

Çiğdem Özkan*, Mustafa Boz**

MANAGING CONSUMER COMPLAINTS: THE CASE OF TRIPADVISOR¹

Abstract: Today's Internet technologies make it easier for firms and customers to interact with each other. The second generation of web based services is characterized by having complaint management which allow people to share information and opinions. Online social travel networks are changing the way travellers plan their trips. These websites provide tourists to see other tourists' reviews, who stayed in hotels before. One of these social networks is Trip Advisor which is well known around the world.

The aim of this study is to investigate online complaint management practices emerging in Trip Advisor. It was selected two hotels that are one-five stars and four-stars operating in the city center of Çanakkale. For this purpose, it was examined first fifty assessment belongs to guests staying in both hotels. It was evaluated regarding attitudes and complaint management of hotels by analyzing the answers given by the hotels to customer reviews. A total of hundred customer review were analyzed. Qualitative data analysis methods were used in the study. Customer comments were transferred to Excel program and reviews were analyzed by content analysis, which is one of the qualitative research methods. The research is based on the first fifty reviews of the two hotels made in Trip Advisor between July 15 and July 25 2019.

According to customer reviews in Trip Advisor operating in Çanakkale province, as a result of the findings obtained from the first fifty customer reviews of one five-star and the other four-star hotel business, it was determined that there was no response to the comments of Turkish guests. On the other hand, it was concluded that some foreign guests' evaluations were returned. The findings of the research are examined, it is among the other findings that both hotels don't give required importance to customer evaluations and don't pay attention to customer complaints. In the study, it was concluded that customer complaints are generally related to the features of the rooms, personnel behavior and service quality. Another finding is that customer satisfaction is related to the hotel's location, cuisine, services (such as tennis courts, spas) and personnel features.

Keywords: Hotel Industry, Trip Advisor, Complaint Management, Çanakkale Hotels.

1. Introduction

Today's competitive business environment, complaint management should be considered as an important issue in solving marketing problems and for customer satisfaction. Companies must listen to their customers and give feedback. Customers must feel that their complaints and opinions are cared and problems are solved.

Complaints management have been studied from a number of disciplinary perspectives. Complaints management is about resolving individual complaints and identifying opportunities to make systemic improvements. Every organisation that deals with the public or every business that market goods and services will receive complaints. People expect companies and organisations to be customer-focused and responsive to complaints. Companies and organisations are required to have complaints management systems (CMS) in

* **Çiğdem Özkan** – Dr. Öğr. Üyesi, Çiğdem Özkan since 2007 is lecturer in Ayvacık Vacation School in Department of Tourism and Hospitality, Çanakkale Onsekiz Mart University, Çanakkale, Türkiye, e-mail: cigdemozkan@comu.edu.tr

** **Mustafa Boz** – Prof. Dr. Mustafa Boz is a lecturer since 2009 in Department of Hospitality Management, Tourism Faculty at Çanakkale Onsekiz Mart University, Türkiye, e-mail: m.b.istanbul@gmail.com

¹16–19 Ekim 2019 tarihinde düzenlenen 4th International Tourism Congress'inde bildiri olarak sunulmuştur.

place and be accountable for their decisions and actions². In certain circumstances, customers become almost inevitably unhappy due to various problems or difficulties that are not always under the direct control of the company. Encouraging clients to express their discontent is the first step recommended to managers in their effort to systematically learn about customers' negative experiences, restore satisfaction and strengthen business relationships³.

Complaints should be considered an indicator of organizational performance assessment, signalling some problems or failures in internal processes that need quick recovery in order to avoid migration of profitable customers. Furthermore, organizations must learn that the consequences of losing clients are both profit decrease and negative word of mouth.

Consumers trust the comments shared on tripadvisor⁴. Users' online comments are a tool that provides communication and information about tourism businesses for past and future customers⁵. The aim of this study is to investigate online complaint management practices for two hotels in Canakkale throughout reviews published in TripAdvisor.

2. Literature Review

Complaint management is the process of dissemination of information aimed at identifying and correcting various causes of customer dissatisfaction⁶. It defines strategies used by companies to solve and learn from the previous mistakes in order to restore customer confidence in organizational reliability⁷.

TripAdvisor is the world's largest travel platform and helps 490 million travelers each month to make their trips easier. Travelers across the globe use the TripAdvisor site and app to browse more than 760 million reviews and opinions of 8.3 million accommodations, restaurants, experiences, airlines and cruises. Whether planning or on a trip, travelers turn to TripAdvisor to compare low prices on hotels, flights and cruises, book popular tours and attractions, as well as reserve tables at great restaurants. TripAdvisor, the ultimate travel companion, is available in 49 markets and 28 languages⁸. As an evidence of the growing importance of online search and influence on travel behaviors, a survey of the hotel and restaurant industry in Europe in 2007 concluded that 80% of UK consumers are researching online before booking a hotel and half of them maintained to have refrained from booking a specific hotel as a consequence of a negative review on TripAdvisor-like websites⁹.

In their study, Erdem and Yay¹⁰ found that restaurant customers complained about staff, then food and beverage, service, price, service environment and menu, respectively.

According to Alrawadieh and Demirkol¹¹, the issues in which the customers make negative comments in accommodation establishments are determined as poor service quality, the low quality of service, the quality and cleanliness of the facilities (rooms, bathrooms etc.), personnel attitude and performance, high

² Queensl and Ombudsman, Complaints management. <https://www.ombudsman.qld.gov.au/improve-public-administration/public-administration-resources/complaints-management>, 2019, accessed: 04.09.2019.

³ **Fornell, C.** A national customer satisfaction barometer: The Swedish experience. *Journal of Marketing*, 1992, 56, pp. 6–21.

⁴ **Taştan, H. ve Kızılcık, O.** Kahramanmaraş'ta Bulunan Yiyecek İçecek İşletmelerine Yönelik Tripadvisor.com'da paylaşılan şikayetlerin sınıflandırılması. *Ç. Ü. Sosyal Bilimler Enstitüsü Dergisi*, 2017, 26 (1), pp. 270–284.

⁵ **Sparks, B. A. ve Bradley, G. L.** A “Triple A” Typology of Responding to Negative Consumer-Generated Online Reviews. *Journal of Hospitality and Tourism Research*, 2014, 41 (6), pp. 719–745.

⁶ **Fornell, C., & Westbrook, R. A.** The vicious circle of consumer complaints. *Journal of Marketing*, 1984, 48, pp. 68–78.

⁷ **Hart, C. W. L., Heskett, J. L., & Sasser, W. E.** The profitable art of service recovery. *Harvard Business Review*, 1990, 68, pp. 148–156.

⁸ **Trip Advisor.** Trip Advisor to Audiocast Second Quarter 2019 Conference Call on August 8, 2019, <http://ir.tripadvisor.com/news-releases/news-release-details/tripadvisor-audiocast-second-quarter-2019-conference-call-august>. accessed: 30.08.2019.

⁹ Pew. Pew Internet and American Life Project, Internet Evolution, Pew Research Center, 2005.

¹⁰ **Erdem Ö. ve Yay Ö.** Tripadvisor'daki müşteri şikayetlerinin değerlendirilmesi: Antalya örneği. *Journal of Tourism and Gastronomy Studies*, 2017, pp. 227–249.

¹¹ **Alrawadieh, Z. ve Demirkol, Ş.** Konaklama İşletmelerinde E-şikâyet Yönetimi: İstanbul'daki Beş Yıldızlı Oteller Üzerinde Bir Çalışma. *Nişantaşı Üniversitesi Sosyal Bilimler Dergisi*, 2015, 3 (1), pp. 132–152.

prices, physical characteristics of the enterprise environment, food and beverage quality, not meeting the special requests of the guests, misleading promotion and information.

Sparks and Browning¹² found that the negative reviews shared on TripAdvisor were related to the internal (external features of the rooms) and external (location of the hotel) factors of hotel businesses. In the study of Sparks and Bradley¹³, the typology of 150 negative comments received from Tripadvisor was analyzed and developed. The most criticized issues regarding negative comments are room features and staff. Then comes the ambiance and cleanliness.

In the study of Olcay and Sürme¹⁴, customer complaints in a four-star hotel operating in Gaziantep include general hotel services, food and beverage services, room comfort and cleanliness, respectively.

Gürkan and Polat¹⁵ examined 815 complaints made by domestic customers belonging to 34 accommodation establishments operating in 14 different regions in the Aegean and Mediterranean Regions. Service quality, facilities, staff, pool-bound and managerial. In particular, customers complained of inadequate and poor quality of food & beverage services, inadequate cleaning and hygiene, and inadequate and defective materials used in rooms.

Filip founded that customer complaining behaviour and subsequently on the development and implementation of the service recovery strategy. Ali¹⁶ examined on Malaysian resort hotels perceptions of hotel ambiance and staff courtesy, food and beverage products, staff knowledge, reservation services and financial value were more likely to develop customer satisfaction. Khoo-Littimore and Ekiz¹⁷ studied the quality five-star hotels through online reviews and revealed that guest compliments fell into five important categories (rooms, staff, services, location and namely). According to research results, the guests expressed their satisfaction with room upgrades, late check out, limousine services, free shuttle service to airport.

3. Method

With the growing importance of social networking and online complaint management, the aim of this study is to investigate online complaint management practices for two hotels in Canakkale throughout reviews published in TripAdvisor.

For this purpose, the first 50 reviews of Turkish and foreign customers of both hotels were examined. Hotels' answers to these reviews were analyzed and evaluations were made regarding hotel attitudes regarding complaint management. Total 100 customer reviews were analyzed.

TripAdvisor evaluates customers' opinions based on five criteria: location, cleanliness, service, room and sleep quality. In addition, there is a section in the customer comments section where original evaluations of customers can be made. In this study, customer review of the hotel is analyzed according to these 4 criteria. Customer reviews are classified in two ways as satisfaction and dissatisfaction. The customers were divided into two as Turkish and foreign and the reviews of Turkish and foreign customers were compared.

Qualitative data analysis methods were used in the study. Customer reviews were transferred to Excel program. Data were analyzed with Spss 22 analysis program. Customer comments were analyzed by content analysis, which is one of the qualitative research methods. The research is based on the first 50 reviews made between July 15 and July 25, 2019.

¹² Sparks, B. A. ve Browning, V. Complaining in Cyberspace: The Motives and Forms of Hotel Guests' Complaints Online. *Journal of Hospitality Marketing and Management*, 2010, 19, pp. 797–818.

¹³ Sparks, B. A. ve Bradley, G. L. A "Triple A" Typology of Responding to Negative Consumer-Generated Online Reviews. *Journal of Hospitality and Tourism Research*, 2014, 41 (6), pp. 719–745.

¹⁴ Olcay, A., Sürme, M. Otel İşletmelerinde Müşteri şikâyetlerini Belirlemeye Yönelik Ampirik Bir Çalışma. *Uluslararası Sosyal Araştırmalar Dergisi*, 2014, 7 (35), pp. 836–855.

¹⁵ Gürkan, G. Ç., Polat, D. D. Ege ve Akdeniz Bölgesi'nde Faaliyet Gösteren Resort Konaklama İşletmeleri Hakkında Yapılan şikâyetler Üzerine Nitel Bir Araştırma. Seyahat ve Otel İşletmeciliği Dergisi. *Journal of Travel and Hospitality Management*, 2014, 11 (2), pp. 45–61.

¹⁶ Ali, F. Service quality as a determinant of customer satisfaction and resulting behavioural intentions: A SEM approach towards Malaysian resort hotels. *Tourism*, 2015, 63 (1), pp. 37–51.

¹⁷ Khoo-Lattimore, C., Ekiz, E. H. Power in praise: exploring online compliments on luxury hotels in Malaysia. *Tour. Hosp. Res.* 2014, 14 (3), pp. 152–159.

4. Findings and Discussion

When the first hundred reviews of two of the top ten hotels operating in Çanakkale center were examined, it was concluded that the accommodation was excellent between 40-50% in terms of room, service, cleanliness, location and sleep quality, and between 8-16 % bad and lousy. It can be stated that they are generally satisfied with the hotels located in the center of Çanakkale. Table 1.

Table 1. Findings related to satisfaction levels according to first face assessment

	Frequency		Percent %		Perfect		Good		Average		Poor		Awful	
	f	%	f	%	f	%	f	%	f	%	f	%	f	%
Location	95	95,0	50	50,0	23	23,0	14	14,0	4	4,0	4	4,0		
Cleaning	95	95,0	40	40,0	26	26,0	14	14,0	10	10,0	5	5,0		
Service	96	96,0	42	42,0	27	27,0	11	11,0	10	10,0	6	6,0		
Room	95	95,0	41	41,0	26	26,0	12	12,0	10	10,0	6	6,0		
Sleep quality	96	96,0	43	43,0	26	26,0	10	10,0	10	10,0	5	5,0		

Customer reviews were examined in the research are grouped under 4 categories. Categories based on TripAdvisor customer reviews questions. These are:

1. Satisfaction from the rooms, the general cleanliness of the hotel, the care, the food and service, the attention of the staff, the restaurant.
2. Dissatisfaction with the general cleanliness, maintenance, food and service, the attention of the staff and the restaurant from the rooms.
3. Satisfaction or dissatisfaction with the general cleanliness of the hotel from the rooms, maintenance, food and service, the attention of the staff, some of the restaurants
4. Other complaints and satisfaction.

When customer reviews are evaluated according to category 1:

It is seen that most of the customers (70%) express their satisfaction clearly. For example, the phrase “hotel is very clean, staff is concerned and friendly”. Only eight of the satisfaction comments were returned by guest relation department.

Customer Reviews 1: “Goog everything.”

Hotel Reviews: “Dear Guest XXX, Thank you for choosing XXX Hotel for your stay in Çanakkale and thank you taking the time to write a review on Tripadvisor.”

Customer Reviews 2: “This it the location where you feel yourself at home with their great and friendly staff. We are very glad to hear that you liked our customer service and XXX Hotel’s Location.”

Hotel Reviews: “Dear Mr XXX, Thank you so much for your short feedback and we are truly delighted that you did enjoy your stay with us. We are very glad to hear that you liked our customer service and XXX Hotel’s Location. Looking forward to welcoming you back in the future. Best Regards, Guest Relations Department”

Customer Reviews 3: “Amazing hotel with amazing facilities. Decoration is super/ wonderful kitchen.”

Hotel Reviews: “Thank you so much for taking the time to give us feedback. We are delighted to hear that you had a great service from our team.”

Customer Reviews 4: “I was surprised to see such a large and modern hotel in Canakkale after the

ferry ride into the older part of town. There was a supermarket across the street, a nice bar, a big game room and an inviting pool looking out to the Dardanelles.”

Hotel Reviews: “We really appreciate you taking the time to give us feedback for your stay at XXX Hotel.”

Costumer Reviews 5: “Modern with view of sea. Got beautiful pix of sunset. Buffet dinner included: Beef tips fish and vegetables were notable. Breakfast buffet OK. Room with shower, pergo floors, modern and clean. Thank you for choosing us for your stay in Çanakkale and thank you very much for your excellent comment about us. We are happy to hear that you enjoyed your stay with us. We would love to welcome you again in XXX Hotel in the future.”

Hotel Reviews: “Dear Our Guest XXX, Thank you for choosing us for your stay in Çanakkale and thank you very much for your excellent comment about us. We are happy to hear that you enjoyed your stay with us. We would love to welcome you again in XXX Hotel in the future.”

Costumer Reviews 6: “Dardanelles, with a beautiful view of the strait from our two room suite. Dinner was very good. In addition, there is an indoor lap pool (note swimmers need to have a bathing cap), and the hotel offers spa services. There is nicely maintained fitness center, outdoor soccer field, and tennis courts. Wi-fi is available with strong signal.”

Hotel Reviews: “We would like to thank you for your nice comments. We are all very happy to hear that you had enjoyed your stay with us and do appreciate your feedback.”

Costumer Reviews 7: “The food is also good and the staffer friendly. This is a good hotel to stay. We would like to thank you for your nice comments.”

Hotel Reviews: “We are all very happy to hear that you had a wonderful stay with us and do appreciate your feedback.”

Costumer Reviews 8: “This is a big hotel with separate buildings and good view. The room is huge and the suite is even nicer. Everything is clean and all working.”

Hotel Reviews: “We would like to thank you for your nice comments. We are all very happy to hear that you had a wonderful stay with us and do appreciate your feedback.”

When customer reviews are evaluated according to category 2:

It is seen that very few (14%) of the customers express their dissatisfaction clearly. For example, “the room is dirty, cleanliness is very crappy, the rooms are old, the staff are uninterested, the food is bad”. Only three of the negative comments were returned by guest relation department.

Spark and Brownin¹⁸, in their study, shared negative comments via TripAdvisor, the hotel operations of the interior (room features and customer services) and external (hotel location) determined that the factors are related. Similarly, Sparks and Bradley¹⁹ found that negative comments were mostly about room features and personnel behavior.

Costumer Reviews 1: “My wife and I agree that the room was not clean” (Costumer 74). Hotel Reviews: We really appreciate you taking the time to give us feedback for your stay at x hotel. We do appologize that your room experience was not up to your expectation.

Costumer Reviews 2: “Stayed here for 2 nights as it looked like the smartest hotel in the area. Unfortunately, I would never stay here again in my life. Two major issues; 1. Most of the staff were rude and unhelpful (which was counter to all the other hotels we stayed at in Turkey), 2. The rooms were unbearably hot - a/c was not switched on and hot air was pumped into the bathroom. Made sleeping very difficult even with windows open. Definitely not what you expect from a 5* hotel. Best avoided at all costs.”

Hotel Reviews: “We are very sorry to read that overall your stay was not satisfying. As for the We would like to inform you that our goal is total customer satisfaction. XXX Hotel has several good reviews and recommended by several guide books customer service, it is very upsetting to read that it was beneath your expectations.”

Costumer Reviews 3: “Room is very small and dirty, staffs are rude.”

¹⁸ Sparks, B. A., Browning, V. Complaining in Cyberspace: The Motives and Forms of Hotel Guests' Complaints Online. *Journal of Hospitality Marketing and Management*, 2010, 19, pp. 797–818.

¹⁹ Sparks, B. A., Bradley, G. L. A “Triple A” Typology of Responding to Negative Consumer-Generated Online Reviews. *Journal of Hospitality and Tourism Research*, 2014, 41 (6), pp. 719–745.

Hotel Reviews: “We are very sorry to read that overall your stay was not satisfying. We do appologize that your room experience was not up to your expectation.”

When the customer reviews are evaluated according to the category 3:

It is seen that 15 comments contain both positive and negative evaluations. Only two of these comments were returned by the customer relations department. For example:

Costumer Review 1: “Stayed here for 2 nights as it looked like the smartest hotel in the area. Nice looking hotel, wonderful location (by the sea, just out of town), great breakfast ... unfortunately I would never stay here again in my life because room is not claen. (Costumer 88).”

Hotel Reviews 1: “We really appreciate you taking the time to give us feedback for your stay at XXX Hotel. We do appologize that your room experience was not up to your expectation. Once again we would like to apologize for your dissatisfaction and would be happy to welcome you again in order to prove XXX Hotel quality.”

Costumer Reviews 2: “Though not loud, they were not silent. The hotel has a huge dining room with a generous buffet. The quality was pretty good. As you have experienced we have central heating for winter and self controlled A/C for summer in all rooms, the level of heat and wheather can be adjusted from each room. We have checked the adjust switches of the heating system in all rooms whether it is working properly.”

Hotel Reviews 2: “Dear Guest XXX, Thank you so much for taking the time to give us feedback. We are delighted to hear that you had a great service from our team. As you have experienced we have central heating for winter and self controlled A/C for summer in all rooms, the level of heat and wheather can be adjusted from each room. We have checked the adjust switches of the heating system in all rooms whether it is working properly. We would be happy to see you again in the XXX Hotel.”

When the customer evaluations are evaluated according to the category 4:

It is seen that one (%1) comments contain both positive and negative reviews.

Costumer Reviews 1: “The quality was pretty good. But my wife is not relax in the room so room is very hot.”

Hotel Reviews1: “Dear Guest XXX, Thank you so much for taking the time to give us feedback. We are delighted to hear that you had a great service from our team. As you have experienced we have central heating for winter and self controlled A/C for summer in all rooms, the level of heat and wheather can be adjusted from each room. We have checked the adjust switches of the heating system in all rooms whether it is working properly. We would be happy to see you again in the XXX Hotel.”

When the returns of the hotel management are examined regarding customer complaints, it is seen that they generally thank the first ones in return, then they are informed about the complaints made or to be done, and there is an ongoing response system with the wishes to see the customer again.

In the answers to customer satisfaction; write the message of satisfaction and welcome again.

5. Conclusion and Recommendation

Customer reviews do not consist solely of complaints. Positive or negative assessments are seen by potential customers. Customers consider customer ratings before booking a stay. As well as the extent to which the hospitality company cares about customer reviews is understood by looking at the response rate. Returning to customer evaluations is important for customer satisfaction. It is also considered as an attitude that will enable future customers to think positively.

According to the results of the research; When a total of 100 customer reviews are reviewed, it is seen that 70 of them are pozitive, 14 of them are completely negative and 16 of them are both positive and negative. It was found that only 14 out of 100 comments were answered by the customer relations department. Of the 14 comments, 8 were positive, 3 were negative, 2 negative and pozitive and 1 were other subjects. As Rhee and Yang (2015)' suggested, guests are truthful in their opinions while providing reviews online. Thus, as more and more customers use the online travel platform, understanding and monitoring online reviews becomes important.

It is seen that there is no response to the reviews of Turkish guests. Hotels answer reviews of foreign customers. When the research findings were examined, it is seen that both hotels do not pay necessary attention to customer reviews and they do not care about customer complaints. In the study, it was concluded

that customer complaints are generally related to the features of rooms, personnel behavior and service quality. The study concluded that the customer satisfaction is related to the location of the hotel, the kitchen, the services offered (such as tennis court, spa) and staff characteristics.

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