How hotel websites may discursively adjust to customer preferences using online criticism

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Abstract

This paper explores discursive ways in which hotels may improve their own websites using online criticism to adjust to customer preferences. To this end, a combined method was used, consisting of a netnographic approach (Kozinet, 2010; Mkono, 2011, 2012) together with an interpersonal discourse framework (Hyland, 2008) applied to e-tourism genres (Suau-Jiménez, 2012, 2016). Four hotel websites, together with 200 corresponding negative reviews from TripAdvisor, were diachronically analyzed to identify common topics. Attitudinals were sought, being the core markers of online critiques, as well as boosters, acting as enhancing markers in hotel websites and paralleling criticized topics. Results suggest that hotel website adjustments may use enhancements following particular marketing strategies and referring to certain areas complained about in online reviews. This implies that the discursive adjustment of hotel websites using enhancers is a means for hoteliers to improve the website description of hotel services, as well as to indirectly manage customer dissatisfaction in a positive and effective manner.

Keywords: discursive enhancement, hotel website adjustment, online criticism, netnography, interpersonal discourse.

Resumen

Cómo pueden los hoteles ajustar discursivamente sus webs según las preferencias del cliente a partir de las críticas en línea

Este artículo explora estrategias discursivas mediante las cuales los hoteles pueden mejorar el contenido de sus propias webs utilizando las críticas en línea,

con objeto de tener en cuenta las preferencias del cliente. A partir de un corpus de géneros digitales del turismo (Suau-Jiménez, 2012, 2016), se ha aplicado una metodología doble, consistente en una aproximación netnográfica (Kozinet, 2010; Mkono, 2011, 2012), junto con un marco de análisis de discurso interpersonal (Hyland, 2008). Concretamente, se han analizado diacrónicamente cuatro webs hoteleras, junto con 200 reseñas negativas correspondientes, alojadas en TripAdvisor, para así identificar temas comunes tratados en ambos géneros. Se han extraído marcadores de actitud como centro de las críticas, así como realzadores en las webs hoteleras, que describen los mismos temas que las reseñas. Los resultados sugieren que los ajustes realizados en las webs hoteleras pueden introducir mejoras siguiendo determinadas estrategias de marketing y tratando de reflejar los temas criticados. Ello apunta a que los hoteles pueden ajustar la descripción de los servicios hoteleros en sus webs basándose en las críticas, al mismo tiempo que gestionan indirectamente la insatisfacción del cliente de un modo positivo y eficaz.

Palabras clave: mejora discursiva, ajuste de web hotelera, crítica en línea, netnografía, discurso interpersonal.

1. Introduction

The need for hotels to take their customers' voices seriously and to interact via social media in order to establish a two-way communication with them has been noted by researchers in the field of tourism over a number of years (Law & Hsu, 2006; O'Connor, 2008; Austin, 2009; Xiang & Gretzel, 2010; Escobar-Rodríguez & Carvajal-Trujillo, 2013; Pwc Report, 2015). This article attempts to raise awareness as to how hotels, using their websites as channels for discursive improvement and enhancement of establishment values, may use negative online reviews to adjust to customer preferences. To this end, a corpus-based, combined scenario was used, taking discourse analysis, marketing, tourism and hospitality research as a general framework to contextualize the issue of negative online reviews. A linguistic analysis of hotel websites and online reviews was then carried out from an interpersonal discourse perspective framed within a netnographic approach that is part of the applied interdisciplinary method. Netnography, a methodology derived from ethnography and consumer research (Kozinets, 1998, 2002, 2006, 2010; Kozinets et al., 2008) consists in observing internet information written by users to analyze their personal experience in different areas. Applied to tourism, it represents an evolution of ethnographic research methods that were based on a face-to-face elicitation of data from tourists

and travellers. Although in its infancy (Mkono, 2012), netnography applied to tourism has begun to substitute the older personal researcher-tourist way to collect data by verbal digital contributions from internet users in varied sources: blogs, networks, websites, etc. (Haldrup & Larsen, 2009). Netnography has among its virtues that of generating global samplings, since participation in cyberspace is almost ubiquitous, as well as generating honest data as participants join the internet freely (Mkono, 2011). Although this method entails some shortcomings, such as the possibility of the participants' authentic identity being masqueraded or some website or network texts being previously and deliberately manipulated for commercial purposes, it provides researchers with relevant data that might otherwise not be accessed or be difficult to reach (Mkono, 2012: 554). The present research follows the principles of netnography to guarantee its credibility (Kozinets, 2010; Mkono, 2012), i.e. it analyzes relevant computer-generated data to address a specific research objective, such as whether hotels, through website discursive adjustments, can take into account negative online reviews, this being a way to manage customer dissatisfaction.

2. Hotel websites and customers' discursive engagement

Hotel websites have been studied extensively from a multi-faceted marketing-communicative perspective, although frequently with the viewpoint of how consumers perceive them, and often with the conclusion that hotels (especially small and medium-sized ones) need to develop actions that fuel promotion, taking advantage of the two-way communication that the 2.0.Web allows. In this way, a number of researchers have evaluated specific aspects of websites: Wong and Law (2005) the travel intentions of consumers after reading websites, Law and Hsu (2006) the dimensions and attributes of websites from consumers' perspectives, Schmidt et al. (2008) the impact of websites for medium and small size hotels, Lee and Morrison (2010) the technological aspects of websites, Browning and Sparks (2013) the link between reviews and remarks related to core services, and Escobar-Rodríguez and Carvajal-Trujillo (2013) the importance of the contrast between informational and relational strategies on websites. In most of these studies, the concept of two-way communication is understood as hotels providing spaces on their websites where customers can express their concerns, evaluate hotel services or express their demands. Hoteliers would

ideally answer these queries and concerns, and establish a dialogue that would also ideally, yield good commercial results and help them to adjust their offer. However, as noted in the previous section, consumers have long opted for a different channel, TripAdvisor, where comments, evaluations, judgements and complaints can be expressed with a far higher degree of freedom and a greater guarantee of non-censorship. Given this tendency, the current study does not focus on the explicit two-way communication where the consumer is prompted to provide feedback by invitation. Rather, our interest lies in the format where explicit responses are substituted by discursive strategies, enacted on the hotel webpage in an attempt to enhance the hotel values and, as a result, adjust to customer preferences.

We might also note that the range of topics analyzed in previous studies does not focus on the textual or discursive importance of hotel websites. In their comprehensive compilation of tourism studies from 1996 to 2009 related to website evaluation, Law et al. (2010) present an analysis of 75 website evaluations across a number of values, these used as measurement instruments. This study indicates that from a series of basic functions that tourism websites must offer their users, appropriate language and extensive content narration are among the most demanded values.

Hotel websites have also been analyzed linguistically as a kind of promotional genre (Pierini, 2007, 2009; Cheng, 2016; Fuster & Pennock, 2015; Dolón, 2016). In terms of discourse, hotel websites are referred to as digital genres with a "hidden" dialogue, one in which the author (hotel) engages readers (customers) through persuasive strategies with the intention of attracting them commercially (Calvi, 2010; Suau-Jiménez, 2012a, 2012b, 2016). Such sites tend to be updated periodically, with adjustments and improvements based in part on data coming from offline and online evaluations/reviews. They can also be understood as a kind of communicative event characterized by the interaction of verbal and non-verbal features, fulfilling a set of communicative purposes (informing, influencing the receiver's behavior) (Garzone, 2002). The discourse of hotel websites is hybrid in nature, using specific linguistic features, depending on the specific section of the site (welcome, rooms, services, accessibility, etc.), although strategies to persuade potential customers to stay at the hotel are the most prominent ones. Cheng (2016) sees these sites as exhibiting their own textual and visual features, as compared to other e-genres in the field of tourism. Dolón (2016) also notes their discursive features as informative yet persuasive tools to attract tourists.

One very important element in the discourse of hotel websites is the hotel's own concept of identity. Identity has been defined in marketing studies as an internal perspective that represents "the ways a company chooses to identify itself to all its publics" (Zinkhan et al., 2001:154). In this sense, the image of a business is linked to different values related to its identity (Leblanc & Nguyen, 1996). This identity or image can include tradition, a variety of services, specific architectural features, design, environmental cues, etc., but also the impression of quality as communicated through interaction with customers, which comes to reflect a hotel's reputation. Despite some similarities in their web-mediated communication strategies, hotels engage in discursive strategies that reveal diverging attitudes in their choices of semiotic resources to construct their own brand identities (Cheng, 2016). Following this trend, tourism promotional websites, including hotels, choose values connected with their brand images and convey them in language through adjectives and adjectival phrases used to discursively construct their websites and to establish an interaction with potential customers (Mapelli, 2008; Pierini, 2009; Edo-Marzá, 2012).

From an interpersonal discourse perspective, a hotel website's interaction with customers is composed of a strong author stance, one which claims reliability and credibility, but also a high degree of reader engagement. Both author's stance and reader's engagement are typically discursive voices used to achieve persuasion in tourism promotional genres (Suau-Jiménez, 2012a, 2012b). Attitudinals and boosters are essential discourse markers belonging to the author's stance voice.

3. Online reviews and tourism

Online reviews operate as so-called eWOM (electronic word-of-mouth), and are a preferential source of interpersonal information for consumers, as well as for commerce in general (O'Connor, 2008; Gretzel & Yoo, 2008; Sandvik, Arnett & Sandvik, 2011), including the tourism and hospitality industry (Berger, 2014). Online reviews are a recent e-genre, having emerged as a result of the way in which individuals use the internet (Herring et al., 2005), and serving as a tool for the evaluation of products and services. As a digital mode or phenomenon (Thurlow & Mroczek, 2011; Herring, 2013) such reviews can be understood as short narrations in which customers express their opinions about different services. In the field of tourism, these include

hotels, restaurants, attractions, events, etc. Their address is made to other travellers, but also to the business or institution responsible for the service evaluated.

Online reviews may also be seen as short texts in which customers/travellers employ their own experiences and subjectivity in a monologic discourse with characteristic formulations (Tian, 2013), and in which judgements on a series of topics are expressed using a strong interpersonal stance. Hence, experience and subjectivity are the two pillars that give credibility to such opinions. The largest and best known site for online reviews in the area of tourism and travel is TripAdvisor, which has been the subject of a number of detailed studies (Briggs et al., 2007; Gretzel et al., 2007; Chung & Buhalis, 2008; Yoo et al., 2009; Cunningham et al., 2010; Zehrer et al., 2011; Ekiz et al., 2012). The success of this site is due in part to its easy accessibility, where one does not need to be a fluent or proficient internet user to write reviews. The site also claims to provide "unbiased" user-generated recommendations for travel destinations and accommodation (Vasquez, 2011), as opposed to what many hotels might do when presenting reviews on their own websites.

Reviews in TripAdvisor are typically written with evaluations combining both positive and negative judgements about hotels and their services, and may include speech acts or functions such as praise, suggestions, recommendations, complaints, accusations or even threats, made through direct or indirect discursive strategies (Vasquez, 2011, 2013; Suau-Jiménez, 2019). They are conceived of as short narratives, with an irregular language register going from formal to informal uses of grammar and vocabulary (Piccioni, 2014) through which authors address their readers, these including other consumers and the management of the businesses themselves.

An added point of interest here is that some hotels feel the need to address complaints or negative opinions made in online reviews through direct responses, as a means of restoring customer confidence. This reaction of hotel managers has given rise to a new e-genre or digital mode, the *online review response*, intertextually linked to online reviews since they share the same topic and also some discursive structures or rhetorical moves. Prior to the emergence of the internet, customers would send complaints in written form by post. These complaints were an important form of customer-business communication, and because they remained private in nature it is difficult to know whether such communication had an impact on the management of the institutions and businesses involved. eWOM has made it

possible for customers to post their opinions online, therefore turning this into a public form of communication, and hence making it possible for hotels to handle negative judgements by providing adequate responses. However, these hotel responses do not seem to have had a genuinely repairing effect, other than to the extent that they can post rhetorically based responses in an attempt to appease customers' emotions, rather than to address the source of their complaints.

Swales (2004) describes business responses to online reviews as belonging to the same genre chain, which is in itself a challenging claim, since the generic stability of this chain remains to be proved. However, online reviews are not guaranteed to receive an answer from the business (hotel) in question (Suau-Jiménez, 2019), although the trend in responding to specific complaints seems to have risen notably in recent years (Zhang & Vasquez, 2014).

When online reviews do get a response, these are typically of a rather formalistic nature, not always giving real solutions such as offering actions to solve or repair a substandard service (Zhang & Vasquez, 2014; Sanmartín, 2017). In this sense, Zhang and Vasquez (2014) suggest that large hotel corporations answer online consumer complaints with non-specific approaches known as "customer care" or "service recovery", making very general mentions of the problem discussed in the review and using rhetorical strategies that are more concerned with speed and efficiency in responding than with offering solutions. Such responses, then, are often imprecise in nature and lack reliability in terms of the customer-hotel communication.

The current paper will not focus on how hotels explicitly respond to online reviews, but on how hotels, while periodically and discursively reformulating their websites, may also be, as an effective result of this action, adjusting to customer preferences. Rather than responding overtly to online reviews, which would entail a public acceptance of their failures, hotels may prefer to improve their websites bearing in mind customer online critiques. Although it is out of the scope of this paper to prove that such a business-related practice is a formal strategy, that is, that hotels actually do respond to online complaints through their websites -something that would require an additional ethnographic approach-, it is possible to analyze the bonds that exist between the two genres in terms of discourse and draw conclusions with implications for the tourism industry.

Hotel reputation management (Van Noort & Willemsen, 2011) is a relatively new concept and a new area of study, one which analyzes and provides

information on hotels in conjunction with their internet positioning (O'Connor, 2010; Heyes & Kapur, 2012; Sparks et al., 2013). One of the key variables in achieving a good position here is that a hotel "listens" to its customers' needs and opinions made through online reviews. The rationale behind this new form of reputation management derives from the field of hospitality marketing: "the voice of the customer must be embraced since it entails a transformational power towards improving quality, building loyalty and gaining market" (Austin, 2009). Indeed, consulting businesses have emerged that provide advice and hands-on information to hotels on how to use online reviews to their benefit, describing their activity as "Leverage online reputation and guest satisfaction survey analytics to enhance guest experiences and increase revenue" (www.reviewpro.com). In other words, they survey guests' preferences and complaints about hotels and restaurants, analyzing data drawn from online reviews to help businesses position themselves in an advantageous way. For example, the consultancy Review Pro, cited above, lists a variety of major hospitality chains as clients (Meliá, Kempiski, Iberostar, Louvre Hotels, Pestana, The Ascott, etc.), and thus we can assume that it is these large companies that can currently afford to work with consultants of this kind. Smaller businesses might not have the human, financial or technological resources to do so, as studies on the (lack of) hotel website effectiveness and the perception of this by customers have pointed out (Law & Cheung, 2006; Schmidt et al., 2008).

Also, online reviews are of great value to hospitality marketers since they offer a solution to the "problem" of the intangibility of their products (Zhang & Li, 2010), thus making it possible for hotels to update their websites, refining their offer and its presentation, to match customer demands (O'Connor, 2008, 2010). Although eWOM opinions may have a positive effect on businesses, Heyes and Kapur (2012) claim that hospitality firms must take into account angry customers' negative reviews, and develop ways to manage the damaged reputation of hotels. Although these customer reviews can be found on hotel websites, as part of a "genre chain" (Zhang & Vasquez, 2014), they are identified more extensively on social network platforms such as TripAdvisor, places which consumers feel are less censored and therefore more reliable.

It is worth mentioning that researchers have also been concerned about deceptive reviews and tools for detection on TripAdvisor (Wu et al., 2010; Ott et al., 2011). There is even a marketing concept in hospitality, "the TripAdvisor effect", which encapsulates the importance of this phenomenon

for hotels with regard to the need for effective internet positioning, and which claims that the information arising from sites such as TripAdvisor should result in an increase in standards of service, since the opinions of customers quickly reach a wide audience and hence need to be dealt with as a matter of urgency (Cunningham et al., 2010). Browning, So and Sparks (2013) also discuss the importance for hotels to manage online reviews, especially negative ones, and the need to act promptly in addressing customer service problems. Finally, recent reports from the fields of marketing and hospitality (Pwc Report, 2015) urge hoteliers to consider negative online reviews as an opportunity for constructive exchange and thus as a means of improving their businesses.

4. Purpose of the study

The aim of the current study is to highlight the enhancement strategies enacted in hotel webpages that may resonate with negative online customer reviews. The study would eventually seek to endow hotels with effective ways of discursively reformulating websites in order to better adapt to customer opinions and preferences while taking into account online criticism. Such discursive adjustment, based on the use of enhancing strategies by means of boosters, can have the effect of a silent handling of critiques on a variety of topics. In pursuit of this, it is expected that hotels will have recourse to some of the topics complained about, here analyzed through attitudinals, to transform them into enhanced values, these expressed through different collocational structures. The study thus aims to explore the ways in which this uptake and revisiting of topics can be enacted, as a kind of marketing strategy.

5. Data and method

The data analyzed consist of a first sub-corpus of four hotels, including the following sections: Home, Rooms, Eat and Drink, and Events. These four hotels (all four-star establishments), two from the US and two from the UK, were selected from a larger corpus of 100 hotels belonging to the Cometval Project corpus (2011-2014), after previously discarding hotels without a sufficient number of negative online reviews on TripAdvisor and also without a textually rich website, since the text on some hotel websites is very poor, offering little more than a description of the pictures it shows.

This sub-corpus is made of discursive excerpts from the four hotel websites from 2008 to 2015, all extracted from the Internet Archive Wayback Machine (https://archive.org/web/). The purpose was to give evidence, first, on how values were described in the 2008 or 2009 hotel websites, and then, on how hotels have enhanced some of those same values in further adjustments (2011-2012-2015).

The second sub-corpus is made of 200 negative online reviews collected from TripAdvisor about the four above-mentioned hotels. The reviews were all written and posted between 2009 and 2012, and fall within the TripAdvisor's traveller rating categories "poor" and "terrible". This sub-corpus of online reviews was analyzed from a netnographic approach (Mkono, 2011, 2012), which implies a qualitative analysis. To this end, the interpersonal metadiscourse framework was applied (Hyland, 2005, 2008), further refined through the classification markers for e-genres in the field of tourism (Suau-Jiménez, 2012b). *Attitudinals* were scrutinized, since these markers deploy a subjective authorial stance that can entail negative content, thus constructing discursive strategies that contain negative evaluations. Following this, the discourse of the related hotel websites was analyzed from the same perspective, looking in particular for *boosters*, a kind of marker opposed to attitudinals and used to enhance values in e-genres in the field of tourism (Pierini, 2007, 2009; Mapelli, 2008; Edo-Marzá, 2012; Suau-Jiménez, 2012b).

Having conducted this first part of the analysis, instances were identified in the hotel websites and online reviews that contained topics reflecting the lexico-semantic fields related to hospitality in the Multilingual Dictionary of Tourism (2014): booking, customer service, prices, staff, facilities and services, rooms, food and drink, hotel's gallery pictures, events, location and atmosphere, decoration and internet access. Another qualitative analysis was then performed, discarding discursive examples of both genres that did not deal with these topics or that did not occur more than three times in the corpora. A list of recurrent parallel instances containing the above mentioned topics was thus produced. All the analyses were done manually.

6. Results

The layout of information in the current section is as follows: for each hotel, a first table presents the topics criticized in the online reviews during 2009-

2012. Then, a second table shows website adjustments ranging from 2008 or 2009 to 2015 with enhanced values that match the critiques and that have changed along time with website reformulations, reflecting the business's particular choices.

Both negative online reviews and hotel enhancements are materialized through attitudinals and boosters that are embedded in diverse lexico-grammatical forms. Most take the form of collocations, with a variety of grammatical constructions. Attitudinals, with negative subjective and semantic content, are typical of how this marker is seen in non-academic genres (Suau-Jiménez, 2016), and tend to form collocations or phrases with adjectives, verbs, nouns or even particles. Their function as attitudinals that project an author's stance and authority is in all cases contextually-driven, that is, it makes sense within the specific genre (negative reviews) and the discipline or domain (hospitality):

(1) *bad* customer service

(2) web pictures *do not represent* actual rooms

(3) *no* night room service

(4) *waiting* at reception

(5) *noise* at night

As for boosters, these are formed by noun phrases with positive qualifying adjectives or nouns in determiner position. They are very frequent on hotel websites, and indeed are among the most salient features of the discourse of promotion in the field of tourism, and also as part of an author's stance, but this time focusing objectively on specific values that entail hotel services, staff or facilities. Again, the enhancing function here should be understood contextually, as a result of their generic and disciplinary variables, in this case in the form of a hotel website as the genre, and hospitality as the domain:

(6) *recently renovated* rooms and suites

(7) *69 oversized* accommodations

(8) the city's *most knowledgeable concierge*

(9) *high-resolution images* in our gallery

(10) *high-speed* WIFI connectivity at a *reasonable cost*

These markers can take a variety of lexico-grammatical forms, mostly collocational or phrasal, and constitute discursive strategies whose ultimate function is to criticize or enhance hotel values.

Hotel no. 1

Customer service	*bad* customer service *poor* customer service *poor and misleading* payment method
Hotel rooms	*dirtiness* in rooms and in facilities *poor* bathroom equipment *no* bathroom amenities *noise* at night *poor* room facilities
Facilities	*poor* hotel facilities
Staff	*disrespectful* staff *unprofessional* and *unkind* staff
Wifi	*expensive* WIFI *no* free WIFI in rooms
Room pictures	web pictures *do not represent* actual rooms

Source: https://www.tripadvisor.es/Hotel_Review-g60763-d223019-Reviews

- *Customer Service.* Only the 2015 website shows changes in its adjustment, with very specific enhancements like *comforting amenities, complimentary continental breakfast, free Starbucks coffee*, etc.

- *Hotel rooms.* On the 2012 hotel website, several enhancements appear that could be interpreted as a counterbalance of complaints, since they focus on the same criticized characteristics: size and renovation of facilities: The hotel is *proud to offer guests 69 of the largest, best appointed, most up to date rooms in New York*. The 2015 website adjustment enhances the same characteristics, though with different boosters: *recently renovated rooms and suites, 69 oversized accommodations, largest, best-appointed rooms and suites*, etc.

- *Facilities.* Only the 2015 website shows changes, enhancing specifically the hotel renovation, thus counterbalancing the critique: *elegant entryway, modern lobby space, unique décor, renovated in March 2013*, etc.

- *Staff.* The 2012 website shows an adjustment using enhancements like *Welcoming, friendly staff,* etc. The 2015 version presents another adjustment with a more powerful textual tone, focusing on professionalism: *expert* concierge, the city's *most knowledgeable concierge*. Thus, both adjustments emphasize values that were criticized.

- *Wifi.* It is in 2015 when the website shows an important change, specifying its quality and reasonable price through these enhancements:

	Online review complaints (2009-2012)	Hotel website (2009)	Hotel website (2012)	Hotel website (2015)
CUSTOMER SERVICE	*bad* customer service *poor* customer service *poor and misleading* payment method	*Concierge* Services *24-Hour in-room* food delivery service *Same day* dry cleaning / laundry services *Complimentary* Continental Breakfast served daily 7AM - 10AM *24-hour Complimentary* Coffee/Tea Service	Transportation *arrangements* Bus tour and boat cruise tickets *available* at the concierge desk Credit Card *Authorization Form*	*comforting* amenities *complimentary* continental breakfast *free* Starbucks coffee our concierge *streamlines* your transportation
HOTEL ROOMS	*dirtiness* in rooms and in facilities *dirtiness* in rooms and carpets *poor* bathroom equipment *no* bathroom amenities *noise* at night *poor* room facilities	Iron and ironing boards in *each* guest room Hairdryers in *each* guest room *Bathroom lighting fixtures* - renovated September 2007 *Fitted bedspreads* - renovated September 2007	The hotel is proud to offer guests 69 of the *largest, best appointed, most up to date* rooms in New York. *modern and spacious* accommodations, *complete* roster of amenities	*recently renovated* rooms and suites *plush* bedding 69 *oversized* accommodations *largest, best-appointed* rooms and suites *newly renovated* rooms *premium* accommodations *spacious* rooms and suites
FACILITIES	*poor* hotel facilities	NO REFERENCE FOUND	NO REFERENCE FOUND	*elegant* entryway *modern* lobby space *unique* décor *modern* comforts *renovated* in March 2013
STAFF	*disrespectful* staff *unprofessional and unkind* staff	We pride ourselves on our *warm friendly* service and making each guest feel like they are *part of our family*	*Welcoming, friendly* staff *Express* Check Out in 4 languages	*expert* concierge the city's *most knowledgeable* concierge
WIFI	*expensive* WIFI *no* free WIFI in rooms	Wireless Hi Speed Internet access available @ $9.95 per day	SAME AS 2009	*high-speed* WIFI connectivity *at a reasonable cost*
ROOM PICTURES	web pictures *do not represent* actual rooms	The rooms pictured *are a sampling* and not all rooms are identical or pictured.	SAME AS 2009	*high-resolution* images in our gallery/

Source: https://web.archive.org/web/20090225232719/

Table 2: Matching of topics from online review complaints with hotel website adjustments.

high-speed WIFI connectivity *at a reasonable cost*. Thus, this is another case of complaints matching enhancements.

- *Room pictures.* In 2015 a website adjustment was introduced, deleting the previous description and pointing towards technical quality: *high-resolution*

images in our gallery, something that can match the complaint since it implies that its high quality depicts the real shape of rooms and furniture.

Overall, many of the complaints, although not all, were matched by enhancements in the website, but not in the same manner. A certain pattern can be pictured where general critiques are matched through enhancements of specific values, and also that attitudinals turn into boosters for the same criticized features. It has to be pointed out that the 2009 hotel website was discursively well designed, with rich descriptions, the 2012 one was poor, and the 2015 website catered for most of the enhancing strategies.

Hotel nº 2

Facilities and services	*poor* room facilities and services *small* bathroom *poor* hotel facilities
Staff	*bad* staff service *inconsiderate* staff *mismanaged* hotel
Decoration and atmosphere	*old and dated* decoration *run down* decoration
Rooms	*horrible* room *uncomfortable and worn* bed *dirty* room *expensive* room *small* single room *tiny and stuffy* single room
Eat and drink	*expensive* breakfast
Wifi	*no free* wifi

Source: https://www.tripadvisor.co.uk/Hotel_Review-g186338-d224663-Reviews

Table 3: Most frequent topic instances criticized in the online reviews (2009-2012).

- *Facilities and services.* 2009 and 2012 websites were not found on the Internet Archive Wayback Machine. The 2013 hotel website shows a long series of enhancements on specific qualities, like *convenient events venue, fully air-conditioned meeting rooms, flexible meeting rooms, etc.* that matches the criticized topic.

- *Staff.* The 2013 and 2015 hotel websites give no enhancing whatsoever to this topic.

- *Decoration and atmosphere.* The 2013 and 2015 websites adjustment matches the complaint with specific qualities: *luxurious marble bathrooms, charming hotel, close to London's most iconic landmarks.* It can be noticed that attitudinals of specific characteristics turn into boosters of the same values.

	Online review complaints (2009-2012)	Hotel website (2009) NOT FOUND	Hotel website (2013)	Hotel website (2015)
FACILITIES AND SERVICES	*poor* room facilities and services *small* bathroom *poor* hotel facilities	WEBSITE NOT FOUND	rooms *fitted with* LCD flat-screen televisions, satellite and cable channels *convenient* events venue room service is also *available 24 hours a day* a *same-day* laundry and dry cleaning service	rooms *fitted with* LCD flat-screen televisions, *satellite and cable* channels alongside wi-fi and *broadband* access to PC, *colour* printing and *fax* services *convenient* events venue *fully air-conditioned* meeting rooms *flexible* meeting rooms *in-house* restaurant *comfortable* lounge bar
STAFF	*bad* staff service *inconsiderate* staff *mismanaged* hotel	WEBSITE NOT FOUND	NO REFERENCE FOUND	NO REFERENCE FOUND
DECORATION, ATMOSPHERE	*old and dated* decoration *run down* decoration	WEBSITE NOT FOUND	*luxurious* marble bathrooms *charming, close to* London's most *iconic* landmarks	*luxurious* marble bathrooms *charming, close to* London's most *iconic* landmarks
ROOMS	*horrible* room *uncomfortable and worn* bed *dirty* room *expensive* room *small* single room *tiny and stuffy* single room *not as advertised* rooms and bed	WEBSITE NOT FOUND	76 *welcoming* en-suite guest bedrooms	76 *welcoming* en-suite guest bedrooms and 6 studio apartments wi-fi and *broadband* access
EAT AND DRINK	*expensive* breakfast	WEBSITE NOT FOUND	NO REFERENCE FOUND	NO REFERENCE FOUND
WIFI	*no free* wifi	WEBSITE NOT FOUND	*include* AV support and wi-fi connectivity	wi-fi and *broadband* access

Source: https://web.archive.org/web/20130911062908/

Table 4: Matching of topics from online review complaints with hotel website adjustments.

- *Rooms.* The 2013 website adjustment presents a general and inclusive enhancement: *76 welcoming en-suite guest bedrooms*, that seems to address a whole renovation of accommodation. This enhancement is reformulated on the 2015 website with extra information on apartments: *76 welcoming en-suite guest bedrooms and 6 studio apartments,* as well as enhancing the *Wifi connectivity.* Both adjustments match the complaint.

- *Eat and drink.* The critique of an expensive breakfast is not handled at all in none of the scrutinized hotel websites.

- *Wifi.* The 2013 and 2015 hotel website adjustments show enhancements of this topic like *Hotel services for business travellers include AV support and wi-fi connectivity,* something that half-matches this critique, since the enhancement only addresses business customers.

Summing up, not all topics or values receive the same discursive treatment in terms of website enhancements. Also, website adjustments are irregular, although they show a chronological tendency to textual improvement through enhancement of specific values via boosters. Topics like *Rooms* or *Facilities and services* are better addressed, discursively speaking, whereas *Staff* – an important value – is disregarded and not enhanced or handled, as happens with *Eat and drink* or *Wifi.*

Hotel nº 3

Staff	rude, unhelpful manager unprofessional staff unprofessional and disrespectful staff
Customer service	unprofessional spa service bad customer service poor customer service no night room service bad customer service at restaurant waiting at reception
Eat and drink	poor food and restaurant service
Location and atmosphere	not good atmosphere
Prices	additional, unexpected charges overpriced hotel services overpriced parking

Source: https://www.tripadvisor.co.uk/Hotel_Review-g187069-d659248-Reviews-

Table 5: Most frequent topic instances criticized in online reviews (2009-2012).

The focus of the criticism here is clearly on staff and customer service.

- *Staff.* Only the 2015 website adjustment presents a long and powerful discursive enhancement that matches the complaint, with boosting collocations like *outstanding guest experience, service quality and warm manners.*

- *Customer service.* The 2015 website offers a discursive adjustment focusing on the *hotel's team guest experience* and *expertise* that matches the general complaint.

- *Prices.* This value does not appear described nor matched at all in any of the scrutinized websites.

	Online review complaints (2009-2012)	Hotel website (2008)	Hotel website (2011)	Hotel website (2015)
STAFF	rude, unhelpful manager bad customer service unprofessional staff disrespectful staff	The hotel's *standard of personal service* and hospitality completes the package, making the Manchester hotel a *clear leader* for business and leisure	NO REFERENCE FOUND	The team at our hotel in Manchester is driven to deliver an *outstanding* guest experience and has a *reputation for its service standards warm and welcoming* service
CUSTOMER SERVICE	no night room service (customer service) poor customer service no customer service unprofessional spa service	Put yourself in the *skilled hands* of our spa therapists and *experience head to toe pampering* in one of our peaceful treatment rooms	NO REFERENCE FOUND	The team at our hotel in Manchester is driven to deliver an *outstanding* guest experience and has a *reputation for its service standards warm and welcoming* service We'll work *closely* with you to *manage* your expectations and *exceed* those of your delegates
EAT AND DRINK	*poor food and restaurant service* (eat and drink/customer service) *bad* customer service at restaurant	*award-winning* restaurant *finest seasonal* ingredients *best* produce available *local and organic* produce where possible menus that are *unique*	SAME AS 2008	*Re-launched* on Friday 14th March 2014 *brand new* Scottish Steak Club *innovative fresh new* flavours *best* cuts of beef from Scotland *tastiest* burger around
ATMO-SPHERE	*not good* atmosphere	NO REFERENCE FOUND	NO REFERENCE FOUND	*Inspired, relaxed and comfortable* atmosphere

Source: https://web.archive.org/web/20081604113441/

Table 6: Matching of topics from online review complaints with hotel website adjustments.

- *Eat and drink.* A change appears on the 2015 website in contrast with the previous 2008 and 2012 ones referring to the topic date of renovation (2014) and matching the critique: *Re-launched on Friday 14th March 2014, brand new Scottish Steak Club, innovative fresh new flavours*, etc.

- *Atmosphere.* Only the 2015 website addresses this topic through a series of enhancements that match the complaint: *Inspired, relaxed and comfortable atmosphere.*

To sum up, we can observe again a recurrent action pattern in the hotel management of the websites. Some of the criticized topics receive no attention at all, as is the case with *prices,* a taboo topic in all cases that were analyzed. Certain topics receive little or no enhancing on the 2012 website, but they do in the 2015 version, thus confirming the tendency towards more intense chronological website adjustments.

Hotel no. 4

Staff	unrespectful staff terrible staff unhelpful staff
Customer Service	very faulty plumbing and room services no customer service noise at night
Rooms	small and dirty room tiny and dirty room poor room very small and dated room dirtiness in bathroom
Facilities	pretentious lobby
Internet access	overpriced WiFi in rooms
Prices	expensive rooms overpriced hotel overprices services

Source: https://www.tripadvisor.com/Hotel_Review-g60763-d93517-Reviews

Table 7: Most frequent topic instances criticized in online reviews (2009-2012).

- *Staff.* On the 2012 website, boosters like *friendly staff, multilingual, professional Concierge staff* counterbalance the complaint. The 2015 website adjustment offers changes and new enhancements, like *The multi-lingual staff is eager to attend to any and all of your needs,* etc. As said before, this shows an increasing chronological tendency towards website adjustments that contain discursive matching of the complaints.

- *Customer Service.* It is not until 2015 that the website shows some adjustment that can be interpreted as a complaint counterbalance: *service is priority one, throughout the property.*

- *Rooms.* The 2012 website adjustment includes specific enhancements: *freshly updated guest rooms designed for comfort and style, 597 guest rooms and suites refurbished,* etc. Rather importantly, there is a change in the number of bedrooms offered, going from 601 in 2009 to 597 now that could be part of the hotel's accommodation policy. In 2015, the website shows changes with discursive strategies like *the hotel consists of 608 rooms,* etc. Both adjustments match the complaint.

- *Facilities, atmosphere and decoration.* The 2012 website shows specific changes and enhancements like *stylish lobby, captivating setting of historic architecture, distinctive modern art,* etc. This is again noticed on the 2015 website, with a new discursive enhancement of this topic: *living room with the drama of a lavishly adorned theater, hotel's lobby a lounge-like ambiance,* etc. Again, both adjustments match the critique with distinct enhancements.

	Online review complaints (2009-2012)	Hotel website (2009)	Hotel website (2012)	Hotel website (2015)
STAFF	unrespectful staff terrible staff unhelpful staff	NO REFERENCE FOUND	friendly staff multilingual, professional Concierge staff always willing to help you	The multi-lingual staff is eager to attend to any and all of your needs, with warm welcoming smiles
CUSTOMER SERVICE	very faulty plumbing and room services no customer service noise at night	NO REFERENCE FOUND	NO REFERENCE FOUND	service is priority one, throughout the property
ROOMS	small and dirty room tiny and dirty room poor room very small and dated room dirtiness in bathroom	boasts 601 freshly renovated, comfortable guest rooms new furnishings, clean, modern decor, exquisite bathrooms and luxurious linens April 2009 renovations in all the rooms	597 guest rooms and suites refurbished with boutique-style	the hotel consists of 608 rooms rooms can easily accommodate up to three guests and feature one king or two double beds
DECORATION AND ATMOSPHERE	pretentious lobby	fashionable midtown boutique hotel	stylish lobby captivating setting of historic architecture distinctive modern art glamorous décor quintessential Manhattan style fabulous atmosphere	living room with the drama of a lavishly adorned theater hotel's lobby a lounge-like ambiance, making it the ideal place elegant atmosphere spectacular views Paramount is Art Nouveau hotel designed by Philippe Stark, located near Times Square
WIFI	overpriced WiFi in rooms overprices services	NO REFERENCE FOUND	free Wi-Fi in the lobby and common areas high-speed wireless internet located in the lobby	SAME AS 2012
PRICES	expensive rooms overpriced hotel	NO REFERENCE FOUND	exceptional value affordable stay in the heart of Times Square	caters for a cost-conscious clientele

Source: https://web.archive.org/web/20090501223328/

Table 8: Matching of topics from online review complaints with hotel website adjustments.

- *Internet access.* This topic is only addressed on the 2012 and 2015 versions, although with poor enhancements: *free Wi-Fi in the lobby and common areas,* etc.

- *Prices.* The 2012 website shows changes, with enhancements like *exceptional value, affordable stay.* The 2015 website also presents changes,

with a subtle but precise booster expression: *caters for a cost-conscious clientele*. Both website versions match the complaint.

The pattern of discursive adjustment described in the previous hotels can also be observed here: certain topics or values (here: staff, rooms, decoration and atmosphere) are taken into consideration against others (Wifi, prices, customer service).

7. Discussion and conclusions

In this longitudinal study, four hotel websites were analyzed, together with 200 corresponding negative online reviews. In most cases, a tendency was observed towards a chronologically progressive discursive improvement of the hotel websites, with an enhancement of certain values. These enhancements were made of different strategies, going from simple collocations to rich elaborated expressions or sentences. It can be suggested that these website discursive improvements may have an effect of dealing with the complaint, matching attitudinal markers (adjectives or adjectival phrases mostly: *small rooms, unprofessional or disrespectful staff,* etc.) with a booster (adjective or adjectival phrase: *renovated guest bedrooms, the most knowledgeable concierge, warm and friendly staff*). A form of strategy was identified, in which the topic of the complaint was taken up and turned into something positive: i.e. what was highlighted as *old and dated* was given a new positive sense by referring to its charming ambiance; for instance, the *pretentious lobby* was described in terms of the *elegant atmosphere* it creates.

In light of these findings, the first issue to arise is that specific instances of discourse on hotel websites, those based on enhancing strategies, can entail an effect of discursive and functional adjustment to customer preferences and opinions based on online criticism. As noted above, hotels are being advised, indeed warned, about the need to take online complaints seriously, especially those on TripAdvisor (Cunningham et al., 2010), and to remedy negative opinions and evaluations with positive actions and replies as a means of restoring customer confidence and thus being seen as addressing problems in earnest (Browning, So & Sparks, 2013). It could therefore be said that, apart from hotels posting replies to specific online complaints –a polite corporate practice, but one which in itself is no guarantee of any real and specific action– the use of their own websites as a tool for the enhancement of certain criticized hotel values can be a positive discursive strategy.

As far as our corpus is concerned, hotels' website discursive adjustments enhance only certain issues, maybe those most closely related to their own identity or brand image (Leblanc & Nguyen, 1996; Cheng, 2016), that is, issues which speak to their specific interests. Our findings suggest that hoteliers can use social media as a means of interacting actively with travellers, using the "collective intelligence" available on the internet (Merono-Cerdán & Soto-Acosta, 2007; Litvin, Goldsmith & Pan, 2008), as an indirect two-way communication with the users of their websites (Bonsón & Flores, 2011). This study has important implications for the hospitality and the tourism industry in general. It suggests that through diverse enhancing strategies, rich in collocational booster expressions inserted in the textual readjustment of their websites, tourism businesses can address customers focusing on specific values of their interest and by-passing other values that can be counterproductive for the business image.

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