The role of customer online reviews in the discourse-dialogic construction of hotel websites

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The internet as a tool for travel and tourism has triggered or reshaped new cybergenres, also known as digital modes or phenomena (Thurlow and Mroczek 2011, Herring 2013) that have revolutionised the way discourse is modelled.

Here, we’ll be dealing with an emergent cybergenre, *online review*, and a reconfigured one, *hotel website*, and their possible discursive connection.
“the voice of the customer must be embraced since it entails a transformational power towards improving quality, building loyalty and gaining market”

(Austin 2009)
hypothesis: customer online reviews might be used in the dialogic construction of hotel websites

two research questions...

1. whether customer negative evaluations can be traced and identified in online reviews

2. whether hotel websites present the negative topics of online reviews as positive values that enhance their services
I have analysed

. positive and negative *online reviews* (2010–2013) of 4 hotels from the US and the UK, attempting to trace the specific content aspects that are criticized

. the current *websites* of the same 4 hotels (2015), looking for interpersonal strategies and markers that show the traced negative aspects of online reviews as positive values
my corpus

. pilot corpus of online reviews collected from TripAdvisor (2010–2013) in order to guarantee more impartiality
. number of reviews: 40 positive/40 negative
. informants: 50% male/female
. varied nationalities
. purpose of trip: business/holidays – randomly

. pilot corpus of hotel websites of same hotels (2015)
. pages: home, rooms, spa (if available), meals, events
background...

- COMETVAL research project (Corpus Multilingüe en Turismo, Universitat de Valencia, 2011–2014, funded by the Spanish Ministry of Economy and Competitiveness)

- webgenres analysed: **hotel websites / touristic webguides / traveller forums** (Suau–Jiménez 2012a, 2012b, 2014)

- methodological proposal: interpersonal discourse pattern for tourism webgenres (Suau–Jiménez 2014)

  - with implications for the tourism and travel industry

  - **MANUAL DE BUENAS PRÁCTICAS EN EL DISCURSO DEL TURISMO**. Revista Normas, Anejos, 2016
methodological framework...

- **interpersonal metadiscourse pattern** for tourism webgenres (Suau–Jiménez 2012, based on Hyland 2005)
  - defined or understood as: *discursive elements (markers and strategies) that an author uses to express authority and to engage readers throughout a text in order to achieve its generic aim*
  - constrained by genre, language–culture and discipline

**attitudinals** in online reviews: verbal, adjectival and adverbial markers containing some subjectively negative aspect

**boosters** in hotel websites: verbal, adjectival and adverbial markers containing some enhancing aspect
electronic word-of-mouth (e-WOM)

- it refers to interpersonal communications among consumers concerning their personal experiences and evaluations of a firm or a product (Richins, 1983)

- the greatest amount of eWOM is represented by customer-generated online reviews (Gretzel and Yoo 2008; Sandvik, Arnett, & Sandvik 2011)

- eWOM is a central source of information for the tourism and hospitality industry (Berger 2014)
online reviews are of great value to tourism and to hoteliers as:

- they offer a solution to the “problem” of the intangibility of their products (Zhang, Yea, Law and Li 2010)
- they facilitate that hotel websites are updated, refining their offers to match customer demands (Suau–Jiménez 2016)
customer-generated online reviews

. can be found in **hotel websites**, as a “genre chain” (Zhang & Vásquez 2014) and in **social network platforms**

. those located in social network platforms like TripAdvisor are felt by travelers as less “filtered”, therefore being more popular and reliable

. they deploy a strong **interpersonal stance** discourse:
  . making judgements through **attitude markers** as well as **boosters**, for negative and positive evaluations

. based on **self-mentions** that provide experiential reliability

**this stance discourse can ideally be incorporated into the hotel website’s text and turned into interpersonal strategies meant to repair negative online evaluations and to match customer demands**
hotel websites

- are *interactional* digital genres with a hidden dialogue where the author (hotel) engages the reader (customer) through a persuasive interpersonal discourse

- periodically updated, being subject to adjustments and improvements based, in part, on the data coming from customer offline and online evaluations/reviews

- their dialogic interaction is made of

  - a strong author’s stance, claiming reliability and credibility

  - a varying degree of reader engagement
## Interpersonal markers

<table>
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<th>boosters</th>
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<th>reader pronouns</th>
<th>directives</th>
<th>quest</th>
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<td>10'25%</td>
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<td>3'55%</td>
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Results: quantitative analysis of *positive* online reviews
## Results: Quantitative Analysis of *Negative* Online Reviews

<table>
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<tr>
<th>Interpersonal Markers</th>
<th>Hedges</th>
<th>Boosters</th>
<th>Self-M</th>
<th>Reader Pron</th>
<th>Directives</th>
<th>Questions</th>
<th>Total</th>
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<tbody>
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<td>331</td>
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<td>823</td>
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<td>4.49%</td>
<td>40.21%</td>
<td>5.10%</td>
<td>4.37%</td>
<td>0.12%</td>
<td>100%</td>
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**Notes:**
- **Attitudinals** are highlighted in red.
results: qualitative analysis: negative topics in positive online reviews

. through *attitudinals*. Hotel Broadway, NYC (high standard):

1. noise
2. not so good location, far from Times Square; slightly dated bathroom
3. not so good location, far from Times Square; small breakfast room
4. tiny lobby
5. small bathroom facilities
6. high prices; no non-smoking room available
8. small dining room for breakfast; no free wifi service
9. small lobby and entrance
10. poor entrance
results: qualitative analysis: negative topics in negative online reviews

. through *attitudinals*. Hotel Broadway, NYC (high standard)

1. bad customer service, web pictures do not represent actual rooms
2. staff disrespectful, bad customer service
3. poor room facilities, poor bathroom equipment and no amenities, pics do not represent actual rooms
4. disrespectful staff
5. poor and misleading payment method
6. noise at night and poor customer service
7. dirtiness in rooms and in facilities
8. dirtiness in rooms and carpets, noise, bad customer service
9. misleading payment method, noise at night
10. poor hotel facilities and bathroom dirtiness
recently renovated rooms and suites/ comforting amenities/ plush bedding/ high-speed WIFI/ complimentary continental breakfast/ expert concierge/ recently renovated hotel/ high-resolution images in our gallery/ 69 oversized accommodations/ free Starbucks coffee/ spacious rooms and suites/ connectivity at a reasonable cost/ our concierge streamlines your transportation/ largest, best-appointed rooms and suites/ the city’s most knowledgeable concierge/ newly renovated rooms/ elegant entryway/ modern lobby space/ unique décor/ modern comforts/ Renovated in March 2013/ outfitted with a variety of plush amenities/ premium accommodations
**Examples of topic matching: online reviews vs current Broadway Hotel’s website**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Online reviews negative evaluations: attitudinals</th>
<th>Hotel website strategies: boosters</th>
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</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>tiny lobby, small lobby and entrance</td>
<td>elegant entryway/ modern lobby space/ unique décor</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>bad customer service, staff disrespectful</td>
<td>the city’s most knowledgeable concierge/ expert concierge</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>web pictures do not represent actual rooms</td>
<td>high-resolution images in our gallery</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>small breakfast room</td>
<td>complimentary continental breakfast</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>poor hotel facilities</td>
<td>69 oversized accommodations</td>
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<tr>
<td>Hotel</td>
<td>Features</td>
</tr>
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<td>---------------------------</td>
<td>--------------------------------------------------------------------------</td>
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</tbody>
</table>
| Hotel Broadway, NYC       | • Excellent staff  
                          • Renovated hotel facilities and rooms  
                          • Modern comforts |
| Grand Rochester Hotel, London, UK | • Customer service (24 hour rooms service; same-day laundry and cleaning)  
                          • Charm  
                          • Modern amenities |
| MacDonal Hotel and Spa, Manchester, UK   | • Customer service  
                          • Hotel staff |
| Paramount Hotel, NYC      | • High-speed internet access  
                          • Hotel amazingly quiet  
                          • Lounge-like ambiance lobby |
conclusions 1

research question 1

• negative evaluations of online reviews have proved to be traceable and identifiable through interpersonal attitudinals

research question 2

• the four hotels seem to have incorporated some negative evaluations from customer online reviews as boosters

• one of them (Broadway Hotel) has incorporated them largely and shows evidence of a manifest website adjustment
negative topics from online reviews acknowledged and shown as positive values in hotel websites (in order of importance)

1. customer service
2. hotel decoration or refurbishment
3. amenities
4. comfort

* None of the aspects dealing with price/expensiveness/bad paying methods was acknowledged by hotel websites
although interpersonality applied to these genres has proved a useful framework.....

1. it is a reduced corpus of online reviews and hotel websites that needs further compilation

2. results meant to answer research question 2 only have a discursive support

3. discursive results need to be contrasted with sociolinguistic data, such as
   . proof of recent hotel website adjustments
   and/or
   . proof of hotel management active acknowledgement of customer online reviews
references 1

. NORMAS: https://ojs.uv.es/index.php/normas/pages/view/anejos


thanks for your attention!!!

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