry. Another reason for sharing a negative experience with a large community of consumers can be based on the intention to warn others as well as to seek collective revenge (Hennig-Thurau et al., 2004). In line with this, Verhagen et al. (2013) found that complaining customers can share their nega-tive experience with an online community in order to prevent the same situation occurring to other customers. As a result, their intention is to help others and not necessarily to harm the company.

Verhagen et al. (2013) identified that consumers also might want to give feedback to the com-pany responsible for the service failure by posting a negative review. Nevertheless, they found

that this is rather the exception since customers are more likely to contact the company directly if their only intention is to give feedback.

Regarding the fact that other current or potential customers are influenced by negative e-word of mouth, being exposed to negative experiences shared online can be seen as an event where the relationship of a certain number of other actual or potential customers with a given organization changes (Malthouse, 2007). In addition to the observation that the customers' perception of the company is likely to change, this can also cause them to switch to the competition (Van Laer & De Ruyter, 2010).

Related to this, also Verhagen et al. (2013) were able to show that negative e-word of mouth shared by a dissatisfied customer is likely to predict the customer's future behavior, which in many cases results in switching to the competition. Moreover, they found that emotions play a major role when it comes to communicating negative experiences online. The above-mentioned study proves that while negative e-word of mouth has certain implications for those exposed to it, also the originator of such postings is, as a consequence, likely to purchase less or switch to the competition.

Thus, the possibility for consumers to share and spread their negative impression of a company easily also significantly influences the way companies compete with each other (Martin & Smith, 2008).

2.4.5 Consumer reviews

One of the various forms of consumer-generated content is consumer reviews and ratings (Gretzel, 2006). According to Chatterjee (2001), online reviews and ratings are the most common as well as the most accessible forms of electronic word of mouth.

Park et al. (2007) identified two roles of a consumer providing an online review. On one hand, consumers inform other users about a given product or service, while on the other hand, they give recommendations. While in the first case, the consumer shares information oriented towards the user, in the second case, they act as recommender sharing e-word of mouth. Connected to this, Hennig-Thurau et al. (2004) found that platforms, where consumer opinions are shared, have developed into an important space for e-word of mouth to be spread and read.

According to eMarketer (2016), about 50% of consumers always or most of the time consult online reviews provided by customers before making a purchase decision. Moreover, Bickart and Schindler (2001) were able to prove that consumers show much more interest in consumer-generated content such as discussions in Internet forums or online reviews than in information provided by marketers. They argue that consumer-generated online sources allow other consumers to indirectly experience a product or service. Thus, consumer reviews can be regarded as much more influential than marketer-generated information. Also regarding the

credibility of online content, consumers are much more prone to believe the information their peers provide than to trust in marketers' content (Smith et al., 2005).

Especially with regard to the tourism industry, online reviews play a major role when it comes to a consumer's decision making. Chatterjee (2001) found that consumers a more likely to seek online reviews and regard them as trustworthy in case they are faced with an unfamiliar service provider. Since traveling in many cases includes going to a place unfamiliar to the consumer and also using all kinds of unfamiliar services, this holds major implications for service providers in tourism (Chatterjee, 2001).

Moreover, a study by Gretzel and Yoo (2008) showed that users consulting reviews on *TripAdvisor* mainly do so in order to make a decision on which accommodation to choose. In addition, they found that consumers read reviews in order to reduce risks and get a picture of what a given place abroad will be like. Furthermore, they identified that reviews help consumers to avoid purchasing a service they will most probably dislike. In line with the findings of Smith et al. (2005), Gretzel and Yoo (2008) also found that reviews provided on *TripAdvisor* are perceived as more reliable compared to marketer information. Moreover, reviews are considered more enjoyable and up-to-date.

Apart from that, the importance of ratings becomes obvious when considering the study by comScore and The Kelsey Group (2007) which revealed that consumers are ready to spend at least 20% more on services which are rated as "excellent" or received five stars in comparison to service evaluated as "good" or 4-star service.

The form of user-generated content relevant for this thesis refers to customers sharing their negative experience on online review platforms. In this case, customers are likely to seek revenge or warn other users, since the service provider might not have been contacted prior to posting the review (Grégoire et al., 2015). Due to all these facts presented above, it can be concluded that negative e-word of mouth poses a serious threat to organizations and calls for effective handling (Hennig-Thurau et al., 2010). The following subchapter seeks to identify recommendations on how to manage this kind of complaints effectively.

2.5 Management responses to negative online reviews

2.5.1 Online complaint management

According to a study by Ombudsman Services (2017) conducted in the UK in January 2017, 71% of customers discuss a negative event on social media platforms or with their family and friends. The same study found that 79% of customers would rather not stay with a brand in case their complaint was not addressed in a satisfactory way. Also, the academic literature agrees on the consequences of poor complaint handling encompassing customers switching to

the competition (Wirtz and Lovelock, 2017; Keaveney, 1995), negative word of mouth and a damaged reputation (Tax et al., 1998).

Considering the risks that go along with not resolving a customer's complaint effectively, the importance of handling these kinds of situations in an appropriate way becomes obvious. As a result, a well functioning complaint handling system is crucial for organizations in order to be able to compete on the market (Istanbulluoglu, 2017).

The most decisive difference between complaint management in the offline world and handling complaints published on online platforms is the fact that third parties including other customers, potential customers as well as competing organizations have access to all content made available in the frame of the conversation between the complainant and the service provider. Therefore, complaint management in an online context, specifically with regard to online platforms, makes organizations face whole new challenges that are not to be found in conventional complaint management (Istanbulluoglu, 2017).

Purnawirawan et al. (2015) argue that negative online reviews cannot be compared to complaints voiced in face to face conversations since their source might be unknown. As a result, it becomes more difficult to understand the reasons why customers complain.

While online complaint management can encompass various fields and channels of complaints expressed online, this chapter concentrates on how to manage complaints posted on third party websites such review platforms (Van Noort & Willemsen, 2012).

2.5.2 To respond or not to respond?

When researching on complaint management in an online context and more specifically in the context of review platforms, there can be found one question that is central to a number of studies: should an organization faced with a negative online review respond to the complainant or not (e.g. Park & Allen, 2013; Van Noort & Willemsen, 2011; Purnawirawan et al., 2015)?

The broad majority of researchers have shown that managing negative e-word of mouth by responding to it is the best way to limit possible damage (e.g. Grégoire et al. 2015; Zhang & Vásquez, 2014; Sparks et al., 2016).

Concentrating on the point of view of the complaining customer, Park and Allen (2013) concluded that the provision of a response to an online review can be seen as a form of co-creation since the service provider is engaging with the customer. Therefore, in order to try to recreate value after it has been destroyed, negative e-word of mouth calls for managing it by responding in an appropriate way.

As Mattila and Mount (2003) and Van Noort and Willemsen (2012) found, complaining customers are much more likely to be dissatisfied and switch to another service provider if an organization does not provide a response.

A study by Hong and Lee (2004) considered the effects on the perception of the complainant as well as the observers. According to them, providing the complainant with an adequate response can contribute to satisfying the complaining customer, creating customer loyalty and can influence the organization's reputation positively. Moreover, they identified that a satisfying response can prevent other customers or observers of the conversation from sharing their negative impression of the service provider or getting involved in the discussion.

Studies focusing on the perspective of the observers include a research by Lee and Song (2010), who found that an accommodative response in which the accused organization admits its wrongdoing and apologizes for it influences potential customers' perceptions of the firm positively, while not providing an answer at all showed a less positive effect. Also, Kim et al. (2016) were able to prove that other consumers are influenced positively if a service provider reacts to a post which then results in staying with the company instead of switching to the competition.

Purnawirawan et al. (2015) brought in another idea and argued that whether a reaction to negative reviews is advisable or needed depends on the ratio of positive vs. negative reviews for a given service provider. They observed that a small number of negative reviews are not likely to have an impact on readers' evaluation of the company since the firm is not regarded as responsible for a given negative event.

In contrast to the findings of the majority of researchers mentioned above, Mauri and Minazzi (2013) found that the provision of a response to a negative online review is not always recommendable due to their observation that potential customers might consider hotels' responses as biased and therefore not trustworthy.

Another factor that could be of importance when deciding if to respond or not, is the expectation of complainants and users. Van Noort and Willemsen (2012) differentiate between answers that are posted reactively on request of the complaining customer and those given proactively without any request by the complainant to receive a reaction. With regard to negative hotel reviews posted on *TripAdvisor*, the answers provided by hotels could be regarded as reactive as well as proactive. While hotels are in most cases not expected to respond to postings on review platforms and would, therefore, require proactive responses, the content can still include a request for the hotel to explain the service failure.

The general tone, however, highlights that responding to this type of online complaint is the best way to handle such situations and make the best out of it. In order to take the appropri-

ate steps and to provide the complainant with a response, companies need to be aware of the existence of negative online reviews regarding their services and where to find them.

2.5.3 Monitoring negative e-word of mouth

It is crucial for companies to monitor content publicized about them since negative e-word of mouth is not only posted on company-related platforms, but also on consumer-generated websites such as review platforms, blogs and social network sites (Van Laer & De Ruyter, 2010). Verhagen et al. (2013) also stress the importance of detecting negative posts and react to them in order to prevent other customers or potential customers to be influenced by the negative word of mouth. As a result, before being able to manage negative e-word of mouth spread via third-party platforms, the question of how a service provider can stay up to date on postings about themselves needs to be raised.

With regard to this, Grégoire et al. (2015) suggest that a service provider start its complaint management for reviews posted on third-party platforms with monitoring user-generated content about themselves. As an example for tools facilitating this task, they mention Google Alerts. By providing Google Alerts with specific criteria, this service collects search engine results connected to the provided keywords and sends them to the user via e-mail, which then allows for a fast reaction to a negative review (wikiHow, n.d.). As another example, Van Laer and De Ruyter (2010) mention WebClipping (2017), which is a service for measuring online public opinion.

Once identified where negative reviews have been posted, the response strategy that best fits the situation has to be elaborated.

2.5.4 Response strategies from different perspectives

Regarding possible response strategies that can be applied when confronted with a negative review, the majority of studies differentiate between accommodative and defensive response strategies (e.g. Einwiller & Steilen, 2015; Lee & Song, 2010; Grégoire et al., 2015). Accommodative response strategies refer to polite and empathetic expressions that encompass for example the provision of an apology, offering compensation and taking corrective action (Coombs, 1999). Zhang and Vásquez (2014) identified ten accommodative moves used by hotels as a response to a negative online review. Among those moves, there can be found a polite opening phrase, thanking the customer for having chosen to stay at the hotel as well as for sharing their feedback, an apology, an invitation to return to the hotel, informing about the corrective actions taken and promising that such an event will not occur again, directly addressing the topic of the complaint, offering to contact the hotel through other channels for further discussion and, finally, a polite closing phrase. In contrast to this, among defensive response strategies reactions such as denying any involvement in the event, attacking the complainant and shifting the blame to third parties can be enlisted (Lee & Song, 2010).

The following table lists accommodative moves identified by Coombs (1999) and Zhang and Vásquez (2014). While the list provided by Zhang and Vásquez (2014) is very comprehensive, it does not include compensation which is mentioned by Coombs (1999).

Coombs (1999)	Zhang & Vásquez (2014)
Compensation	Polite opening phrase
Apology	*Apology*
Corrective action	*Information on corrective action taken or to be taken*
	Expression of gratitude for the stay
	Expression of gratitude for the feedback
	Direct references to the customers' problem
	A promise of avoiding the problem in the future
	Invitation to further discuss the problem via other channels
	Invitation for the customer to come back again
	Polite closing phrase

TABLE 2-6 ACCOMMODATIVE RESPONSE STRATEGIES

In order to also capture the defensive dimension of responses, a list of defensive moves was created. In accordance with Benoit (1997), Einwiller and Steilen (2015) define defensive strategies as denying that a failure happened, accusing the complainant of having committed an error (accusations towards the customer to have caused or contributed to the problem and not having addressed the problem during the stay), blaming another person or third party for the occurrence of the problem and trying to evade responsibility. Benoit (1997), moreover, lists blaming unforeseen circumstances, attacking the complainant by questioning the validity of their claim or being sarcastic, stressing the good intentions behind the failure, stressing the positive aspects and playing down the severity of the event. The defensive moves identified by Lee and Song (2010) go in line with the definitions of Benoit (1997) and Einwiller and Steilen (2015) by mentioning the denial that a negative event happened, an attack on the complainant and the attempt to shift the blame to a third party.

Defensive moves
Denying that a failure happened
Blaming unforeseen circumstances
Blaming a third party for the occurrence of the problem
Accusing the complainant of having caused or contributed to the problem
Accusing the complainant of not having addressed the problem during the stay

Claiming that avoidance of problem is out of their hands
Attacking the complainant (sarcasm, questioning credibility)
Stressing positive aspects (referring to other, positive comments)
Trying to play the occurrence down
Stressing the good intentions behind the event

TABLE 2-7 DEFENSIVE RESPONSE STRATEGIES (BENOIT, 1997; EINWILLER & STEILEN, 2015; LEE & SONG, 2010)

When it comes to complaint management in an online context and to identify an appropriate response strategy, both complainants and observers need to be taken into account. As a result, there has to be considered that not only the complainant has to be satisfied with the response, but also all other users who have been exposed to the complaint. This is also reflected in the previous research on online complaint management. Depending on the study, there are different points of view on what the goals and consequences of online complaint management are.

Referring to both complainant and observers, Einwiller and Steilen (2015, p. 201) found that "accommodative response strategies have a more positive effect on complaint satisfaction than defensive response strategies".

With regard to the perspective of the observers, Purnawirawan et al. (2015) argue that in case the number of negative reviews surpasses the number of positive ones, readers will consider the company as responsible for the discussed failure due to the fact that most customers agree. Here, the attribution of responsibility plays a major role, which will be discussed in detail later. In this case, Purnawirawan et al. (2015) consider it necessary to take action by using accommodative response strategies and apologize, promise that the failure will not happen again and things will be taken care of. Moreover, they recommend offering compensation.

Connected to this, Purnawirawan et al. (2015) found that in most cases a mere apology is not enough since observing customers cannot be sure that corrective actions are taken to prevent this situation to occur again and the complainant is left alone with his or her problem. This also goes in line with the findings of Kim et al. (2016). They observed that even though replying with an apology has a positive effect on the purchase intentions of both the complainant as well as on the observer, only the result for the positive effect on the latter was significant. As an explanation, they add that the level of involvement of how to process this situation could contribute to this outcome. While the complaining party is highly emotionally involved, the viewers' emotional involvement is much lower and therefore they are more likely to be satisfied with a mere apology (Breitsohl et al., 2010). In accordance with Petty and Cacioppo (1986), Kim et al. (2016) argue that the higher the emotional involvement, the more attention is paid to the actual content of a text. Therefore, they conclude that whereas for the complainant the message of the apology and how it is presented has to be satisfying, the most important component for the observer is the mere presence of an apology. In order to keep

the complaining customer, they also add that he or she needs to be reminded of the value the service provider offers to them or that the company needs to offer some kind of compensation.

According to the findings of Lee and Song (2010), defensive response strategies lead the observer to assume that the responding organization is responsible for the negative situation, whereas in cases where there is no response provided at all, the number of observers blaming the accused organization for the failure is lower. They conclude that shifting the blame to the complaining customer might cause the observer to feel disappointed about the company's reaction. Also, in this case, accommodative strategies including corrective actions, a compensation or an apology as a response to the negative event were found to lead to customer satisfaction as well as the loyalty of observing customers.

Additionally, Min et al. (2015) found that responses to negative online reviews should express empathy as well as interest by showing that the review has been read. Based on this, they mention that a response should include references to the complainant's problem by paraphrasing the points stressed in the review instead of providing an empty and generic response, which they found was often the case with accommodative responses. Connected to their findings, they conclude that effective response strategies in the online context show very similar traits to those in the physical world where showing empathy, politeness and interest are considered key factors of satisfactory complaint handling (Min et al., 2015; Wirtz & Lovelock, 2017).

Focusing on the perspective of the complaining customer, Joireman et al. (2013) propose that the service provider responds to the complainant in public showing good-intentions by being polite and acknowledging the information provided. Moreover, they identify that an invitation to discussing the problem in private proves helpful.

As opposed to the outcome of most studies, Grégoire et al. (2015) argue that a service provider does not necessarily always have to be in the position to give in by applying accommodative response strategies. In case of the complainant's request being exaggerated or the conversational tone being inappropriate, cases have shown that other observers stood up for the accused organization.

Purnawirawan et al. (2015), however, do not recommend refutation of the accusation. Although the service provider does not assume responsibility and therefore communicates that they did not commit any error, refuting the arguments of the complaining customer can be perceived negatively by observers since the responding party does not show understanding and empathy towards the complainant. Moreover, the service provider thereby questions the complaining person's credibility.

A very decisive factor closely connected to identifying the most suitable response strategy is the attribution of responsibility (Purnawirawan et al., 2015).

2.5.5 The attribution of responsibility

The concept of attribution theory developed in the field of social psychology and refers to "the study of perceived causation" (Kelley & Michela, 1980, p. 458). The idea behind attribution theory is that a person's behavior is interpreted based on the causes that led this person to behave in a certain way. This interpretation further plays a crucial role when it comes to reacting to a given behavior (Kelley & Michela, 1980). A similar definition can be found with Fincham and Jaspars (1980) according to whom attribution refers to the process of a person, in this case, an observer, trying to explain a given happening. When the observing person looks for an explanation for an event, he or she can attribute the event to different causes. These causes can either be found in the acting person whose behavior is judged or they can refer to circumstances that are surrounding this person. Therefore, on one hand, the person him- or herself and on the other hand, his or her environment can be considered responsible for a certain failure by the observing party. With regard to this, researchers in the field of social psychology speak of internal and external attribution (Kelley and Michela, 1980).

While these definitions refer to the attribution of responsibility made by an observing person, there needs to be considered that attributions can also be made by the accused party itself (Lee and Song, 2010; Kim et al., 2006). As a result, when it comes to the attribution of responsibility, one has to have in mind that different perspectives are represented.

As already discussed, how much responsibility for a service failure the reader of a negative online review attributes to the service provider, can depend on how many negative reviews there can be found and if those are consistent regarding their content (Purnawirawan et al., 2015).

Moreover, further considering the perspective of the observers, consumers who are exposed to negative reviews on an organization they are familiar with are more likely to attribute this negative e-word of mouth to situational conditions such as technical failures or peak times causing slow service and not the organization itself (Chatterjee, 2001).

2.5.6 Apology vs. denial

The attribution of responsibility is a decisive factor when it comes to identifying a suitable response strategy to address a negative online review (Purnawirawan et al., 2015). Attribution theory is closely connected to crisis management (Coombs, 2007). Despite the difference in scale between crisis management and complaint handling, observations made in crisis communication can be helpful for identifying appropriate strategies for complaint management when it comes to the question of assuming responsibility.

With regard to crisis communication, Benoit (1997) enlists five strategies of how an organization can try to restore its image once faced with negative PR as a result of a negative event supposedly caused by the organization. These strategies encompass denial, evasion of responsibility, reducing the offensiveness of the event, taking corrective action as well as mortification. Table 2-8 lists all possible strategies in detail:

Denial	Simple denial	Act was not performed by organization
	Shift the blame	Act was performed by someone else
Evasion of responsibility	Provocation	Reaction to an act performed by someone else
	Defeasibility	Act performed due to missing information or ability
	Accident	Act happened due to unforeseen circumstances
	Good intentions	Act was considered having a positive effect
Reducing offensiveness of the event	Bolstering	Underline the positive aspects
	Minimization	Consider act not important
	Differentiation	Consider act less offensive
	Transcendence	Act was performed in order to serve a positive cause
	Attack accuser	Question credibility of the accuser
	Compensation	Offer reimbursement to accuser
Corrective action		Taking actions to solve or avoid problem
Mortification		Offer an apology

TABLE 2-8 IMAGE RESTORATION STRATEGIES (BENOIT, 1997, P. 179)

While the list by Benoit (1997) presented in Table 2-8 provides a more detailed view on crisis management, the central question in this matter is if an apology or a denial is the more useful approach (e.g. Kim et al, 2004; Kerkhof et al. 2011; Kim et al., 2006). Kim et al. (2009) provide an overview of the development of crisis communication strategies and observed that in the majority of studies an apology is considered more effective than denying something has gone wrong. As opposed to this observation, Kim et al. (2009) found that using denial when confronted with a customer complaint is the most frequent response strategy.

Depending on the cause of the failure as well as on the question whether the company or employee was guilty or innocent of the unpleasant situation, Kim et al. (2004) also argue that either an apology or a denial can be the most effective response strategy in order to restore people's trust after a negative event. In their study, they found that responsibility should be assumed and an apology should be provided in case a failure happened due to competence-based problems. However, if a negative situation has occurred due to matters relating to integrity referring to the organization not acting according to the set of principals the observers expect it to respect (Mayer et al., 1995), a denial has proven to be more effective in order to restore trust. In case of the accused party being innocent, a denial would be the best response strategy, while if the company is guilty of the event, an apology would be more effective. Connected to this, they stress that consistency of the right communication strategy in response to a failure plays a crucial role.

These findings go in line with Kim et al. (2006) who conclude that an apology is not always the appropriate response strategy and can even cause more mistrust due to an inconsistency between the negative event and the accused party's reaction.

Furthermore, Kim et al. (2009) highlight the possibility of combining different response strategies. With regard to this, they stress the importance of using strategies that go together when employing a combination of different response strategies. The strategies used should not be contradictory as for example when the company apologizes, but at the same time denies a given event has occurred. In this case, an accommodative communication strategy is used along with a defensive category which causes inconsistency (Kim et al., 2009).

Focusing on complaint management, Kerkhof et al. (2011) found in their study analyzing the effect of an apology versus a denial in social media that a personal apology, as opposed to a corporate apology, is in any case considered as more honest. With regard to this, they also found that even a personal denial is seen as more trustworthy than a corporate apology. The overall outcome of their study, however, showed that an apology is more effective than a denial.

2.5.7 Internal vs. external attribution

In line with the previous subchapter, Kim et al. (2006) also identified two options for organizations to address situations where the customers' trust has been violated. They can either deny that they had been involved in a given failure, or they can apologize for it. In case of an apology, two further options can be listed. First, they can assume responsibility for the act (internal attribution). Second, they can blame somebody else for the mistake and shift the responsibility to a third party (external attribution) (Kim et al., 2006).

In addition to the definition of internal and external attribution presented at the beginning of this chapter where only the perspective of the observer is considered, here internal and exter-

nal attributions refer to how much responsibility is taken by an apologizing party regarding the mistake he or she might have committed as well as how the observer and the complainant evaluate the accused party's reaction and based on this make internal or external attributions.

Kim et al. (2006) argue that before raising the question whether responsibility for a negative event should be assumed or mitigated by blaming a third party or given circumstances, the accused party's apology must be considered as given. Moreover, the accused person or organization has to have admitted that a dissatisfying situation has occurred. Otherwise, the accused party would simply deny the existence of the negative event and no further discussion of who is to blame would be possible (Kim et al., 2006).

The focus of the study conducted by Kim et al. (2006) lies on the question of how an apology should be presented and how much responsibility should be assumed by the accused party. They argue that it is of equal importance to convey an apology the right way by either admitting one's guilt or shifting the blame to a third party as it is to make the right decision between providing an apology or denying any involvement in a given event.

The findings of research in this field are quite heterogeneous. On one hand, Shaw et al. (2003) found that external attributions generally have a more positive effect on how the accused party is perceived than internal attributions. Based on the findings of Weiner et al. (1987), Kim et al (2006) also argue that external attribution can be the more satisfying response strategy and can calm down the situation.

However, Tomlinson et al. (2004) were able to prove that those who assume responsibility with an internal attribution and admit their wrongdoing are considered more trustworthy and more likely to make sure such an event will not occur again. In addition, the study by Kim et al. (2006) revealed that depending on the cause of the failure, both internal and external attribution can be beneficial to the accused person or organization. In case a failure happened due to a competence-related issue, an apology with an internal attribution proved to be more successful. In case an integrity-related matter was seen as the cause of the wrongdoing, an apology with an external attribution was more effective in repairing trust.

With regard to the observer attributing responsibility to the company in question, Lee and Song (2010) found that company responses that shifted the blame to a third person or the complainants themselves led readers to hold the company responsible for the negative event, whereas the absence of a response caused the readers not to consider the company responsible.

To conclude, the majority of researchers agree that the most effective response strategy is based on accommodative moves. In more detail, this refers to providing an apology, the promise to ensure that such situations will not occur again and compensation in addition to admitting the wrongdoing and assuming responsibility where necessary. In order for companies to

professionalize their online complaint management, "webcare" strategies can prove helpful (Kerkhof et al. 2010, cited by Van Noort & Willemsen, 2012).

2.5.8 Webcare

The process of identifying negative e-word of mouth and handling it in order to satisfy all parties involved is what Van Noort and Willemsen (2012) refer to as "webcare" (Kerkhof et al. 2010, cited by Van Noort & Willemsen, 2012). They define this concept as: "The act of engaging in online interactions with (complaining) consumers, by actively searching the web to address consumer feedback (e.g., questions, concerns, and complaints)" (Van Noort & Willemsen, 2012, p. 133). Moreover, they explain that webcare is carried out by one or more assigned employees of an organization and is useful in terms of CRM as well as a company's reputation. The goal of webcare is to win back complaining customers as well as to influence their perception of the company positively and to also convince third parties exposed to the negative comments (Van Noort & Willemsen, 2012).

Verhagen et al. (2013) also suggest the use of webcare teams. As the findings of Van Noort and Willemsen (2012) showed, the work of such webcare teams contributes to customers evaluating a company more positively. Verhagen et al. (2013) suggest that webcare teams should be able to detect negative e- word of mouth as soon as possible and react to it. In this regard, they also mention that tools for automatic emotion detection as well as subjectivity and sentiment analysis could be useful. Montoyo et al. (2012, p. 676) give examples of the most important companies and systems enabling such analyses and enlist "Appinions (http://appinions.com/), Beyond the Arc (http:// beyondthearc.com/), Market Sentinel (http://www.marketsentinel. com/), text map (http://www.textmap.com/), SenseNews (http:// sensenews.com/homepage.aspx), or the Thomson Reuters sentiment analysis services". Since one of the reasons for complaining customers to spread negative e-word of mouth is to protect other customers, Verhagen et al. (2013) moreover recommend that webcare teams also have in mind to look for indicators signalizing an altruistic intention and then focus on solving the problem that made the complainant want to warn other consumers.

Furthermore, Lee and Song (2010) stress the importance of also considering other consumers' opinions posted along with negative reviews before deciding on how to react to the complaint. Moreover, they recommend that a company pay special attention to complainants for whom it is the first time to post a negative review about a given company. This is due to the fact that previous experiences of customers with posting reviews can influence how they evaluate the company's complaint handling.

Also, Van Laer and De Ruyter (2010) recommend that companies detect negative e-word of mouth and respond to posts that they consider harmful. They found that by providing an appropriate response most companies were able to restore the complaining customer's trust in

them. They identified that an advisable response can either be denying responsibility if the response is given in an analytical way, or apologize for the service failure if the response is given in the form of a narrative. For the latter situation, they suggest that employees practice their skills via creative writing exercises. Moreover, according to Van Laer and De Ruyter (2010) companies should develop and try out response strategies with consumer panels. They conclude that professional communication and providing responses by a narrator the complainant as well as the reader is likely to feel sympathy for are the best prerequisites to limit the damage to the company.

Although it can be concluded that providing a response is in most cases recommended, the reality does not necessarily correspond to these findings as Park and Allen (2013) found that response rates are quite volatile and that hotels do not show clear patterns what kind of reviews they respond to. Also, Grégoire et al. (2015) and Mauri and Minazzi (2013) observed that some hotels prefer to refrain from responding to negative online reviews. In this regard, Park and Allen (2013) suggest that hotel managers should set a target regarding their response rate depending on where they want to position their hotel.

2.6 Conclusions

In order to build a basis for the following research, the main topics connected to the research question of this thesis were discussed. The most important aspect was to identify recommendations provided in the academic literature on how to handle extremely negative online reviews.

As found by Purnawirawan et al. (2015) identifying the most appropriate way of reacting to negative online reviews, strongly depends on the nature of the negative event as well as on other factors connected to the review as well as the hotel. The overall number of negative reviews posted about a given organization, for example, can be an indicator of identifying if a response is required or not (Purnawirawan et al., 2015).

However, the general tone of the academic literature recommends that when faced with a negative review online, a response should be provided. Although confronted with rude behavior from the side of the complainant, responses should be understanding and polite since the service provider's image among observers is at stake. Therefore, the response should be based on accommodative response strategies which indicate that the accused organization would provide at least an apology and most probably use an internal attribution admitting its wrongdoing (Lee & Song, 2010). As mentioned by Wirtz and Lovelock (2017), a defensive reaction transmits the message that a company wants to hide something which has a negative influence on customers' trust.

In more detail, a response should contain an apology, a promise that the failure will not happen again and things will be taken care of as well as compensation in order to convince the complainant and observers to stay with the company or as well become a new customer (Purnawirawan et al., 2015). In line with this, as mentioned by Bernoff and Schadler (2010), solutions to recover the service failure need to be offered.

Factors such as the response's tone and degree of standardization (Kerkhof et al., 2011) are also decisive when it comes to influencing users' perception of the accused party. Based on the recommendations by Min et al. (2015), in addition to being polite, responses should be empathetic and should paraphrase the problems mentioned by the complainant in order to show interest, characteristics typically attributed to accommodative response strategies.

Moreover, it is of great importance to consider all parties an organization seeks to satisfy by providing a response to a negative review. While for the observers including actual or potential customers an apology alone is likely to suffice, for the complainants themselves their high emotional involvement will require more action than that (Kim et al., 2016).

However, Kim et al. (2006) suggest that sometimes defensive responses could be more suitable than merely accommodative ones since accusations made by complainants can be unjustified and a defensive explanation might help to convince observers of the service provider's authenticity and trustworthiness. Moreover, as Min et al. (2015) found, accommodative responses sometimes tend to be generic which has a negative impact on the perception of the complainant as well as the observers since it is an indicator of lacking interest.

Due to the broadly homogeneous opinion found in the academic literature, it can be expected that there is a significant difference between accommodative and defensive responses to online reviews when it comes to the level of politeness and empathy. Whereas the academic literature suggests that responses containing exclusively accommodative moves are much more likely to win back the complainant's trust after a service failure as well as to satisfy observing parties, it could also be observed in the literature that defensive moves are often seen as inappropriate due to their lack of politeness.

Additionally, accommodative responses have been ascribed the characteristic of being rather generic, while defensive response strategies have not been connected to this. Therefore, also with regards to this aspect, it can be expected that a difference between the two types of response strategies will be found.

Based on the general assumption that accommodative responses are more suitable when it comes to handling very negative online reviews, the objective of the following analysis is to find out if defensive responses really fail to politely and empathetically address the complainant or if they might be an appropriate alternative to exclusively accommodative responses as they sometimes fail to convey interest.

3 METHODOLOGY

3.1 Overview of research methods

3.1.1 Quantitative and qualitative research

When it comes to defining the differences between quantitative and qualitative research, Neuman (2007) lists various levels on which a differentiation can be made referring to the type of data, data collection, measurement as well as data analysis.

While quantitative data is expressed numerically, qualitative data can be for example words, sounds or visual impressions. Regarding the collection of data, Neuman (2007) mentions experiments, surveys or existing statistics as possible sources of gathering data for quantitative research. In contrast to this, he lists field research as well as historical-comparative research as qualitative methods. Moreover, Neuman (2007) mentions that regarding the measurement, quantitative research converts all observations to numbers as a medium of measurement, while qualitative research might convert observations to numbers but can also keep other types of data such as words or symbols. Additionally, he argues that quantitative researchers develop their ideas before the data collection, whereas this process is continuous with qualitative research, where ideas are created simultaneously to the data collection. With regards to the data analysis, Neuman (2007) mentions that quantitative analysis underlies a high level of standardization, while qualitative research accepts many different approaches. In addition, he differentiates between the deductive character of quantitative research where existing hypotheses are tested and the inductive character of qualitative research where new ideas and concepts are created.

Babbie (2010) defines the objective of quantitative research as collecting data in the form of numbers in order to draw generalizations regarding groups of people or to find an explanation for a given phenomenon.

When it comes to defining the term of qualitative research, it becomes obvious that there is no homogeneous interpretation of what is exactly captured by this concept due to the various approaches connected to it and the wide range of different disciplines applying this type of research (Ritchi & Lewis, 2003).

A definition by Strauss and Corbin (1998, p. 11) gives a rather general idea of qualitative research by stating that this concept refers to "[…] any type of research that produces findings not arrived at by statistical procedures or other means of quantification." The differentiation between qualitative and quantitative research based on the question if statistical methods are

deployed or not is, however, is rather superficial and does not reflect the complexity of this matter (Ritchi & Lewis, 2003).

In contrast to this, Denzin and Lincoln (2000) attempted to bring together different approaches and stress the common traits often found in the various points of view. They define qualitative research as

> a situated activity that locates the observer in the world. It consists of a set of interpretive, material practices that makes the world visible. These practices [...] turn the world into a series of representations including fieldnotes, interviews, conversations, photographs, recordings and memos to the self. At this level, qualitative research involves an interpretive, naturalistic approach to the world. This means that qualitative researchers study things in their natural settings, attempting to make sense of, or to interpret, phenomena in terms of the meanings people bring to them. (Denzin & Lincoln, 2000, p.3)

In accordance with this definition, Ritchi and Lewis (2003) mention that qualitative research is often connected to seeking to understand the meanings people attribute to occurrences and customs of all kinds in their environment and social context.

Another definition underlining this interpretation is provided by Bryman (1988, p.8) who concludes that "t[T]he way in which people being studied understand and interpret their social reality is one of the central motifs of qualitative research."

Ritchi and Lewis (2003) list a number of characterizing factors that are usually attributed to qualitative research. This list encompasses the meaning connected to the standpoint of participants, the flexibility of this approach, the scale and coverage of qualitative data and the multiple ways of analyzing and interpreting data. Moreover, they mention that specific ways of data collection are connected to qualitative research. Among these methods, there can be mentioned in-depth interviews, observations, group discussions , and narratives as examples.

Finally, Ritchi and Lewis (2003, p.3) define the key aspects of qualitative research as "aims which are directed at providing an in-depth and interpreted understanding of the social world of research participants by learning about their social and material circumstances, their experiences, perspectives and histories."

3.1.2 Mixed methods

Whereas qualitative and quantitative research methods are often considered as two conflicting concepts, they actually exhibit a number of common traits (Brennan, 2005). Brennan (2005) argues that many differentiations between the two research methods cannot hold true. Based on Ritchie and Lewis (2003), Brennan (2005) mentions that the idea of qualitative research being based on words and quantitative research being based on numbers is far too general. Moreover, she lists that the claim that qualitative research is focused on meaning, while quantitative research is focused on actions cannot be generalized since both methods

can investigate meaning as well as actions. Apart from that, she argues that the nature of qualitative research as inductive and of quantitative research as deductive is often switched in practical research since both approaches of logic can be found with both research methods. Therefore, Brennan (2005) concludes that depending on the researcher's goal and working context, qualitative and quantitative research methods are often interrelated in the different phases of research including setting up a design, collecting data, drawing conclusions and putting them into context.

Also, Newman and Ridenour (1998) agree with this point of view and argue that rather than as a dichotomy where qualitative and quantitative methods are seen as opposites, the relationship between the two research methods should be considered a continuum where one method completes the other. While qualitative research often represents the starting point, quantitative methods are often used in the following steps of the research.

3.2   Research design

3.2.1   Netnography

The research method used for this thesis was netnographic analysis (Kozinets, 1998). Netnography is a qualitative research method which seeks to analyze consumer cultures in an online context. Similar to ethnography, online ethnography or netnography consists of a number of different approaches. Depending on the research question, there can be deployed various techniques to conduct netnographic research. Some of the techniques listed by Kozinets (2006) are content analysis, visual analysis, historical analysis, semiotic analysis, discourse analysis, surveys, and interviews. There are also several different approaches when it comes to the degree to which the researcher participates in the online communities he or she is investigating. The spectrum extends from the researcher acting merely as an observer to being highly involved (Kozinets, 2006).

In netnographic research, there are two sets of data important for the analysis. On one hand, the data copied from an online source and, on the other hand, the observations noted down by the researcher serve as the basis to conduct a research (Kozinets, 2002).

A decisive difference between traditional ethnography in the physical world and netnography conducted online is that the first observes people, while the latter's subject are conversations. Moreover, online conversations differ widely from a physical conversation in the sense that they can be accessed by anyone, consist of written text and their originators are protected by anonymity (Kozinets, 2002).

Among the advantages of netnography over traditional qualitative research methods such as interviews, focus groups or ethnography in the physical world, there can be listed that data is easily accessible, there is no need to transcribe the collected data and the costs for the re-

search are significantly lower (Kozinets, 2002). The fact that the participants in online conversations are not aware of a person observing their interaction can also be mentioned since their behavior will not be influenced by the presence of the researcher (Mkono, 2011). However, the downside of this research method is the great amount of data available, which requires to carefully select the relevant data (Kozinets, 2002).

The method of netnography has originally been developed for conducting research for online marketing purposes (Kozinets, 1998) but has been adopted by other disciplines and also finds deployment in the field of tourism (Mkono, 2012). According to Mkono (2014), the most common technique used by tourism researchers is a passive, observing approach in which the online community does not take notice that their content is subject to research and the researcher does not participate actively in online conversations.

Netnography is conducted with the help of search engines in order to find online communities that fit the research topic (Mkono, 2014). The data that serve as a basis for the analysis is mainly retrieved from blogs, chats, discussion forums and other online communities (Mkono, 2013).

User generated content, primarily in form of reviews is the most typical type of data used in the field of tourism to conduct a netnographic research (Mkono, 2014). The advantages of online reviews, apart from being easily accessible, are their personal dimension and the fact that they are posted voluntarily (Mkono, 2011). Apart from that, the reviews are sometimes enriched with pictures posted along with them as well as separate ratings of different services offered by a hotel which can be used as additional data (Mkono, 2014).

In this Master thesis, the approach of the researcher being an observer was used. User generated content, more specifically, responses posted on the travel platform *TripAdvisor* to negative reviews served as the data that was analyzed. As for the technique, content analysis was chosen in order to find an answer to the research question.

3.2.2 Content analysis

According to Neuman (2007, p. 227), "c[C]ontent analysis is a technique for gathering and analyzing the content of a text." By "content", Neuman (2007) refers not only to words but also to symbols, meanings and visual content such as pictures contained in a text that can either be written, spoken or visualized. The goal of content analysis is to extract the meaning behind a communicative act, which allows the researcher to get a deeper insight into the communication apart from the obvious. By applying content analysis, the content of many different texts can be analyzed and compared (Neuman, 2007).

In accordance with what was discussed above, no clear line between qualitative and quantitative research can be drawn. While the data collection of this thesis' research corresponded to

traditional qualitative methods, as ethnography is considered a classical qualitative research method (Newman & Ridenour, 1998), the data analysis was based on numbers and, therefore, can rather be regarded as a quantitative method as in the definition by Neuman (2007). Additionally, the interpretation combined both methods by extracting meaning from statistical results as well as the communication itself.

3.3   Data collection

For this analysis, 150 responses provided by hotels to negative online reviews exhibiting deviant customer behavior referring mainly to rude expressions were collected. The reviews and responses were extracted from the travel website *TripAdvisor*. The research was restrained to hotels in London. On one hand, this was due to the large size of the hospitality market in London providing a high likelihood of finding sufficient reviews with an according response. On the other hand, London was chosen for language reasons. In order to avoid misunderstandings and other problems based on language issues, only reviews and responses written in English were taken into account and, therefore, an English speaking market was chosen.

In a first step, hotels in London with an arrival date of three months ahead were looked for in order to make sure most of the hotels still had availability and were shown as a result to the search. In order to find reviews that had evaluated the stay as "terrible", the hotels were sorted by the category "traveler ranked". This decision was based on the assumption that hotels with a lower ranking are more likely to have negative reviews. Then, starting from the last page of this ranking, each hotel was clicked on and one-star ratings in English were selected. After that, the reviews classified as "terrible" were scanned until a review containing deviant customer behavior that also had a corresponding response was found. The difficulty arising from the data collection was to find reviews that had been responded to, since many hotels seem to refrain from providing a response to negative reviews.

In a next step, the review along with the response was copied to an Excel sheet. A maximum of three reviews and responses of one hotel was retrieved. Additional data such as the position of the respondent, the hotels' name, the hotel category as well as the percentage of one-star ratings of each hotel were also saved in the Excel sheet as can be seen in figure 3-1.

Response	Respondent	Hotel	Hotel category	Percentage of "terrible" reviews
Dear Guest, Thank you for sharing your insights with us following your recent stay with us at the Euro Queens Hotel. We appreciate all forms of feedback as it helps us in our continuous efforts in improving the overall hotel experience. It is with a heavy heart that I read your recent review, please accept my unreserved personal apology. Given your experience I understand and recognize that your perception of us have been marred and I would appreciate the opportunity to restore your faith in us. I know we can and will meet and exceed your future expectations and just hope you give us the opportunity to do so. I do hope we get the chance to reinstate your confidence in the future, Kind Regards, Hotel Manager	Khan F, Manager at Euro Queens Hotel	Euro Queens Hotel	3 stars	43% terrible
Dear Becky, Thank you for your review, I am very sorry to know that you did not enjoy your stay with us. I am sorry that you did not like your room and had some issues with the shower and the keycard. I would like to apologise on behalf of all the team at Euro Queens Hotel that our service did not meet your expectations, however your comments are greatly appreciated as they will help us improve the service we provide as Queens Hotel is undergoing refurbishment. I hope that you will give us the chance to provide you with the true nature of our service and stay with us again in the future as we would love to welcome you back as our guest. Best Regards,	EuroQueensHotel, Customer Relations at Euro Queens Hotel	Euro Queens Hotel	3 stars	43% terrible

FIGURE 3-1 DATA COLLECTION

3.4 Sample

The final sample included 41 accommodative and 109 defensive responses and the percentage of the reviews classified as "terrible" out of the total number of reviews for each hotel ranged from 4% of one-star reviews to 54%.

Regarding the hotel category, the range reached from 2-star properties to 4-star properties. By far the biggest part of responses was provided by 3-star properties. 4-star hotels represented the second biggest group followed by 2-star properties. A small number of hotels did not have a classification.

With regards to the respondents to the reviews, most of them appeared as managers without giving away closer details on what kind of manager they were. The second largest group were General Managers followed by Guest Relation Managers. On the fourth spot, there were members of the Social Media Team followed by a very small number of Guest Relations Agents, Assistant Managers, Duty Managers and owners.

Among the various forms of deviant customer behavior that could be found in the reviews, there can be listed the attempt to boycott the hotel by telling readers to stay away and "rather sleep in your car or under a bridge" or suggest another place to stay instead of the hotel in question. This also includes warnings such as "Don't ever stay here" and "Be VERY afraid". This also came along with the wish of the property shutting down or losing a star.

The reproach of criminal intentions was furthermore one of the forms of deviant customer behavior. Some reviewers stated that their stay was a "rip off", "robbery", "big fraud", "a total lie" and that "they are only there to steal your money" and "tried to con us".

Moreover, a vast number of negative comparisons and metaphors such as "prison cells", "police cell", "sweat box", "slate of wood they call a bed", "even the slum dog areas of india are

much better", "the horror that awaits you", "urine infested old people's home", "hotel from hell", "felt a bit like bates motel", "looked like it had never seen a hoover" and "just like torture" could be found. Extremely pejorative adjectives also have to be mentioned here. Examples for such adjectives were "appalling", "disgusting", "awful", "terrible", "creepy", "ridiculous", "horrific", "uninviting", "grotty", "worst hotel", "poor", "shocking", "abysmal", "dreadful" and "repulsive".

Some dissatisfied guests reported on exaggerated consequences of their stay including "breakfast still haunts me", "wanting to escape the place", "the absolute filth we had to endure", "there are others suffering this too" and "In fact I haven't been able to talk about it until now".

Moreover, some reviews contained words written in capital letters and others lots of exclamations marks to stress the negative impression as well as words between quotation marks in order to question the credibility. Sarcasm was also used to express dissatisfaction by talking about the staff's "awesome attitude" and wishing future guests "Good luck".

Further, some reviewers mentioned specific staff members, sometimes also including their names, telling how "rude", "unprofessional", "uncaring", "unsympathetic" and "unhelpful" they were. Comments such as "Attitude disgusting", "the worst representatives", "numbskull" and "imbecilic is an understatement" were also found. Such comments also referred to the management by stating that "The whole attitude of the management stinks." Connected to this, some reviewers recommended the Managers not to run a hotel due to their inability.

3.5   Data analysis

The lists of accommodative and defensive moves in tables 3-1 and 3-2 below already discussed in chapter 2.5.4 served as the very basis at the beginning of the analysis.

Accommodative moves
Polite opening phrase
Expression of gratitude for the stay
Expression of gratitude for the feedback
Apology
Direct references to the customers' problem
Information on corrective action taken or to be taken
Promise of avoiding the problem in the future
Compensation
Invitation to further discuss the problem via other channels
Invitation for the customer to come back again

Polite closing phrase

TABLE 3-1 ACCOMMODATIVE MOVES (ZHANG & VÁSQUEZ, 2014; COOMBS, 1999)

Defensive moves
Denying that a failure happened
Blaming unforeseen circumstances
Blaming a third party for the occurrence of the problem
Accusing the complainant of having caused or contributed to the problem
Accusing the complainant of not having addressed the problem during the stay
Claiming that avoidance of problem is out of their hands
Attacking the complainant (sarcasm, questioning credibility)
Stressing positive aspects (referring to other, positive comments)
Trying to play the occurrence down
Stressing the good intentions behind the event

TABLE 3-2 DEFENSIVE MOVES (BENOIT, 1997; EINWILLER & STEILEN, 2015; LEE & SONG, 2010)

As the very first step of the analysis, the negative review was read and the problems mentioned by the complainant were identified in order to later draw conclusions on the responses. After that, the corresponding response was read and scanned for accommodative elements as well as defensive moves listed in tables 3-1 and 3-2 above. Accommodative moves were marked in yellow and defensive moves - in case they were present - were marked in red as depicted in figure 3-2 below.

Dear Guest (opening), we apologize for any inconvenience caused (apology) we can confirm that a twin room was booked and due to availability we could only provide you with a double. The staff at the hotel did try very hard to allocate another room for you but due to an extremely busy period this was not possible. (shift blame to circumstances) The staff did try and make contact with you during the day to perhaps relocate you to another hotel but unfortunately you arrived back at the hotel early evening and decided to stay. (shift blame to guest) We apologize once again for the inconvenience caused. (apology) Should you decide to stay with us again (invitation to come back) we will be more than happy to upgrade your accommodation and offer free breakfast as a goodwill gesture. (compensation)

FIGURE 3-2 DATA ANALYSIS

In case only accommodative moves could be found within a response, this response was classified as "accommodative response" regardless of how many accommodative moves a response contained. In case one or more defensive elements could be found in a response, the response was classified as "defensive response" regardless of the number of accommodative moves found beside the defensive ones. This allowed for a separation of the sample into two groups of which one encompassed accommodative and the other one defensive responses.

Apart from this classification, each accommodative move found and marked in a response was entered numerically in an Excel sheet as can be seen in the example in figure 3-5. In addition to the eleven accommodative moves listed in table 3-1, the responses were scanned for an attribution of responsibility and evaluated regarding their level of individualization and quality. Moreover, the number of accommodative moves contained in each response, the hotel category of the hotel that provided the responses, the position of the respondent to each response as well as the overall percentage of reviews that rated the responding hotel as "terrible" were considered. All data retrieved that way were also added numerically to the Excel sheet.

type of response	polite opening	expression of gratitude for the stay	expression of gratitude for feedback	apology	attribution of responsibility	direct references	corrective action
1	1	2	1	2	1	3	3
1	1	2	1	3	2	2	3
1	1	2	1	2	1	3	3
1	2	2	1	2	1	2	1
2	1	2	1	2	1	1	2
2	1	2	1	2	3	3	3
2	1	2	1	2	3	3	3
2	1	2	2	2	3	3	3
1	3	2	1	2	2	3	3
2	3	2	1	5	2	3	4
2	1	2	1	2	3	1	4

FIGURE 3-3 CODING

The Excel sheet was then imported to SPSS where the according tests were run in order to compare the two different types of responses - accommodative and defensive ones - with regards to all variables above. Due to the mainly nominal nature of variables, for the majority of the tests, a crosstabulation was performed. Where data allowed for a comparison of means, a Mann-Whitney-U-test was chosen due to the absence of normal distribution as proven by the histogram as well as the Kolmogorov-Smirnov test.

In order to compare the two types of responses and to find an answer to the question if defensive responses could be an alternative to accommodative ones, the following hypotheses were set up and tested. The list of accommodative moves presented in table 3-1 served as a reference to identify the most important aspects a polite and empathetic answer should contain extended by other variables that could give an insight into what to consider when confronted with a negative response:

1.   H0: It is independent of the type of response (accommodative vs. defensive) if the response contains a polite opening phrase or not.

H1: It depends on the type of response if the response contains a polite opening phrase or not.

2. H0: It is independent of the type of response (accommodative vs. defensive) if gratitude for the stay is expressed or not.

   H1: It depends on the type of response if gratitude for the stay is expressed or not.

3. H0: It is independent of the type of response (accommodative vs. defensive) if gratitude for the feedback is expressed or not.

   H1: It depends on the type of response if gratitude for the feedback is expressed or not.

4. H0: It is independent of the type of response (accommodative vs. defensive) if an apology is offered or not.

   H1: It depends on the type of response if an apology is offered or not.

5. H0: It is independent of the type of response (accommodative vs. defensive) if responsibility for the service failure is taken or not.

   H1: It depends on the type of response if responsibility for the service failure is taken or not.

6. H0: It is independent of the type of response (accommodative vs. defensive) if direct references to the guest's problem are mentioned or not.

   H1: It depends on the type of response if direct references to the guest's problem are mentioned or not.

7. H0: It is independent of the type of response (accommodative vs. defensive) if corrective actions are mentioned or not.

   H1: It depends on the type of response if corrective actions are mentioned or not.

8. H0: It is independent of the type of response (accommodative vs. defensive) if a promise to avoid reoccurrence of the problem is expressed or not.

   H1: It depends on the type of response if a promise to avoid reoccurrence of the problem is expressed or not.

9. H0: It is independent of the type of response (accommodative vs. defensive) if compensation is offered or not.

H1: It depends on the type of response if compensations is offered or not.

10. H0: It is independent of the type of response (accommodative vs. defensive) if an invitation to further discuss the problem via other channel is made or not.

     H1: It depends on the type of response if an invitation to further discuss the problem via other channel is made or not.

11. H0: It is independent of the type of response (accommodative vs. defensive) if an invitation to come back again is made or not.

     H1: It depends on the type of response if an invitation to come back again is made or not.

12. H0: It is independent of the type of response (accommodative vs. defensive) if the response contains a polite closing phrase or not.

     H1: It depends on the type of response if the response contains a polite closing phrase or not.

13. H0: There is no significant difference regarding the level of individualization between accommodative and defensive responses.

     H1: There is a significant difference regarding the level of individualization.

14. H0: There is no significant difference regarding the quality of the response between accommodative and defensive responses.

     H1: There is a significant difference regarding the quality of the response.

15. H0: There is no significant difference regarding the number of accommodative moves between accommodative and defensive responses.

     H1: There is a significant difference regarding the number of accommodative moves.

16. H0: It is independent of the hotel category what type of response (accommodative vs. defensive) is given to a negative online review.

     H1: It depends on the hotel category what type of response is given.

17. H0: There is no significant difference regarding the overall percentage of reviews classified as "terrible" on *TripAdvisor* on the hotel that provided the response between accommodative and defensive responses.

H1: There is a significant difference regarding the overall percentage of reviews classified as terrible.

18.   H0: It is independent of the respondent (management vs. employee) what type of response (accommodative vs. defensive) is given to a negative online review.

H1: It depends on the respondent what type of response is given.

4 RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

4.1 Polite opening

In order to test if there was any dependence of the opening phrase contained in a response on the type of response, three categories of an opening were defined. The first category referred to polite openings using "Dear" plus the complainant's name or username such as "Dear Becky" or "Dear Janf410". The second category encompassed neutral openings such as "Dear guest", "Dear Sir/Madam", "Hello" or "Good afternoon". The third category included those responses that did not contain any opening phrase.

The result of the crosstabulation between "type of response" and "polite opening" showed that there was no association between the two variables (χ^2=0.137, p>0.05). Within both types of responses, the majority of responses contained a polite opening phrase. Expressed in numbers, 39% of accommodative responses and 35.8% of defensive responses started with a polite opening. 31.7% of accommodative responses and 35.6% of defensive responses had a neutral opening phrase and 29.3% of accommodative responses compared to 31.2% of defensive responses contained no opening phrase. Although the percentage of accommodative responses starting with a polite opening was a little higher and there was a slight overrepresentation of accommodative responses and a slight underrepresentation of defensive responses in the category "polite", no significant dependence was detected. It could therefore be concluded that the level of politeness in the opening phrase was very similar in accommodative and defensive responses.

type of response * polite opening Crosstabulation

			polite opening			Total
			polite	neutral	no openning	
type of response	accommodative	Count	16	13	12	41
		Expected Count	15.0	13.4	12.6	41.0
		% within type of response	39.0%	31.7%	29.3%	100.0%
		% within polite opening	29.1%	26.5%	26.1%	27.3%
		% of Total	10.7%	8.7%	8.0%	27.3%
	defensive	Count	39	36	34	109
		Expected Count	40.0	35.6	33.4	109.0
		% within type of response	35.8%	33.0%	31.2%	100.0%
		% within polite opening	70.9%	73.5%	73.9%	72.7%
		% of Total	26.0%	24.0%	22.7%	72.7%
Total		Count	55	49	46	150
		Expected Count	55.0	49.0	46.0	150.0
		% within type of response	36.7%	32.7%	30.7%	100.0%
		% within polite opening	100.0%	100.0%	100.0%	100.0%
		% of Total	36.7%	32.7%	30.7%	100.0%

Chi-Square Tests

	Value	df	Asymp. Sig. (2-sided)
Pearson Chi-Square	.137[a]	2	.934
Likelihood Ratio	.137	2	.934
Linear-by-Linear Association	.118	1	.731
N of Valid Cases	150		

a. 0 cells (.0%) have expected count less than 5. The minimum expected count is 12.57.

TABLE 4-1 CROSSTABULATION TYPE OF RESPONSE & POLITE OPENING

This result shows that, against the common assumption reported in the academic literature (Einwiller & Steilen, 2015; Purnawirawan, et al., 2015; Lee & Song, 2010), definsive responses can also contain a polite entry and greet the reviewer in a friendly way nearly as often as do accommodative responses.

4.2 Expression of gratitude for the stay

In order to find out whether the two types of responses contained an expression of gratitude for the stay or not, two categories for expressing gratitude were defined encompassing those responses that thanked the reviewer and those that did not.

Regarding the presence of an expression to thank the complainant for having stayed at the hotel, a dependence on the type of response was detected (χ^2=4.030, p<0.05). While 100% of accommodative responses contained no expression of gratitude for the stay, 9.2% of defensive responses did compare to 90.8% that did not. As a result, defensive responses managed to be more polite in this regard. However, the outcome shows that respondents were generally very

reluctant to thanking a complaining guest for their stay. Moreover, this result could not be seen as accurate, since one cell showed an expected value lower than 5.

type of response * expression of gratitude for the stay Crosstabulation

			expression of gratitude for the stay		Total
			yes	no	
type of response	accommodative	Count	0	41	41
		Expected Count	2.7	38.3	41.0
		% within type of response	.0%	100.0%	100.0%
		% within expression of gratitude for the stay	.0%	29.3%	27.3%
		% of Total	.0%	27.3%	27.3%
	defensive	Count	10	99	109
		Expected Count	7.3	101.7	109.0
		% within type of response	9.2%	90.8%	100.0%
		% within expression of gratitude for the stay	100.0%	70.7%	72.7%
		% of Total	6.7%	66.0%	72.7%
Total		Count	10	140	150
		Expected Count	10.0	140.0	150.0
		% within type of response	6.7%	93.3%	100.0%
		% within expression of gratitude for the stay	100.0%	100.0%	100.0%
		% of Total	6.7%	93.3%	100.0%

Chi-Square Tests

	Value	df	Asymp. Sig. (2-sided)	Exact Sig. (2-sided)	Exact Sig. (1-sided)
Pearson Chi-Square	4.030[a]	1	.045		
Continuity Correction[b]	2.691	1	.101		
Likelihood Ratio	6.651	1	.010		
Fisher's Exact Test				.062	.036
Linear-by-Linear Association	4.003	1	.045		
N of Valid Cases	150				

a. 1 cells (25.0%) have expected count less than 5. The minimum expected count is 2.73.
b. Computed only for a 2x2 table

TABLE 4-2 CROSSTABULATION TYPE OF RESPONSE & EXPRESSION OF GRATITUDE FOR THE FEEDBACK

This finding clearly proves that, regardless of the type of response, respondents were very reluctant to thanking complainants for their stay. However, left aside the fact that one of the cells contained an expected value below 5, this result shows that defensive responses rather tended to express their gratitude towards the reviewer for staying at the hotel including examples of thanking the reviewer as in: "Please let me thank you for staying with us.", and: "Thank you for choosing to stay at The Park Lane Mews Hotel."

4.3 Expression of gratitude for the feedback

To identify whether or not there was a relationship between the type of response and the presence of an expression of gratitude for the feedback, two categories were defined of which

one referred to responses with the respondent thanking the reviewer for the feedback and the other one to responses without such an expression of gratitude.

A significant connection with the type of response was found concerning the expression of gratitude for the feedback (χ^2=11.890, p<0.001). 95.1% of accommodative responses thanked the complainants for sharing their feedback compared to 4.9% that did not. The percentage of defensive responses containing an expression of gratitude for the feedback was with 67.9% significantly lower. 32.1% of defensive responses did not thank the complainant for their review. With a clear overrepresentation of accommodative responses and a clear underrepresentation of defensive responses expressing gratitude for the feedback, this result shows that accommodative responses were much more polite with regards to thanking the complainant for their opinion.

type of response * expression of gratitude for the feedback Crosstabulation

			expression of gratitude for the feedback		Total
			yes	no	
type of response	accommodative	Count	39	2	41
		Expected Count	30.9	10.1	41.0
		% within type of response	95.1%	4.9%	100.0%
		% within expression of gratitude for the feedback	34.5%	5.4%	27.3%
		% of Total	26.0%	1.3%	27.3%
	defensive	Count	74	35	109
		Expected Count	82.1	26.9	109.0
		% within type of response	67.9%	32.1%	100.0%
		% within expression of gratitude for the feedback	65.5%	94.6%	72.7%
		% of Total	49.3%	23.3%	72.7%
Total		Count	113	37	150
		Expected Count	113.0	37.0	150.0
		% within type of response	75.3%	24.7%	100.0%
		% within expression of gratitude for the feedback	100.0%	100.0%	100.0%
		% of Total	75.3%	24.7%	100.0%

Chi-Square Tests

	Value	df	Asymp. Sig. (2-sided)	Exact Sig. (2-sided)	Exact Sig. (1-sided)
Pearson Chi-Square	11.890[a]	1	.001		
Continuity Correction[b]	10.470	1	.001		
Likelihood Ratio	14.773	1	.000		
Fisher's Exact Test				.000	.000
Linear-by-Linear Association	11.811	1	.001		
N of Valid Cases	150				

a. 0 cells (.0%) have expected count less than 5. The minimum expected count is 10.11.
b. Computed only for a 2x2 table

Table 4-3 Crosstabulation Type of Response & Expression of Gratitude for The Feedback

This finding goes in line with the broad opinion of the academic literature (Einwiller & Steilen, 2015; Purnawirawan, et al., 2015; Lee & Song, 2010) since the great majority of accommodative responses contained an expression of gratitude for the guest's feedback. Moreover, accommodative responses were found to be significantly more likely to thank the reviewer for the feedback than defensive responses. Examples of an expression of gratitude for the feedback of accommodative responses were: "Thank you for sharing your insights with us following your recent stay with us at the Euro Queens Hotel.", "Thank you for taking the time to tell us about your experience at the ibis budget London City Airport.", and: " We are grateful that you got some time to leave us feedback about your stay with us."

Compared to the results of the expression of gratitude for the stay, interestingly, a significantly larger number of hotels responded by thanking the reviewer for their feedback than for their stay. A possible explanation could be the time difference between staying at the hotel and sharing the feedback. Since the event of posting a review was closer in time than the stay at the hotel, it might be considered less important than the fact that the guest shared their feedback and might be simply ignored intentionally or forgotten to mention. Another explanation could refer to the very negative nature of the feedback, which could cause respondents to consider expressing their gratitude for the complainant's stay as unnecessary due to the fact that he or she did not enjoy it.

4.4   Apology

Due to the variety in which apologies were offered, four different categories were defined in order to test for an association between the type of response and the type of apology. The categories encompassed an apology that somehow assumed responsibility for the service failure stating "We apologize for the inconveniences caused […]" or "We are sorry we failed […]", an apology that referred to the reviewer's opinion by stating for example "We apologize you were disappointed […]", an apology that indicated that the respondent felt sorry for hearing about the guest's disappointment as in "We are sorry to hear […]" and responses that did not contain an apology.

With regards to offering an apology for the service failure, no dependence on the type of response was found (χ^2=3.695, p>0.05). 36.6% of accommodative responses contained an apology in which the respondent apologized for the inconveniences caused or the fact that they failed to offer satisfying service. 22% of accommodative responses apologized for the fact that the guest had not liked the stay. 19.5% of accommodative responses expressed their regret to hear that the guest had not enjoyed their services and 22% did not apologize at all.

Compared to this, 42.2% of defensive responses apologized for their wrongdoing, 16.5% offered an apology to the guest for not having liked the stay, 10.1% were sorry to hear that the guest had been dissatisfied and 31.2% did not offer an apology.

Due to a small overrepresentation of defensive responses in the first column in table 4-4, the result shows that defensive responses were a little more likely to contain an apology where a wrongdoing was somehow admitted. As opposed to this, accommodative responses showed a little overrepresentation in the second and third column where the apology was not given for what went wrong, but for the subjective evaluation of the complainant and the fact that the respondents heard of it respectively. With regards to not offering an apology, defensive responses were overrepresented indicating that accommodative responses were overall more likely to contain an apology than defensive ones.

Nevertheless, no striking differences could be detected and, therefore, accommodative and defensive responses tended to show a very similar behavior when it came to offering an apology.

type of response * apology Crosstabulation

			apology				
			sorry we failed/caused inconveniences	sorry for subjective costumer opinion	sorry to hear	no apology	Total
type of response	accommodative	Count	15	9	8	9	41
		Expected Count	16.7	7.4	5.2	11.8	41.0
		% within type of response	36.6%	22.0%	19.5%	22.0%	100.0%
		% within apology	24.6%	33.3%	42.1%	20.9%	27.3%
		% of Total	10.0%	6.0%	5.3%	6.0%	27.3%
	defensive	Count	46	18	11	34	109
		Expected Count	44.3	19.6	13.8	31.2	109.0
		% within type of response	42.2%	16.5%	10.1%	31.2%	100.0%
		% within apology	75.4%	66.7%	57.9%	79.1%	72.7%
		% of Total	30.7%	12.0%	7.3%	22.7%	72.7%
Total		Count	61	27	19	43	150
		Expected Count	61.0	27.0	19.0	43.0	150.0
		% within type of response	40.7%	18.0%	12.7%	28.7%	100.0%
		% within apology	100.0%	100.0%	100.0%	100.0%	100.0%
		% of Total	40.7%	18.0%	12.7%	28.7%	100.0%

Chi-Square Tests

	Value	df	Asymp. Sig. (2-sided)
Pearson Chi-Square	3.695[a]	3	.296
Likelihood Ratio	3.557	3	.313
Linear-by-Linear Association	.022	1	.882
N of Valid Cases	150		

a. 0 cells (.0%) have expected count less than 5. The minimum expected count is 5.19.

TABLE 4-4 CROSSTABULATION TYPE OF RESPONSE & APOLOGY

The results for both types of responses revealed that the majority of responses contained an apology. Referring to Kim et al. (2009) who found that an apology in most cases proves to be

more effective than denying a service failure, the outcome shows that both types of responses were likely to possibly be satisfactory when it comes to the apology. However, Kim et al. (2009) also found that in reality the most frequent response strategy used when confronted with an accusation is denial, which is not supported by the results of this thesis.

Surprisingly, 22% of accommodative responses did not contain an apology, although Purnawirawan et al. (2015) and Kim et al. (2016) defined an apology as the minimum condition for at least readers to be satisfied with a response. However, Kim et al.'s (2004) and Kim et al.'s (2006) argument that in some situations it is more advisable to deny any involvement in a problem and not to provide an apology also has to be considered. The decision whether it is appropriate not to apologize depends on many factors that, unfortunately, were unknown for these specific cases.

With regards to the type of apology, although not a significant result, more defensive responses than accommodative ones offered an apology in which the respondent apologized for what they did wrong as in: "Please accept our sincere apologies for the inconvenience caused.", whereas more accommodative responses contained an apology for the fact that the guest did not like the stay by writing: "[…] we're very sorry that you were unhappy with the condition of your guest room" and for hearing of the dissatisfaction of the guest by stating: "I was very sorry to hear that you found your room noisy […]".

Connected to the finding by Kerkhof et al. (2011) that a personal apology is considered as more honest than a corporate one and to the finding by Kim et al. (2009) that an apology should go along with an internal attribution, defensive responses showed a slightly better outcome. However, this result cannot be considered, since, on one hand, there could not be proven any significant association and, on the other hand, the apology has to be seen in context with the rest of the response in order to determine whether there is an internal attribution of responsibility.

4.5 Attribution of responsibility

In accordance with Kim et al. (2006) who argue that responsibility can only be attributed in case a respondent apologized and that way acknowledges that something went wrong, all responses not containing an apology were excluded from the sample for running this test. In order to look for an dependence of the attribution of responsibility on the type of response, three categories of attributions were defined including responses with an internal attribution, responses without an attribution of responsibility and responses with an external attribution.

Concerning the attribution of responsibility, a clear dependence of this factor on the type of response was detected (χ^2=35.768, p<0.000). While 41.9% of accommodative responses admit-

ted their responsibility for the service failure, only 13.3% of defensive responses assumed responsibility .

The results moreover showed that more than half (58.1%) of accommodative responses refrained from attributing responsibility. While they did not take on the responsibility themselves, they did not blame someone else for the service failure either. None of the accommodative responses contained an external attribution.

Within defensive responses, 32% did not make any claims of who to blame and more than half (54.7%) of defensive responses shifted the blame to either the customer, a third party or the circumstances.

Table 4-5 shows a clear overrepresentation of accommodative moves in the first and second column as well as a definitive underrepresentation with regards to external attribution. In contrast to this, defensive moves were underrepresented in the categories of "internal attribution" and "no attribution of responsibility" and overrepresented in the category of "external attribution".

In addition to the highly significant association to the type of response when it comes to assuming responsibility, it was found that both accommodative and defensive responses were very likely not to indicate who is to blame. While accommodative responses preferred no attribution of responsibility for admitting their responsibility, the most likely behavior of defensive responses was still an external attribution.

type of response * attribution of responsibility Crosstabulation

			attribution of responsibility			
			internal attribution	no attribution of responsibility	external attribution	Total
type of response	accommodative	Count	13	18	0	31
		Expected Count	6.7	12.3	12.0	31.0
		% within type of response	41.9%	58.1%	.0%	100.0%
		% within attribution of responsibility	56.5%	42.9%	.0%	29.2%
		% of Total	12.3%	17.0%	.0%	29.2%
	defensive	Count	10	24	41	75
		Expected Count	16.3	29.7	29.0	75.0
		% within type of response	13.3%	32.0%	54.7%	100.0%
		% within attribution of responsibility	43.5%	57.1%	100.0%	70.8%
		% of Total	9.4%	22.6%	38.7%	70.8%
Total		Count	23	42	41	106
		Expected Count	23.0	42.0	41.0	106.0
		% within type of response	21.7%	39.6%	38.7%	100.0%
		% within attribution of responsibility	100.0%	100.0%	100.0%	100.0%
		% of Total	21.7%	39.6%	38.7%	100.0%

Chi-Square Tests

	Value	df	Asymp. Sig. (2-sided)
Pearson Chi-Square	28.977[a]	2	.000
Likelihood Ratio	39.262	2	.000
Linear-by-Linear Association	26.203	1	.000
N of Valid Cases	106		

a. 0 cells (.0%) have expected count less than 5. The minimum expected count is 6.73.

TABLE 4-5 CROSSTABULATION TYPE OF RESPONSE & ATTRIBUTION OF RESPONSIBILITY

The result that the majority of defensive responses contained an external attribution goes in line with the findings of Shaw et al. (2003), Weiner et al. (1987) and Kim et al (2006) who argue that external attributions can be more beneficial to the observers' as well as complainants' perception of the service provider. This is due to the assumption that organizations could manage to convince the readers and also the complaining customer that the service failure was not the service provider's fault and like that also provide an explanation of what went wrong.

The fact that no external attribution was found in accommodative responses was not surprising since shifting the blame for a wrongdoing to somebody else was defined as one of the factors characteristic for defensive responses. Therefore, any response containing an external attribution was classified as defensive.

Nevertheless, a large number of defensive responses shifted the blame to the complainant, which might be perceived as justified by observers, but is likely to cause the complaining guest not to come back again such as in the following response given by the *Royal National Hotel*:

Dear Guest,

Thank you for your feedback regarding your stay at our Royal National Hotel. We are sorry to hear that you did not fully enjoy your stay with us. Our housekeeping staff are on hand throughout the day and would have been able to assist by flipping or changing the mattress, had you raised this to their attention at the time. Please check the terms and conditions with your booking agent directly for the breakfast rate, we advise our guests to upgrade to our popular English breakfast if they would like more of a choice and a selection. Please do not hesitate to contact us directly if you would like to discuss your stay with us any further.

Assuring you of our best intentions at all times.

Regards,

Christianna Andrews

Guest Liaison Officer

Interestingly, compared to the result of the type of apology, 75 defensive responses included an apology and 46 of those responses even offered an apology in which the respondent expressed they were sorry for the inconveniences they had caused or that they had done something wrong conveying the message of somehow assuming responsibility. However, these numbers do not go in line with the results regarding the attribution of responsibility. Only 10 defensive responses genuinely assumed responsibility for the service failure. This contradictory outcome is based on the fact that many defensive responses first presented an apology including an internal attribution, but later on, also shifted the blame to the complaining customer, the circumstances or a third party. As Kim et al. (2009) argue, combining an accommodative move with a defensive one causes inconsistency. An example of such a response provided by the *Belgrave House Hotel London* was:

Dear Guest,

Thank you for taking the time to comment on your stay at our hotel.

At the Belgrave House Hotel we endeavour to ensure all our guests have an enjoyable stay in a comfortable environment and I do apologise that on this occasion we failed to provide this.

We take all complaints and comments extremely seriously, and endeavour to rectify any issues in order to provide our customers with complete satisfaction.

FIRSTLY, YOU HAVE PAID A SUPER BUDGET PRICE FOR A BUDGET HOTEL. IF YOU WANTED LUXURY, PLEASE BE OUR GUEST AND SPEND A LOT MORE NEXT TIME ON 4/5 STAR HOTEL. WE FAIL TO UNDERSTAND HOW YOU COULD POSSIBLY EXPECT SUPER LUXURY AT THE PRICE AT WHICH YOU PAID. Please do your homework in respect of hotel amenities (such as AIR CONDITIONING) and prices before embarking on your next holiday.

Secondly, your room WAS on the 3rd floor. Do the maths and you will see that the lobby is on the ground floor, and then the top floor of the building is 3 floors up. FLOOR 3. THREE. TROIS. DRIE. And yes, the rooms ARE small, and the dimensions are advertised on every single OTA on the internet as well as our own website. So why this was a surprise to you is beyond our understanding.

> Finally, if your TV was not working, why didn't you just speak to the front desk, and one of the two full time maintenance managers would've addressed the issue. The fact that you simply didn't know how to operate the TV is more likely what happened.
>
> Thank you for wasting your time in reviewing the hotel, and we look forward to welcoming you again soon.
>
> With warmest regards

This combination is moreover an indicator of respondents offering an apology because they feel like their company obliges them to do so. This connects to another finding by Kerkhof et al. (2011) referring to the observation that offering a personal apology is considered as more honest than offering a corporate one, which defensive responses often failed to do.

Regarding accommodative responses, 13 responses contained an actual internal attribution compared to 15 responses that contained an apology conveying an internal attribution. This very similar result can be explained by the fact that accommodative responses were in many cases rather short and did not contain enough text to cause a contradiction concerning the attribution of responsibility such as in this example from easyHotel Paddington London:

> Dear Guest,
>
> We're very disappointed with the issues you came across. Please accept our sincere apologies that the room was not up to our usually high standards. We have immediately addressed your complaint and passed on your comments to the relevant department.
>
> Thank you so much for sharing your experience with us. We appreciate all opportunities to better our hotel.
>
> Warmest regards,
>
> Social Media Coordinator

With regards to Tomlinson et al.'s (2004) finding that an internal attribution conveys the message of being more trustworthy and more likely to take measures to prevent reoccurrence, the result of this analysis that more than three times as many accommodative responses than defensive ones assumed responsibility corresponds to the main finding of the academic literature that accommodative responses are more effective (Einwiller and Steilen, 2015; Lee and Song, 2010; Purnawirawan et al., 2015). Nevertheless, as argued by Kim et al. (2006) it depends on the situation, whether or not an internal attribution is more appropriate since sometimes the service provider did not cause the service failure and assuming responsibility in order to express empathy is not the right way.

Another interesting finding is that a high percentage of both types of responses did not comment at all on who is to blame. They either contained a simple apology without indicating the hotel had caused the negative experience or any further comment or they did not include an apology at all and neither an attribution of responsibility. In the case of accommodative re-

sponses, this might be explained by an often low level of interest of respondents to go into detail as found by Min et al. (2014). An example of such a response was:

> Thank you for submitting your review of our London Crystal Palace Travelodge. We're so sorry to hear about your recent experience and would like to hear more about your stay. May we kindly request you contact us via our website with your review so our customer service team can investigate your visit with the hotel. Thank you again for posting your comments and we hope to hear from you soon.

4.6 Direct references

In order to find out if there was an association between the type of response and direct references, three categories of references were defined. The first category included those responses in which all points raised by the complainant had been addressed. The second category referred to responses where some of the problems mentioned in the review had been covered. The third category encompassed those responses where no direct reference was found.

The results of the crosstabulation between "types of response" and "direct references" show that there was a highly significant association between whether the response was accommodative or defensive and the references to the complainant's problem made or not made in the response (χ^2=53.412, p<0.000). Only 4.9% of accommodative responses addressed all points mentioned by the dissatisfied customer compared to 36.7% of defensive responses. 22% of accommodative responses and with 50.5% slightly more than half of defensive responses contained references to some problems described in the review. The majority of accommodative responses (73.2%) contained no direct reference to what the complainant had mentioned in their review compared to 12.8% of defensive responses.

With regards to accommodative responses, there was a striking overrepresentation of responses that did not contain any reference and an underrepresentation of responses that addressed all or some points. As opposed to this, defensive responses were clearly underrepresented among the responses without any reference and overrepresented among responses with references to some or all problems.

95.2% of responses that addressed all of the problems mentioned were defensive responses. Although the overall number of defensive responses in the sample was clearly higher than the number of accommodative ones, this result underlines that accommodative responses were much less likely to exhibit details on the complaint and much more likely to be superficial and generic. As a result, defensive responses were much more prone to containing direct references to and details on the customers' problems.

type of response * direct references Crosstabulation

			direct references			
			all points addressed	some points addressed	no reference	Total
type of response	accommodative	Count	2	9	30	41
		Expected Count	11.5	17.5	12.0	41.0
		% within type of response	4.9%	22.0%	73.2%	100.0%
		% within direct references	4.8%	14.1%	68.2%	27.3%
		% of Total	1.3%	6.0%	20.0%	27.3%
	defensive	Count	40	55	14	109
		Expected Count	30.5	46.5	32.0	109.0
		% within type of response	36.7%	50.5%	12.8%	100.0%
		% within direct references	95.2%	85.9%	31.8%	72.7%
		% of Total	26.7%	36.7%	9.3%	72.7%
Total		Count	42	64	44	150
		Expected Count	42.0	64.0	44.0	150.0
		% within type of response	28.0%	42.7%	29.3%	100.0%
		% within direct references	100.0%	100.0%	100.0%	100.0%
		% of Total	28.0%	42.7%	29.3%	100.0%

Chi-Square Tests

	Value	df	Asymp. Sig. (2-sided)
Pearson Chi-Square	53.412[a]	2	.000
Likelihood Ratio	52.859	2	.000
Linear-by-Linear Association	43.842	1	.000
N of Valid Cases	150		

a. 0 cells (.0%) have expected count less than 5. The minimum expected count is 11.48.

TABLE 4-6 CROSSTABULATION TYPE OF RESPONSE & DIRECT REFERENCES

The observation of accommodative moves containing a lot fewer direct references to what was mentioned in the review supports Min et al.'s (2014) finding that accommodative responses are often very generic. An example of such a response by *Travelodge London Crystal Palace* underlines this observation:

> Thank you for your feedback. We are really sorry to hear of your experience. Please accept our sincerest apologies and we have passed your comments onto the hotel manager as this does not reflect Travelodge standards. Could we kindly ask you to contact one of our Customer Services Advisors via our website help form with your review to look into this more thoroughly. Thank you again for reviewing our hotel.

This response shows that the respondent had no interest in dealing with the complainant's problems. Although the response is polite, it is not likely to be satisfactory.

With regards to Min et al's (2014) recommendation that responses should convey the message that the review has been read thoroughly by referring to the points addressed by the complainant, defensive responses are much more likely to create satisfaction for the complaining guest as well as the readers. As opposed to the example of a superficial response, a very detailed response was provided by *Boston Court Hotel*:

Dear Guest,

Thank you very much for your review and we would like to precise the following:

- We are truly sorry about the mistake and we hope you understand we are humans as well and mistakes can occur although we always do our best to avoid these kind of situations

-True, it took a month to get your money back, but this is only because after a month both you and consequentially the hotel staff realised about the mistake; matter of fact, the same day you have contacted us about the matter, we have immediately started the refund process and your money has been sent to your bank account few hours later.

-We have also offered you a 20% discount on any future stay, which we believe being a nice gesture to say sorry and we keep the offer opened

-It is also true that we did not cover any overdraft fee, but this is not possible for us unless you decide to send us a proof of overdraft and the fee amount; asking to have the whole stay refunded is NOT the same as covering any eventual overdraft fee you might have incurred into because of this mistake; again, we invite you to send these details to our e-mail address and we will be happy to cover the fee as there is absolutely no difference for us between offering you a discount or simply cover the payment.

-Although we understand your disappointment, we have no other ways to explain how sorry we are about the above matter and we would like to precise that the shared bathroom is both in the basement where there are ALWAYS the lights on as well as on the first floor of the building; also, the rooms are cleaned on a daily basis by our chambermaid as you can see being nicely pointed out by other reviewers.

-Also, the breakfast is served free of charge as an extra treat for our guests; this, is a basic continental breakfast with toast, jam, orange juice, tea, coffee and milk. Everything is served fresh and we also provide room service, although basic, it is a great advantage for our customers who can enjoy a free of charge meal when staying with us.

-Lastly, we really hope you will be able to accept our apologies for the above matter and decide to accept our discount offer and therefore give us a chance to make you change your mind about our services.

We thank you very much again for taking the time to write a review and we apologies again for the mistake.

Best Regards

However, direct references are not necessarily an indicator of an effective response, since detailed responses often failed to convey empathy or politeness such as the following response by *Notting Hill Hotel* in which the complainant is attacked in a rude way:

Dear WorldTravlerMonaco,

We are glad you found the hotel to be clean and in a nice neighborhood. We have an on-going plan of renovation for the hotel, but the building is of heritage status so we are limited as to what we can modernise.

We note your complaint about the room being too hot, however; your room has a thermostat and all you need to do to adjust the room temperature is to turn the thermostat to the required temperature, or if you

are not able to understand how to use a thermostat, then ask the staff and they can set it for you. You do not need to open the window to adjust the room temperature, although fresh air is good.

We noted that your profile for "WorldTravelerMonaco" lists you as a "Luxury" traveler and we wonder why you selected a two star hotel for your accommodation in Notting Hill London. There are many four and five star hotels in our area that offer appropriate accommodation for "Luxury" world travelers from Monaco...however, you will have to pay for the "Luxury"

4.7 Corrective action

Four different categories for corrective action were set up including corrective action already taken, corrective action to be taken in the future, mentioning the intention to improve based on the complainant's feedback and responses without any corrective action.

There was found a significant relationship between the type of response and the information on corrective action (χ^2=9.266, p<0.05). In 12.2% of accommodative responses compared to 13.8% of defensive responses corrective action already taken in response to the dissatisfying occurrence was reported. 36.6% of accommodative responses and 18.3% of defensive responses contained information on corrective action to be taken in the future. Moreover, 26.8% of accommodative responses and 19.3% of defensive responses mentioned the intention to improve due to the occurrences, however, did not indicate corrective action. Lastly, nearly one fourth (24.4%) of accommodative responses compared to almost half (48.6%) of defensive responses did not contain any information on corrective action.

While the observed values are very close to the expected values with regards to information on action already taken, accommodative responses are overrepresented regarding corrective action to be taken in the future and the intention to improve. In contrast to this, defensive responses are underrepresented in these two categories. Concerning responses exhibiting no information on corrective action, defensive responses are strikingly overrepresented as opposed to accommodative responses showing an underrepresentation in this category.

This leads to the conclusion that defensive responses were much more prone to providing no information on corrective action than accommodative responses. In addition, they were less likely to inform about corrective action to be taken in the future and to mention the intention to improve.

type of response * corrective action Crosstabulation

			corrective action				Total
			corrective action taken	corrective action to be taken	intention to improve	no corrective action	
type of response	accommodative	Count	5	15	11	10	41
		Expected Count	5.5	9.6	8.7	17.2	41.0
		% within type of response	12.2%	36.6%	26.8%	24.4%	100.0%
		% within corrective action	25.0%	42.9%	34.4%	15.9%	27.3%
		% of Total	3.3%	10.0%	7.3%	6.7%	27.3%
	defensive	Count	15	20	21	53	109
		Expected Count	14.5	25.4	23.3	45.8	109.0
		% within type of response	13.8%	18.3%	19.3%	48.6%	100.0%
		% within corrective action	75.0%	57.1%	65.6%	84.1%	72.7%
		% of Total	10.0%	13.3%	14.0%	35.3%	72.7%
Total		Count	20	35	32	63	150
		Expected Count	20.0	35.0	32.0	63.0	150.0
		% within type of response	13.3%	23.3%	21.3%	42.0%	100.0%
		% within corrective action	100.0%	100.0%	100.0%	100.0%	100.0%
		% of Total	13.3%	23.3%	21.3%	42.0%	100.0%

Chi-Square Tests

	Value	df	Asymp. Sig. (2-sided)
Pearson Chi-Square	9.266[a]	3	.026
Likelihood Ratio	9.351	3	.025
Linear-by-Linear Association	3.880	1	.049
N of Valid Cases	150		

a. 0 cells (.0%) have expected count less than 5. The minimum expected count is 5.47.

TABLE 4-7 CROSSTABULATION TYPE OF RESPONSE & CORRECTIVE ACTION

Mentioned in Lee and Song's (2010) study to be an indicator of a satisfactory response, the result revealed that, in this case, accommodative responses could be more prone to satisfy the complainant or observers, since they contained information on corrective action more frequently.

However, when it comes to mentioning specific corrective action, defensive responses were slightly more likely to exhibit this information and also provided more detailed corrective action such as in a response by Kensington West Hotel:

> Thank you for taking the time to write a review,
>
> We appreciate guests taking their time to write good and bad reviews as we take pride ourselves in listening to our guest's feedback in order to improve our services for future guests.
>
> I am really appalled to see the pictures as this is definitely not our standards. We take pride in providing our guests a clean base to stay while they visit London, majority of the reviews our guests write emphasize that our rooms are clean on this occasion, please accept my sincere apologies for inconvenience caused to you. Your review has been played back to the housekeeping team and we will make sure that this is not repeated for our future guests.
>
> We understand there are marks on the carpet in the room that you stayed in however these are marks that can not be hoovered and I am pleased to inform you and other guests that management have already placed an order to replace the carpet in this room with Vinaly flooring.

We prefer to be given the opportunity to rectify any issues that arise during your stay with us; this is to enable your stay with us to be more pleasurable. I hope you will give us another chance and stay at the Kensington West in the near future.

Again please accept our sincere apologies for the inconvenience caused

Best Wishes from the Kensington West team

In contrast to this, accommodative responses often referred to rather generic corrective actions such as: "We have immediately addressed your complaint and passed on your comments to the relevant department."

It was found that many accommodative responses included a reference to striving for improvement by stating: "[…] your comments are greatly appreciated as they will help us improve the service we provide as Queens Hotel is undergoing refurbishment.", but no reference to specific corrective action. Therefore, the reviewer, as well as the observers, might not get an idea of what those improvements could look like and are likely not to believe that their feedback will have any impact. This can be seen in connection with Wirtz and Lovelock (2017) who argue that dissatisfied customers are likely to refrain from complaining if they feel that their complaint does not bring along any changes.

Other accommodative responses contained the promise to investigate the unpleasant event such as a response by *Victoria Inn*: "Thank you for your feedback, we are investigating this and will come back to you." With regards to this, the question arises why nobody looked into the problem before responding to the review. This could be an indicator that some respondents do not bother reading the reviews before answering to them.

4.8 Promise of avoiding problem in the future

Regarding the question, if the promise to avoid reoccurrence of the customers' problems was related to the type of response, there was detected a significant dependence (χ^2=4.195, p<0.05). Whereas 31.7% of accommodative responses contained the promise of avoiding a specific problem in the future and 68.3% did not, 16.5% of defensive responses contained this promise compared to 83.5% that did not.

There was a clear overrepresentation of accommodative responses in the category where a promise of future avoidance was given and a clear underreprestantion in the category without the promise. As for defensive responses, they were underrepresented in the category where the promise was made and overrepresented among the responses without a promise. Consequently, accommodative responses were more likely to present a promise to prevent a specific problem from happening again.

type of response * promise of avoiding problem in the future Crosstabulation

| | | | promise of avoiding problem in the future | | |
			yes	no	Total
type of response	accommodative	Count	13	28	41
		Expected Count	8.5	32.5	41.0
		% within type of response	31.7%	68.3%	100.0%
		% within promise of avoiding problem in the future	41.9%	23.5%	27.3%
		% of Total	8.7%	18.7%	27.3%
	defensive	Count	18	91	109
		Expected Count	22.5	86.5	109.0
		% within type of response	16.5%	83.5%	100.0%
		% within promise of avoiding problem in the future	58.1%	76.5%	72.7%
		% of Total	12.0%	60.7%	72.7%
Total		Count	31	119	150
		Expected Count	31.0	119.0	150.0
		% within type of response	20.7%	79.3%	100.0%
		% within promise of avoiding problem in the future	100.0%	100.0%	100.0%
		% of Total	20.7%	79.3%	100.0%

Chi-Square Tests

	Value	df	Asymp. Sig. (2-sided)	Exact Sig. (2-sided)	Exact Sig. (1-sided)
Pearson Chi-Square	4.195[a]	1	.041		
Continuity Correction[b]	3.319	1	.068		
Likelihood Ratio	3.947	1	.047		
Fisher's Exact Test				.068	.037
Linear-by-Linear Association	4.167	1	.041		
N of Valid Cases	150				

a. 0 cells (.0%) have expected count less than 5. The minimum expected count is 8.47.
b. Computed only for a 2x2 table

TABLE 4-8 CROSSTABULATION TYPE OF RESPONSE & PROMISE OF AVOIDING PROBLEM IN THE FUTURE

The promise of avoiding a given problem in the future was often related to corrective action. Since accommodative responses were found to be more likely to exhibit corrective action, it is not surprising that this result shows that they also contained a promise to avoid reoccurrence of the problem.

However, what is surprising is that the majority of both types of responses did not contain such a promise. This could also be seen in connection with corrective actions mentioned in the respective responses. In case corrective action was already mentioned, respondents could have considered it self-explanatory that the problem would not occur again. The other way round, whenever no corrective action was mentioned also no promise to avoid the problem in the future could be found.

4.9 Compensation

With regards to compensation, no dependence on the type of response was found ($\chi2=0.000$, p>0.05). Both types of responses exhibited exactly the same distribution among responses that contained an offer of compensation and those that did not. While 7.3% of accommodative and defensive responses offered a compensation, 92.7% lacked this offer. As a result, there can be concluded that both accommodative and defensive responses were very unlikely to contain an offer of compensation. However, one cell showed an expected value below 5. Therefore, the accuracy of the result needs to be questioned.

type of response * compensation Crosstabulation

			compensation		Total
			yes	no	
type of response	accommodative	Count	3	38	41
		Expected Count	3.0	38.0	41.0
		% within type of response	7.3%	92.7%	100.0%
		% within compensation	27.3%	27.3%	27.3%
		% of Total	2.0%	25.3%	27.3%
	defensive	Count	8	101	109
		Expected Count	8.0	101.0	109.0
		% within type of response	7.3%	92.7%	100.0%
		% within compensation	72.7%	72.7%	72.7%
		% of Total	5.3%	67.3%	72.7%
Total		Count	11	139	150
		Expected Count	11.0	139.0	150.0
		% within type of response	7.3%	92.7%	100.0%
		% within compensation	100.0%	100.0%	100.0%
		% of Total	7.3%	92.7%	100.0%

Chi-Square Tests

	Value	df	Asymp. Sig. (2-sided)	Exact Sig. (2-sided)	Exact Sig. (1-sided)
Pearson Chi-Square	.000[a]	1	.996		
Continuity Correction[b]	.000	1	1.000		
Likelihood Ratio	.000	1	.996		
Fisher's Exact Test				1.000	.650
Linear-by-Linear Association	.000	1	.996		
N of Valid Cases	150				

a. 1 cells (25.0%) have expected count less than 5. The minimum expected count is 3.01.
b. Computed only for a 2x2 table

TABLE 4-9 CROSSTABULATION TYPE OF RESPONSE & COMPENSATION

Although compensation is mentioned by Coombs (1999) and Lee and Song (2010) as a typical indicator for an accommodative response, the results show that is was hardly ever actually

offered. If it was offered, it only included a discount for the next stay or referred to a rate reduction already considered during the complaining guest's stay. However, in none of the responses a full refund was offered.

This observation could be related to fraudulent deviant customers and jaycustomers as mentioned by Wirtz and Lovelock (2017) and service providers' fear connected to complainants taking advantage of a firm's service recovery strategies.

4.10 Invitation to further discuss the problem via other channels

A highly significant association to the type of response was detected with regards to expressing an invitation to discuss the complainant's problem via other channels ($\chi^2=25.328$, p<0.000). 48.8% of accommodative responses expressed an invitation for the guest to contact either the respondent themselves or an employee responsible for complaint handling compared to 11% of defensive responses. Whereas among accommodative responses, 51.2% did not contain this invitation, among defensive ones 89% responses did not invite the complainant to contact the hotel beyond the review.

There was a striking overrepresentation of accommodative responses within the category of responses that presented an invitation. The same observation could be made for defensive responses within the category of responses without an invitation. As a result, defensive responses were much more likely not to invite the complaining guest for further discussion of their problems via other channels.

type of response * invitation to further discuss problem via other channel Crosstabulation

| | | | invitation to further discuss problem via other channel | | Total |
			yes	no	
type of response	accommodative	Count	20	21	41
		Expected Count	8.7	32.3	41.0
		% within type of response	48.8%	51.2%	100.0%
		% within invitation to further discuss problem via other channel	62.5%	17.8%	27.3%
		% of Total	13.3%	14.0%	27.3%
	defensive	Count	12	97	109
		Expected Count	23.3	85.7	109.0
		% within type of response	11.0%	89.0%	100.0%
		% within invitation to further discuss problem via other channel	37.5%	82.2%	72.7%
		% of Total	8.0%	64.7%	72.7%
Total		Count	32	118	150
		Expected Count	32.0	118.0	150.0
		% within type of response	21.3%	78.7%	100.0%
		% within invitation to further discuss problem via other channel	100.0%	100.0%	100.0%
		% of Total	21.3%	78.7%	100.0%

Chi-Square Tests

	Value	df	Asymp. Sig. (2-sided)	Exact Sig. (2-sided)	Exact Sig. (1-sided)
Pearson Chi-Square	25.328[a]	1	.000		
Continuity Correction[b]	23.127	1	.000		
Likelihood Ratio	23.106	1	.000		
Fisher's Exact Test				.000	.000
Linear-by-Linear Association	25.159	1	.000		
N of Valid Cases	150				

a. 0 cells (.0%) have expected count less than 5. The minimum expected count is 8.75.
b. Computed only for a 2x2 table

TABLE 4-10 CROSSTABULATION TYPE OF RESPONSE & INVITATION TO FURTHER DISCUSS THE PROBLEM VIA OTHER CHANNELS

This result shows that accommodative responses exhibited more interest in helping complainants to find a satisfactory solution beyond offering a response and possibly an apology. However, in some cases complainants were asked to contact an employee responsible for complaint handling in order to send them their review again via another channel such as a response posted by *Travelodge London Crystal Palace*:

> Thank you for your feedback. We are really sorry to hear of your experience. Please accept our sincerest apologies and we have passed your comments onto the hotel manager as this does not reflect Travelodge standards. Could we kindly ask you to contact one of our Customer Services Advisors via our website help form with your review to look into this more thoroughly. Thank you again for reviewing our hotel.

The observation of respondents asking complainants to contact them via e-mail in order to explain again what the cause for their dissatisfaction led to the question of why a complainant

would invest more time and effort to write their comment all over again. Most probably the responding organization's intention is to prevent this exchange from happening in public. However, this does not show any serious intention to make up for the problem and does most likely not lead to a satisfactory outcome for neither the complainant nor the observers.

4.11 Invitation to come back again

There was found a significant relationship between the type of response and the presence of an invitation for the complaining guest to come back again ($\chi2=7.636$, $p<0.05$). 53.7% of accommodative and 29.4% of defensive responses invited the complainant to come back. 46.3% of accommodative responses compared to 70.6% of defensive responses did not express such an invitation.

Among those responses containing an invitation, accommodative responses were clearly overrepresented, as were defensive response among those responses that did not invite the reviewer to stay with them again. As a result, accommodative responses were more prone to containing an invitation to come back, as opposed to defensive responses of which the vast majority did not express an invitation.

type of response * invitation to come back again Crosstabulation

			invitation to come back again		Total
			yes	no	
type of response	accommodative	Count	22	19	41
		Expected Count	14.8	26.2	41.0
		% within type of response	53.7%	46.3%	100.0%
		% within invitation to come back again	40.7%	19.8%	27.3%
		% of Total	14.7%	12.7%	27.3%
	defensive	Count	32	77	109
		Expected Count	39.2	69.8	109.0
		% within type of response	29.4%	70.6%	100.0%
		% within invitation to come back again	59.3%	80.2%	72.7%
		% of Total	21.3%	51.3%	72.7%
Total		Count	54	96	150
		Expected Count	54.0	96.0	150.0
		% within type of response	36.0%	64.0%	100.0%
		% within invitation to come back again	100.0%	100.0%	100.0%
		% of Total	36.0%	64.0%	100.0%

Chi-Square Tests

	Value	df	Asymp. Sig. (2-sided)	Exact Sig. (2-sided)	Exact Sig. (1-sided)
Pearson Chi-Square	7.636[a]	1	.006		
Continuity Correction[b]	6.618	1	.010		
Likelihood Ratio	7.446	1	.006		
Fisher's Exact Test				.008	.005
Linear-by-Linear Association	7.585	1	.006		
N of Valid Cases	150				

a. 0 cells (.0%) have expected count less than 5. The minimum expected count is 14.76.
b. Computed only for a 2x2 table

TABLE 4-11 CROSSTABULATION TYPE OF RESPONSE & INVITATION TO COME BACK AGAIN

The result that accommodative responses were less likely to invite the complainant to come back, can be seen in connection with the assumption that especially respondents answering defensively do not want to take the risk to be faced with a guest notoriously likely to complain. Also only slightly more than half of accommodative responses contained an invitation for the complainant to stay at the hotel again. This could also be explained by hotels' fear to be faced with a guest that has already complained and is likely to do it again. Moreover, the expectations of a guest coming back after a complaint might be much higher of a first-time guest or one that has always been satisfied.

4.12 Polite closing

Regarding a polite closing, three categories were defined in order to test their association with the two types of responses. While the first category encompassed responses that had a polite closing such as "Kind regards, […]", the second category contained responses with a neutral closing where only the respondent's name or position or the hotel's name was written be-

neath the response and the third category referred to responses that did not contain a closing at all.

Regarding the presence of a polite closing phrase in the response, a significant dependence on the type of response was detected ($\chi2=7.652$, $p<0.05$). 63.4% of accommodative responses closed politely compared to 46.8% of defensive responses. Whereas none of the accommodative responses contained a neutral closing, 14.7% of defensive responses did. 36.6% of accommodative responses did not contain a closing phare compared to 38.5% of defensive responses.

While the results for the two types of responses were similar when it came to responses without a closing phrase, differences were found among responses with polite and neutral openings. Accommodatie responses were clearly overrepresented within the category of responses with a polite opening and with 0% clearly underrepresented within in the responses with a neutral opening phrase. Nevertheless, due to the fact that 1 cell contains an expected value below 5, the results cannot be regarded as accurate.

type of response * polite closing Crosstabulation

			polite closing			
			polite	neutral	no closing	Total
type of response	accommodative	Count	26	0	15	41
		Expected Count	21.0	4.4	15.6	41.0
		% within type of response	63.4%	.0%	36.6%	100.0%
		% within polite closing	33.8%	.0%	26.3%	27.3%
		% of Total	17.3%	.0%	10.0%	27.3%
	defensive	Count	51	16	42	109
		Expected Count	56.0	11.6	41.4	109.0
		% within type of response	46.8%	14.7%	38.5%	100.0%
		% within polite closing	66.2%	100.0%	73.7%	72.7%
		% of Total	34.0%	10.7%	28.0%	72.7%
Total		Count	77	16	57	150
		Expected Count	77.0	16.0	57.0	150.0
		% within type of response	51.3%	10.7%	38.0%	100.0%
		% within polite closing	100.0%	100.0%	100.0%	100.0%
		% of Total	51.3%	10.7%	38.0%	100.0%

Chi-Square Tests

	Value	df	Asymp. Sig. (2-sided)
Pearson Chi-Square	7.652[a]	2	.022
Likelihood Ratio	11.783	2	.003
Linear-by-Linear Association	1.166	1	.280
N of Valid Cases	150		

a. 1 cells (16.7%) have expected count less than 5. The minimum expected count is 4.37.

TABLE 4-12 CROSSTABULATION TYPE OF RESPONSE & POLITE CLOSING

This result shows that accommodative responses were more likely to be polite in this matter than defensive ones. However, within both groups also a large number of responses did not contain any polite closing phrase.

The outcome that more than one third of accommodative responses did not contain a closing phrase at all could be explained by the observation that those responses were often very standardized and respondents did not bother to add any details such in the response by Victoria Inn stating: "Thank you for your time in giving us your feedback. All reviews are important to us and we will look to improve your comments."

Regarding the result that defensive responses sometimes contained a neutral closing compared to accommodative responses of which none did, this could be based on the observation that defensive responses sometimes exhibited a rude tone of voice to which a neutral closing or no closing fit best.

4.13 Level of individualization

The level of individualization of a response was determined based on the direct references contained in the text as well as on the similarity to other responses included in the sample. The responses were evaluated on a scale from 1 to 10, where 1 referred to a low level of individualization and 10 indicated a highly individualized response.

There was a highly significant difference regarding the level of individualization between accommodative and defensive responses (p<0.000). Defensive response presented a much higher level of individualization than accommodative ones. Consequently, while defensive responses were much more likely to be individually adapted to the respective reviews, accommodative responses were in many cases very standardized and contained same or similar parts as in other responses or were even simply copied in response to any review regardless of its content.

Mann–Whitney Test

Ranks

	type of response	N	Mean Rank	Sum of Ranks
level of individualization	accommodative	41	34.28	1405.50
	defensive	109	91.00	9919.50
	Total	150		

Test Statistics[a]

	level of individualization
Mann–Whitney U	544.500
Wilcoxon W	1405.500
Z	–7.175
Asymp. Sig. (2–tailed)	.000

a. Grouping Variable: type of response

TABLE 4-13 MANN-WHITNEY TEST TYPE OF RESPONSE & LEVEL OF INDIVIDUALIZATION

This result supports Min et al's (2014) finding that accommodative responses often tend to be very generic such as the following example posted by *Tophams Hotel Belgravia* given in response to three different reviews:

> Dear Guest,
>
> Your feedback is most appreciated and please rest assured that we have taken your comments very much on board and will ensure we are much more thoughtful and sensitive in dealing with such matters in future.
>
> I very much hope we will yet have the opportunity to welcome you back to the Tophams Hotel.

Kind Regards

As both Min et al. (2014) and Kerkhof et al. (2011) suggest, responses should be individualized by directly referring to the content of the review to show that the review was read thoroughly and the hotel is actually interested in the feedback such as in the example by *La Reserve*:

Dear Sir/Madam,

Firstly I would like to thank you for taking the time to advise us of your recent stay at La Reserve Hotel. It is only through our guests' feedback that we are able to improve the service we provide.

We are very disappointed to hear you did not have a pleasant stay with us. Whilst an apology will not change the outcome of your experience I do extend it with all sincerity.

As you have noticed our car park is limited, therefore, we need to collect cars keys in case we have a delivery or an entrance is blocked and we need to move around the cars. We are really sorry if you have not been informed about this on your arrival.

Being located on a busy road like Fulham road has advantages such as easy access, quick public transport to city centre,… and also disadvantages such as road noise, though our windows are all double glazed still some noises can be heard during night time. Regarding the noise from the room above you, unfortunately, guests are coming from different time zones which mean that they stay awake till late and due to the victorian style wooden floor this can cause disturbance to the rooms underneath especially if you are a light sleeper, however, you could have informed reception to move you to a room on the top floor to have a quieter room.

Regarding the smell in your room, though all our rooms are non-smoking some guests simply ignore it and smoke in the rooms which sometimes takes long to get rid of the smell. Again you could have informed reception to change your room.

We are pleased to inform you that we are going through a major refurbishment mid next year and we will take into account all our guests' points and recommendations to improve our facilities and services.

Again, Please accept our apology, and we hope that this hasn't put you off a return stay with us.

Kind Regards

La Reserve Hotel Management

Along with the individualized text, this response contains external attributions shifting the blame to the reviewer as well as other guests. Therefore, it has to be considered that a high level of individualization does not necessarily relate to a high quality of a response. This observation was also stressed by other highly individualized responses that exhibited a rude tone of voice such as in the example by *Notting Hill Hotel*:

Dear Matthew Fleming,

We are sorry to hear that you were not happy with your stay in room 56. We know you were not happy to pay for a triple room when you wanted a single room, but we were fully booked and could only offer you a

triple room for £94 instead of a single at £58. All the free tea, coffee and coco are available 24/7 in our guest lounge. We do not have AC, hardly need it in London (in October?) but we do have thermostatic valves on the radiator with settings one to five. One of the windows is bolted shut, but to open the other window, you just need to turn the handle. We have inspected the room and have not found any problems. The bathroom is exactly as pictured in the booking.com web site, as is the room you booked. The lift is protected by English Heritage, we are not allowed a larger one, but it is fully serviced. Kind regards, Notting Hill Hotel

4.14 Quality of response

In order to determine how appropriate a response was, each response was given an evaluation between 1 and 10, where 1 was the lowest and 10 the highest quality of response. The responses were evaluated based on the factors if they contained an apology and connected to this an internal attribution, corrective action, an individualized text and a friendly and understanding tone.

Concerning the quality of response, there was found no significant difference between accommodative and defensive responses (P>0.05). Accommodative responses exhibited a slightly lower mean rank than defensive responses indicating a lower quality of response. This can be explained by the often very standardized nature of accommodative responses. However, there was no significant difference between the two types of responses due to the fact that defensive responses in many cases contained a rude tone of voice which led to a lower evaluation of their quality despite a high level of individualization and the presence of various accommodative moves within responses.

Mann−Whitney Test

Ranks

	type of response	N	Mean Rank	Sum of Ranks
quality of response	accommodative	41	65.68	2693.00
	defensive	109	79.19	8632.00
	Total	150		

Test Statistics[a]

	quality of response
Mann−Whitney U	1832.000
Wilcoxon W	2693.000
Z	−1.742
Asymp. Sig. (2−tailed)	.082

a. Grouping Variable: type of response

TABLE 4-14 MANN-WHITNEY TEST TYPE OF RESPONSE & QUALITY OF RESPONSE

This result implies that both types of responses often contained various accommodative moves indicating a high level of quality and were therefore almost equally polite with regards to these factors. However, the weaknesses of both types of responses, the often standardized texts of accommodative responses and the rude tone of voice of many defensive responses, negatively influenced the evaluation of the respective responses.

An example of a defensive response that obtained a 10 was given by *Avni Kensington Hotel*:

Dear Dolores M,

Firstly, on behalf of the entire team at Avni Kensington Hotel, I apologize for your Avni Kensington Hotel experience having been so unsatisfactory. We are as disappointed as you were; and assure you that all practicable steps necessary to assure your complaints are dealt with are being taken; or have already been taken. Please be assured that this was a unique occurrence.The vast majority of our guests check out of Avni Kensington Hotel having had very positive stays with us, as our TripAdvisor reviews reflect.We really appreciate for your time you have taken to record your areas of dissatisfaction in providing detailed on your stay. Below I would like to address each of the matters raised and, where practical, the steps taken in remediation.

Change of rooms/check in incident:

We are sorry that the originally assigned rooms were not to your liking. Where a guest is unhappy with the room(s) first allocated, we always endeavor to accommodate a change; which we did in your case. With regard to the return of the original room key to Reception; the initial misplacement and subsequent finding of this key; and the untruthful denial by one of our Receptionists that you had not returned the key, I tender a profound apology. Our CCTV system showed that you had returned the key and that the individual involved had tried to conceal this fact. He has now been dismissed.

Smell of Cigarette smoke on the entrance;

We have and strictly adhere to a non-smoking policy throughout the building. To fulfill the needs of smokers we have provided an external smoking area where our guests are allowed to smoke. Having investigated your complaint thoroughly, I am satisfied that no members of staff were smoking within the hotel; rather that the smoke you smelled was attributable to emanations from smokers coming into the hotel after smoking outside.We are relocating the smoking area away from the entrance to the hotel, which we believe will resolve this as a potential issue.Additionally we are implementing a policy whereby should any of our guests breach the hotel's non- smoking policy, they will be charged £50 for the cost of fumigation

Glass in one of your room windows broken/ window rattling

I have looked into this issue in detail. I discovered a minor crack in one of the windows caused very recently by very heavy winds. I apologize that this had not been dealt with as part of our regular maintenance program at the time you were in occupation.

As to the rattling of windows, I am sure you will appreciate that, as is the case with many Victorian buildings, where exceptional storm winds are in play (as has been the case in Central London recently), windows will rattle from time to time. We have no plans at this time to replace our window frames but we shall review the issue with Maintenance and take necessary steps to minimize this issue.

Skirting boards, walls and carpets, and tiles

I have thoroughly reviewed the allocated rooms with my Head Housekeeper and Maintenance department.

Whilst all skirting boards and walls are regularly maintained and cleaned, those in your rooms had not yet been repainted within our annual rolling room refreshment program. Similarly with the carpets in your rooms. We are engaged in a rolling carpet replacement program. But although not new carpets, those in your room (and in a number of other rooms) had been professionally cleaned in January of this year. On inspection I saw that one bath room tile required filler in a corner area. I apologize for this not having been picked up on our departure inspection. The matter has now been addressed.

Basin blocked:

I have crossed checked with my Reception Team, and assured there was no record of this having been drawn to our attention. If there was a communication issue in this regard, which may well have occurred, I add this to my apology list ; f notified to our front desk team we should have certainly addressed It immediately.

Breakfast Room :

I can assure you that our staff are instructed to, and are more than happy to, accept "late arrivals", even after closing time. And I have reiterated that this should uniformly be done graciously and cheerfully. I believe, and hope the guest will accept, that she (and as regards Avni Kensington we) were during her stay hit by a "perfect storm" of mishaps, each of which possibly exacerbated and magnified the previous.

Once again I apologize for her family's experience for I sincerely do not want any guest to leave with this view of Avni Kensington Hotel.

I sincerely hope that this client might give us a further chance to show that her family did not experience our usual level of service & standards.

This response manages perfectly to convey understanding and empathy while also clarifying the parts which, according to the respondent, the hotel cannot be held responsible for. Although these explanations are partly given by either denying given problems had occurred or blaming circumstances, which might as well be justified, the response contains an apology, internal attributions for the problems the respondent apologized for, a number of corrective actions, lots of details and direct references and sounds friendly at all times.

One of the accommodative responses that received a high score of 9 was the following response by *Ambassadors Hotel*:

> Dear DSLo80,
>
> We are grateful that you got some time to leave us feedback about your stay with us. We have been closely monitoring our guest feedback and since this Wednesday we have done some changes on our breakfast.
>
> We are now baking our own croissants, making our own yogurts and also changed our juice to freshly squeezed. We hope this changes and more to come will be more tasting for our daily guest.
>
> We do apologise if when you stayed with us these were not already done.
>
> Once again, apologies for the inconveniences and we are looking forward to welcome you back and proof you we can do much better.
>
> Kind regards,
>
> David G.

This response received a very positive evaluation since it contains an apology, corrective action, is rather individualized compared to the average of accommodative responses and exhibits a friendly tone of voice. One weakness of this response, however, is the attribution of responsibility, which is clearly stated. On one hand, corrective action is mentioned which implies an internal attribution, however, the apology includes a condition which somehow seems like the hotel is trying to evade responsibility.

Examples of defensive responses that received a very negative evaluation due to their rude tone of voice and their lack of empathy were:

> Dear 10jennifer12. Thank you for your review, you are entitled to your opinion but that does not make you a qualified person in reporting on perfectly safe premises, otherwise we would not be allowed to operate. Central London is far from a ghetto and if you live in an area that does not offer some sort of graffiti then that is very nice. Thank you. Mr. Weiss – General Manager

> Dear Guest,
>
> Thank you for taking the time to comment on your stay at our hotel.

Once again, we have identified that you have not stayed with us at the hotel, and are simply an aggrieved nobody who has left a fabricated and pointless review without merit or truth.

Please take a look at the hundreds of 3-5 star reviews below yours, of satisfied and happy customers.

Please refrain from tarnishing our business in this way. We trust you will find something more meaningful to do with your time in future.

Thank you for your pointless and scathing review...

With warmest regards

The two following responses provided by *Cardiff Hotel* received the lowest ranking since they did not contain any of the factors mentioned for a response to be evaluated as appropriate:

Voltaire has been attributed to the quote :-

''I don't agree with what you have to say, but I'll defend to the death your right to say it.''

I'm personally a great believer in free speech, but alas the down side to this belief is that you are sometimes subjected to reading dross.

Your choice of the screen name YellowBelly seems very apt I must say.

Tripadvisor is damaging its reputation by publishing this.

With regards to accommodative responses, the following response by Mayflower Hotel was attributed a low quality due to its highly standardized text conveying a lack of interest and also the fact that most aspects of high-quality responses were missing:

Dear Kamilla,

Thank you for your review. Our customer feedback is very important to us as we are constantly trying to find ways to improve our hotel and it service.

If you could please email us at info@mayflower-group.co.uk so we can investigate fully, we would be grateful.

Best wishes,

Mayflower Management

Also the following response by *Victoria Inn* was considered of very low quality: "Thank you for your feedback, we are investigating this and will come back to you."

4.15 Number of accommodative moves

With regards to the number of accommodative moves identified in the responses, there was no significant difference detected between accommodative and defensive responses ($p>0.05$). Accommodative responses were likely to show slightly more accommodative moves than defensive responses. However, this was not enough to create a significant result.

Mann–Whitney Test

Ranks

	type of response	N	Mean Rank	Sum of Ranks
number of accommodative moves	accommodative	41	84.88	3480.00
	defensive	109	71.97	7845.00
	Total	150		

Test Statistics[a]

	number of accommodative moves
Mann–Whitney U	1850.000
Wilcoxon W	7845.000
Z	−1.642
Asymp. Sig. (2–tailed)	.101

a. Grouping Variable: type of response

TABLE 4-15 MANN-WHITNEY TEST TYPE OF RESPONSE & NUMBER OF ACCOMMODATIVE MOVES

Interestingly, the number of accommodative moves used in a response did not vary significantly between accommodative and defensive responses. On one hand, this finding suggests that also accommodative responses often lacked passages that would convey empathy. On the other hand, this also means that defensive responses in many cases contained respectful and empathic passages combined with one or more defensive aspects. Whenever there was a defensive response containing moderate explanations why the failure happened by shifting the blame to circumstances, the customer or a third party, but still managing to be polite, this combination could still be harmonic. However, if a defensive response contained rude elements but at the same time expressed gratitude for the feedback or offered an apology, this was very contradictory and caused inconsistency.

Although accommodative responses exhibited a higher mean rank, the responses containing the highest number of accommodative moves were mainly defensive ones such as the response by *Oliver Plaza Hotel* including a polite opening, an expression of gratitude for the stay as well as for the feedback, an apology, direct references and corrective action, an invitation to come back and a polite closing.

Dear Kellie,

Thank you for staying at the Oliver Plaza and taking the time to post your feedback.

I was concerned to read your comments regarding our breakfast and rooms and am sorry to hear we fell short of your expectations here. I apologise for the inconvenience that was caused to you by noise however please allow me to reassure future guests that the crossing you mentioned is half a kilometre away and usually guests don't experience such problems as you could see from other reviewers. It was one of the busiest weekends of the year in London so I would assume that could be the reason. I am also disappointed that you didn't enjoy the breakfast and your comments have been acknowledged.

Please be assured that we take every review seriously in our effort to improve our services, following your feedback we are planning major renovations which will take place next month. I am sure you will be completely satisfied with our new rooms and facilties and I hope we will get the chance to provide a more satisfying experience in the future.

Kind regards,

Ioannis Moschos

Marketing Manager

However, the number of accommodative moves within a response did not necessarily indicate if a response was suitable or not. While the response presented above contains a direct reference to the complainant's problem, very standardized responses also sometimes included a high number of accommodative moves. In the following response, a polite opening, an expression of gratitude for the stay, an apology, the intention to improve, a promise to avoid dissatisfaction in the future, an invitation to come back, an invitation to contact the respondent and a polite closing are included. Nevertheless, no detail regarding the guest's problems is mentioned:

Dear Guest,

Thank you for completing the survey regarding your recent stay at our property.

On behalf of our entire team, I would like to apologize for not exceeding your expectations. Your satisfaction is important to us and we will be using the feedback you gave us to implement improvements to ensure we offer a better experience for guests in the future.

I hope that you will consider staying with us again so that we can have another chance to provide you with a superior experience.

If I can provide any assistance, please don't hesitate to contact me directly at +44 (0) 208 6000 555.

Sincerely,

Arun Sharma

Area General Manager

BEST WESTERN Seraphine Hotel

4.16 Hotel category

There was found a significant association of hotel categories to the type of response ($\chi2$=9.725, p<0.05). 13.8% of 2-star hotels provided accommodative responses compared to 86.3% which responded defensively. 26% of 3-star hotels responded with an accommodative answer compared to 74% that gave a defensive response. 40% of 4-star hotels responded accommodatively compared to 51.5% that provided a defensive answer.

2-star hotels were underrepresented among accommodative responses and overrepresented among defensive ones. The same observation was valid for 3-star hotels, only that the difference between observed and expected values was slightly lower. Regarding 4-star hotels, they showed a clear overrepresentation among accommodative responses as well as a clear underrepresentation among defensive responses.

As a result, 2-star hotels were more likely than 3-star hotels and much more likely than 4-star hotels to provide a defensive response. In contrast to this, 4-star hotels were more likely than 3-star hotels and much more likely than 2-star hotels to respond in an accommodative way.

type of response * hotel category Crosstabulation

			hotel category			
			2 star hotel	3 star hotel	4 star hotel	Total
type of response	accommodative	Count	4	20	16	40
		Expected Count	8.3	22.2	9.5	40.0
		% within type of response	10.0%	50.0%	40.0%	100.0%
		% within hotel category	13.8%	26.0%	48.5%	28.8%
		% of Total	2.9%	14.4%	11.5%	28.8%
	defensive	Count	25	57	17	99
		Expected Count	20.7	54.8	23.5	99.0
		% within type of response	25.3%	57.6%	17.2%	100.0%
		% within hotel category	86.2%	74.0%	51.5%	71.2%
		% of Total	18.0%	41.0%	12.2%	71.2%
Total		Count	29	77	33	139
		Expected Count	29.0	77.0	33.0	139.0
		% within type of response	20.9%	55.4%	23.7%	100.0%
		% within hotel category	100.0%	100.0%	100.0%	100.0%
		% of Total	20.9%	55.4%	23.7%	100.0%

Chi-Square Tests

	Value	df	Asymp. Sig. (2-sided)
Pearson Chi-Square	9.725[a]	2	.008
Likelihood Ratio	9.644	2	.008
Linear-by-Linear Association	9.213	1	.002
N of Valid Cases	139		

a. 0 cells (.0%) have expected count less than 5. The minimum expected count is 8.35.

TABLE 4-16 CROSSTABULATION TYPE OF RESPONSE & HOTEL CATEGORY

This result shows that the higher the hotel category, the more likely it is that the hotel provides an accommodative response. However, this does not allow for any conclusion whether this result indicates that 4-star hotels respond in a better way than 2-star hotels due to the observation that accommodative responses are often very generic and standardized and therefore less likely to be satisfactory.

A possible conclusion that could be drawn from this result is that managers and employees of 4-star hotels might have received training with regards to complaint handling while managers and employees of 2-star hotels might rely more on their personal evaluation of the situation which could explain the higher likelihood of 4-star hotels to provide standardized accommodative responses and of 2-star hotels to respond defensively.

4.17 Percentage of terrible reviews

Regarding the overall percentage of "terrible" reviews connected to the respective hotels that provided the responses, there was no significant difference between accommodative and defensive responses. The mean percentage of "terrible" reviews for both types of response was almost identical. This can be explained by the fact that many hotels provided accommodative

as well as defensive responses. Therefore, in many cases, the same numbers were allocated to accommodative as well as defensive responses given by the same hotel, which caused a very similar outcome.

Mann–Whitney Test

Ranks

	type of response	N	Mean Rank	Sum of Ranks
percentage of terrible reviews	accommodative	41	76.72	3145.50
	defensive	109	75.04	8179.50
	Total	150		

Test Statistics[a]

	percentage of terrible reviews
Mann–Whitney U	2184.500
Wilcoxon W	8179.500
Z	-.211
Asymp. Sig. (2–tailed)	.833

a. Grouping Variable: type of response

TABLE 4-17 MANN-WHITNEY TEST TYPE OF RESPONSE & PERCENTAGE OF TERRIBLE REVIEWS

4.18 Respondent

Regarding the connection between the respondent and the type of response, there was a highly significant result ($\chi2=35.434$, $p<0.000$). 19.1% of managers gave accommodative responses compared to 80.9% of managers who responded in a defensive way. 84.2% of employees responsible for Social Media or Guest Relations provided the complainant with an accommodative response compared to 15.8% who responded defensively.

There was a very clear overrepresentation of defensive management responses as well as of accommodative responses given by Social Media or Guest Relations employees. It can be concluded that managers were much more likely to give defensive responses, while employees working in Social Media or Guest Relations were prone to provide accommodative responses.

type of response * respondent Crosstabulation

			respondent		
			management	social media or guest relations clerk	Total
type of response	accommodative	Count	25	16	41
		Expected Count	35.8	5.2	41.0
		% within type of response	61.0%	39.0%	100.0%
		% within respondent	19.1%	84.2%	27.3%
		% of Total	16.7%	10.7%	27.3%
	defensive	Count	106	3	109
		Expected Count	95.2	13.8	109.0
		% within type of response	97.2%	2.8%	100.0%
		% within respondent	80.9%	15.8%	72.7%
		% of Total	70.7%	2.0%	72.7%
Total		Count	131	19	150
		Expected Count	131.0	19.0	150.0
		% within type of response	87.3%	12.7%	100.0%
		% within respondent	100.0%	100.0%	100.0%
		% of Total	87.3%	12.7%	100.0%

Chi-Square Tests

	Value	df	Asymp. Sig. (2-sided)	Exact Sig. (2-sided)	Exact Sig. (1-sided)
Pearson Chi-Square	35.434[a]	1	.000		
Continuity Correction[b]	32.231	1	.000		
Likelihood Ratio	31.681	1	.000		
Fisher's Exact Test				.000	.000
Linear-by-Linear Association	35.198	1	.000		
N of Valid Cases	150				

a. 0 cells (.0%) have expected count less than 5. The minimum expected count is 5.19.
b. Computed only for a 2x2 table

TABLE 4-18 CROSSTABULATION TYPE OF RESPONSE & RESPONDENT

This result could be explained by the assumption that managers are much more empowered when it comes to decisions including decisions referring to complaint handling. Responses provided by members of the Social Media Team were often very standardized since team members most probably have to follow specific instructions as the following example by *Travelodge London Kings Cross Royal Scot* shows:

> Thank you for submitting your review of our London Kings Cross Royal Scot Travelodge. We're so sorry to hear about your recent experience and would like to hear more about your stay. May we kindly request you contact us via our website with your review so our customer service team can investigate your visit with the hotel. Thank you again for posting your comments and we hope to hear from you soon.

Connected to this, Bernoff and Schadler (2010) mentioned that employees need to be empowered when it comes to satisfactory service recovery strategies and also referred the online world where solutions to the complainant's problem need to be offered.

Another explanation could be that managers are emotionally more attached to the hotel and could, therefore, be more likely to take criticism personally which could be a reason for responding defensively such as a response written by the General Manager of *Lord Kensington Hotel*:

> I am writing in response to this review as I feel it strongly misrepresents my hotel.
>
> While it is true that a couple of our double bedrooms are quite small, they are immaculately clean, which is something this hotel prides itself on.
>
> The mattress was bought new last year but, having heard this complaint, we will check it immediately. If there is a problem it will be returned to the shop at once. However, it would have been appreciated if the guests could have alerted us to this fact before posting the review.
>
> As for the hairs on the pillow, I really do not know how that happened, but I will make sure nothing like that happens again.
>
> The radiator in the room must have been turned off by a previous guest and the receptionist turned it back on again. We will now write instructions for guests so they know how to turn the knob on the radiator to get the temperature they require.
>
> I have looked into why the breakfast had been cleared away. My staff tell me that it had been extremely busy that morning, and when nobody had arrived for half an hour they decided to clear it away. I believe the guests arrived at a couple of minutes to ten (breakfast finishes at ten on Sundays), and although my staff obviously offered to accommodate them, the guests decided not to have the breakfast. In future, breakfast will never be cleared away until the designated time.
>
> We take the comfort and enjoyment of our guests extremely seriously, and any complaints are listened to. In this instance, I feel it would have been beneficial if the guests could have pointed out their concerns at the time and given us the opportunity to rectify the situation before posting this review.

4.19 Conclusions

In summary, accommodative responses showed more politeness due to the findings that this group was more likely to contain an expression of gratitude for the feedback, an internal attribution of responsibility, corrective action, a promise to avoid reoccurrence of the problem, an invitation to discuss the problem in further detail via phone or e-mail, an invitation to come back and a polite closing.

In comparison with accommodative responses, defensive responses showed an association with exhibiting an expression of gratitude for the stay, direct references and a higher level of individualization which could be seen as an indicator of empathy.

Regarding the presence of a polite opening, an apology and compensation as well as the quality of the response and the number of accommodative moves contained in a response, accommodative as well as defensive responses showed very similar results.

Although the overview of the results might suggest that accommodative responses could be considered as more effective, all of the results had to be seen within their context as was done in the discussion on each test.

The results of the analyses showed that defensive responses were as polite as accommodative ones when it came to the opening of the response. In both groups, the majority of responses contained a polite opening and nearly the same amount of responses refrained from greeting the reviewer.

Regarding the expression of gratitude for the stay, the outcome suggested that respondents were generally very reluctant to thank the complainant for staying at the hotel. However – without considering that the accuracy of the result needs to be questioned –, it was found that defensive responses were more likely to contain an expression of gratitude for the stay then accommodative responses.

As for the expression of gratitude of the feedback, accommodative responses were more likely to contain it. In contrast to the very low percentage of responses thanking the reviewer for their stay, a lot more responses of both groups contained an expression of gratitude for the feedback, which could refer to the bigger importance possibly assigned by respondents to the giving feedback than to have stayed at the hotel.

The results regarding the offer of an apology were very similar between accommodative and defensive responses. Although an apology was given in the great majority of responses, some apologies failed to convey the right message. Instead of "we apologize for the inconveniences caused" many responses contained the phrase "we are sorry to hear" or "sorry you did not like your stay" which could be interpreted as implying that the customer was somehow responsible for the fact that he or she did not enjoy their stay. This was especially the case for accommodative responses.

With regards to offering an apology in combination with assuming responsibility, defensive responses were found to be rather inconsistent. Whereas the number accommodative responses containing an apology where a wrongdoing was admitted was very similar to the number of accommodative responses containing an actual internal attribution, with defensive responses, the number of responses with an apology where the failure was admitted was a lot higher than the number of responses with an actual internal attribution. Based on the fact that in some cases such an apology was given, but the response also contains an evasion of responsibility by blaming given circumstances, the complainants themselves or a third party, this lead to inconsistency and contradiction as well as to the assumption that such apologies were not meant seriously.

Although accommodative responses were found to be consistent regarding this matter, they were much more likely not to contain an attribution of responsibility than to contain an internal attribution which could indicate that respondents were not interested in going into detail.

With regards to corrective action, accommodative responses were more likely to contain information about that matter than defensive ones, however, defensive responses exhibited more detailed corrective actions in case they were mentioned. In many cases, accommodative responses included a reference to generic future corrective action or to striving for improvement, but no reference to specific corrective action. Therefore, the reviewer, as well as the observers, might not get an idea of what those improvements could look like and probably do not believe that their feedback will have any impact.

A very important observation concerned the biggest weakness of accommodative responses referring to their often low level of individualization and the conclusion that their standardized character lacking details and direct references might not be satisfactory. This finding could also indicate that respondents often do not bother reading the responses thoroughly and, therefore, do not address any of the points raised in the review directly. Accommodative responses containing an invitation to discuss the problems via other channels also supported this assumption since complainants were often asked to contact another employee by sending their review via e-mail, which seems like a lot of effort considering the fact that they had already taken time to write a review on *TripAdvisor*. This lack of interest could lead to the assumption, that defensive responses might have more power to make up for a service failure, at least from the point of view of the observers.

Regarding the quality of response, both types of responses received very similar evaluations and could, therefore, be considered as equally effective. In contrast to the assumption that defensive responses often lack politeness, the results for the quality of the responses as well as for the number of accommodative moves contained in a response suggested that defensive responses also included lots of accommodative moves and could, therefore, be seen as similarly polite as accommodative responses. While some defensive responses were classified as such due to their rude tone of voice, the large majority of defensive responses were simply assigned to the group of defensive responses because they contained an explanation of the problem that shifted the blame away from the hotel by either denying that a failure happened or by externally attributing responsibility. Whereas rude expressions were certainly inappropriate under any circumstances, evasion of responsibility or denial, in most cases, did not make the response sound impolite or unfriendly and often seemed to be justified.

Therefore, accommodative as well as defensive responses can be considered as possible response strategies in order to address deviant customer behavior in online reviews. As an overall conclusion, it can be said that there is no isolated, single attribute that could make a response more suitable than others. Providing a suitable and possibly satisfying response is a

question of the right combination of politeness, individualization, and empathy as well as justifications where appropriate or necessary.

While the biggest weakness of accommodative responses was their often high level of standardization, defensive responses, in many cases, were inappropriate due to their rude tone of voice. As a result, the conclusion can be drawn that both types of responses can be used to address and online complaint, defensive responses mainly due to their detailed and therefore often empathic character and accommodative responses due to their politeness. However, the weaknesses of both groups have to be taken into consideration when opting for one or the other as a response strategy. Whereas defensive responses should not contain rude expressions where the intention is to simply attack the complainant, accommodative responses should be individualized and detailed showing that the review was read and taken seriously.

5 CONCLUSION

5.1 Summary

The objective of this Master thesis was to find an answer to the question if defensive respons-
es actually fail to politely and empathically address a negative online review containing deviant
customer behavior as suggested by a number of studies (Einwiller & Steilen, 2015;
Purnawirawan, et al., 2015; Lee & Song, 2010) or if they might represent an alternative to ex-
clusively accommodative responses that often lack details and direct references (Min et al.,
2014).

For that reason, 150 responses to very negative reviews posted on the travel platform
TripAdvisor were collected and analyzed with regards to differences in accommodative moves
contained in the responses. These factors were moreover extended by the analysis of differ-
ences regarding the attribution of responsibility, the level of individualization, the quality of
the response and the number of accommodative moves used within each response. In addition
to this, the position of the respondent, the category of the hotel that posted the response and
the overall percentage of "terrible" reviews of the hotels that provided the responses were
considered in order to draw conclusions for managerial implications.

The most important finding of this thesis was that defensive responses can represent an alter-
native to accommodative responses. This was based on the observation that defensive re-
sponses often contained lots of accommodative moves which implied a certain level of polite-
ness, while also showing interest in what the complainant shared by providing detailed infor-
mation and very individualized texts.

5.2 Managerial Implications

In light of the finding that each type of response has a specific weakness, managers have to be
aware of those weaknesses when considering how to respond to a negative online review.
When choosing to provide an accommodative response, respondents have to make sure their
responses are detailed and contain references to the problems mentioned by the complainant.
When responding defensively, they have to consider that the response should still be friendly
and polite.

Additionally, when opting for a defensive response, respondents have to take care that the
response is consistent. An internal attribution or corrective actions cannot be paired with the
evasion of responsibility or denial of the service failure since the first two moves automatically
imply that the wrongdoing is admitted. Also, an expression of gratitude for the feedback when

then deliberately showing that the feedback is obviously not wanted by including rude passages is not suitable.

In order to provide the reviewer with a satisfactory response, it would be recommendable the respondent investigate the incident. That way, the response gives a more professional impression and shows interest since the complaining customer most likely never hears anything again if such a promise is given.

If an apology is provided, it should be an honest and real apology as opposed to the use of empty phrases sounding respectful but somehow shifting the blame to the complainant for their subjective opinion.

If a response includes a reference to realizing improvements, specific examples of corrective action should be mentioned. If not, complainants might get the feeling that their complaint does not have any impact and will be more reluctant to complain the next time. Connected to this, hotels should make it easy for guests to complain since a complaint brings along a number of valuable opportunities (Wirtz & Lovelock, 2017). Therefore, complainants should not be asked to send their review again via another channel in order to contact the person in charge. If the respondent cannot provide any further help, they should forward it to the person in charge who could then personally respond to the review.

As for the results concerning the hotel category, 2-star hotels could introduce some flexible guidelines if not in place and 4-star hotels could step away from their often standardized responses and also add a personal note. Individualized and detailed responses also containing defensive moves employed the right way and in restricted numbers could possibly help convince at least observers not to turn their back on the hotel.

As the results regarding the respondents showed, managers are much more likely to provide a defensive response than Guest Relations or Social Media clerk. Connected to this, employees of Guest Relations or the Social Media Team often posted very standardized responses. This implies that employees should be given more freedom when it comes to responding to a negative review in order to avoid very standardized and most likely dissatisfying responses.

5.3 Limitations

The first and most obvious limitation of this analysis referred to the fact that the circumstances of the complainant's stay, as well as the service failure, were completely unknown. This very important limitation is connected to what comes along with the anonymity of the internet. One is not able to identify the identity of the complainant nor to verify if the claims made in the reviews are true. Therefore, it was not possible to determine whether or not it was appropriate to, for example, deny the occurrence of a problem. The other way around, it was also

unknown if the reviewers' harsh critique was justified or not, since staff members could really have acted inappropriately.

With regards to the level of individualization of a response, it was difficult to determine whether or not passages from a response or as well the same response from the sample could have been found again on *TripAdvisor* if more responses from one given hotel had been collected.

Moreover, evaluations regarding the quality of the responses were given based on the author's personal perception and therefore reflect a very limited impression.

It was sometimes difficult to define categories and also to assign one aspect of a response to a category since the texts were often very heterogeneous. Not all aspects could be captured by the numbers in the Excel sheet as for example with regards to the attribution of responsibility, where in some responses addressing various problems some events were taken responsibility for and others not within the same response. Apart from that, due to the sample size, some categories had to be combined in order to get a significant result which caused some loss of information.

Although sometimes categories had to be combined into one category, two tests still contained one cell with an expected value lower than 5, which had a negative effect on the accuracy of the results.

Lastly, high-end hotels were not represented in the sample because of the sorting chosen to select reviews for this research. Therefore, only conclusions for budget and middle-class hotels can be drawn.

5.4   Suggestions for future research

Possible ideas for future research could include a closer analysis of defensive responses including the opinion of other people who actively use *TripAdvisor*, in order to see to which extent defensive behavior is considered as positive, appropriate or acceptable.

Moreover, since the results suggest that managers tend to provide defensive responses, interviews with managers could be conducted in order to find out why they often respond defensively or sometimes even in a rude way.

Based on the finding that defensive responses were sometimes inconsistent and contradictory regarding the presence of an apology indicating internal attribution or information on corrective action combined with shifting the blame to someone else, which in many cases was the complainant, defensive responses could be analyzed more closely regarding their consistency.

Another suggestion would be to focus on the other side of this spectrum and analyze the reviews regarding deviant customer behavior.

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