

Negativity and narrativity in online hotel reviews: The role of the platform

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In the current era of digitalization, most hotels are present on the Internet and most booking decisions are made online, on public platforms such as TripAdvisor, Booking.com, Trivago, etc. Customers' decisions and their attitudes towards companies are influenced by other customers' comments (e.g., Vermeulen & Seegers 2009), and negative emotional contagion between customers makes it crucial for customer service employees to deal in a satisfactory way with negative comments. Against this background, it is crucial to know how the formulation of online negative reviews is influenced by the affordances of platforms on which the reviews are published, because these differences in the expression of negativity are likely to affect hotel managers' responses to these reviews as well as other customers' decisions.

This research explores the impact of the "third author" view on Booking.com on the way customers phrase their negative reviews, in comparison with the reviews posted on a platform such as TripAdvisor (e.g., Cenni & Goethals 2017). Starting from the Hotelspeaker corpus, a large corpus compiled in the context of a collaboration between Hotelspeaker, a company that provides responses to reviews on behalf of the hotels targeted by the customers, and Ghent University, I created a subcorpus consisting of all reviews written in French from which I randomly selected 100 negative reviews for each corpus, i.e., TripAdvisor and Booking.com. I compared the two platforms in terms of four aspects of negative reviews that are related to negativity and narrativity (Vásquez 2012): the number of constitutive components of negative reviews that are realized in a review, the number of times a particular component is realized (and how this component is realized, cf. Decock & Depraetere 2018), the use of linguistic modification (upgraders and downgraders), and the total length of the review.

I predicted reviews to be more negative on TripAdvisor than on Booking.com because Booking.com's third author elicits both positive and negative comments, as it provides a blank text template for positive comments and one for negative comments, and because it invites feedback in the form of lists instead of narratives, thus decreasing the likelihood of dissatisfaction narratives to unfold. My results confirmed these predictions: TripAdvisor reviews are longer than Booking.com reviews; the former are also more explicit, more narrative, and include a larger variety of negative evaluations.

References

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