Do hotels enhance and challenge rapport with customerswith the same degree of commitment?

Abstract

This study is part of an on-going 3-year research project which seeks to develop a thor- ough understanding of the review response genre e hotel management's responses to negative online reviews. As managing (which could be enhancing or damaging) rapport with dissatisfied customers who made the negative comments is regarded as a key component of managerial responses, the present paper specifically investigates the manager's degree of commitment to the act of enhancing and damaging rapport in the responses. The investigation is based on the premise that appealing to pathos is a meta strategy for managing rapport, making it logical and possible to evaluate the degree of commitment to managing rapport from a metadiscourse perspective. A total of 200 managerial responses given by 200 hotels of different star-ratings based in different parts of the world were analyzed by drawing upon genre theory and the metadiscourse construct. Results show that managers had a higher degree of commitment to enhancing rapport than challenging rapport with reviewers, suggesting that they valued a harmo- nious relationship with customers.

1. Introduction

The hospitality industry has been growing at an unprecedented speed in the recent past, thanks to the strong world economy and the emergence of a number of economy airlines during the same period. A large number of tourists traveling around the world are looking for hotel accommodation services that can best meet their requirements. Growing alongside the hospitality industry is the popularity of travel websites like TripAdvisor, Hotels.com, and CTrip, which probably results from the travelers' increasing preference for higher autonomy e they can plan itinerary, arrange transports, pick places of interest, and choose hotels and restaurants by themselves. The need to book hotel accommodation in advance requires travelers to research into the quality of the accommodation services provided by various hotels in their destinations. However, due to the intangible nature of the hotel accommodation services, travelers will not be able to know exactly what the quality is like no matter how rigorous their research is (Mazzarol et al., 2007). They can only rely on either the hotels' promotional materials or word-of-mouth, with the latter being regarded as more trustworthy and particularly important (O'Connor, 2010; Smith, 1993). Consequently, it should not be surprising for us to witness the rapid growth in the number of visitors of travel websites that provide an open platform for hotel customers to comment on the quality of the accommodation services purchased from particular hotels. These websites then allow electronic words-of-mouth to spread to a potentially astro- nomical number of people. Indeed, TripAdvisor, the most popular travel website, recorded a total of 661 million reviews and opinions in 2018 (DMR, 2018).

The high popularity of TripAdvisor (and other travel websites) maximizes the impact of travelers' comments. This is partic- ularly true for negative ones as they usually receive more scrutiny (Page, 2014), making it extremely important for hotel man- agement to address them in a way that can effectively neutralize the negativity of the comments, negotiate corporate identity, brand reputation, customer relations, loyalty, and trust, and ultimately achieve service recovery (Zhang and Vásquez, 2014).

One key feature of effective responses to negative reviews is their ability to win the trust of viewers' e both the customers who wrote the reviews and those potential ones who are reading the revieweresponse pairs online (Ho, 2019; Sparks et al., 2016), thus suggesting the importance of the managers' ability to provide responses that are persuasive enough. The persuasiveness of managerial responses has been shown to be associated with managers' attempt at managing rapport with dissatisfied customers, and such management, interestingly, includes not only the act of enhancing, but also that of challenging rapport (Ho, 2017a, b, 2018). It leads one to naturally inquire about how serious were the managers in managing, in particular challenging, rapport as it is one's intuition that the managers should normally be enhancing rapport with customers. The present paper aims to investigate the managers' degree of commitment to their attempts at managing e both enhancing and challenging e rapport with dissatisfied customers who have criticized the hotel's accommodation services. The investigation will be carried out from a metadiscourse perspective by first establishing the making of appeals to pathos as the meta strategy for rapport management, and then demonstrating how metadiscourse can contribute to the realization of the strategy.

It should be emphasized here that managerial responses in this study do not unquestionably refer to responses written by managers only. They can be written by a range of personnel working for the hotel concerned including the front desk su- pervisor, public relations manager, and general manager (Xie et al., 2017) or even a marketing agency commissioned by large hotels (Sparks and Bradley, 2017).

2. The review response genre

Previous studies on managerial responses to online reviews left by hotel customers generally, as observed by the author, fall into three categories: move structures, effect and functions, and effectiveness.

Studies investigating the move structures of managerial responses have identified a number of moves in the responses, or review response genre (Ho, 2017a, b). Levy et al. (2013) found a total of eight moves including Active Follow-up, Apology, Appreciation, Compensation, Correction, Explanation, Passive Follow-up, and A Request for Future Patronage.[1] Zhang and Vásquez's (2014) study of responses to negative reviews identified a total of 10 moves in the genre: Express Gratitude, Apologize for Sources of Trouble, Invitation for a Second Visit, Opening Pleasantries, Proof of Action, Acknowledge Com- plaints/Feedback, Refer to Customer Reviews, Closing Pleasantries, Avoidance of Reoccurring Problems, and Solicit Responses. In more recent studies, efforts to achieve a more macro level of categorization of moves were made. Sparks and Bradley (2017: 723) proposed the "Triple A" typology categorizing the moves into three main groups Acknowledgement, Account, and

Action. Drawing upon Genre Theory (Bhatia, 1993, 2004; Swales, 1990, 2004), Ho (2017b) categorized the moves in responses given by hotels in the Asian region as either rapport-enhancing or rapport-challenging. Whether the moves identified belong to either the rapport-enhancing or rapport-challenging category depended on the specific communicative function that the particular section of the discourse that formed the moves performed (Biber et al., 2007). In general, rapport-enhancing moves refer to those that attended to the face wants, sociality rights (i.e. association rights and/or equity rights) and interactional goals of the reviewers, and indicated the managers' fulfilment of their obligations. Rapport-challenging moves refer to those that did just the opposite ℮ they threatened or ignored the reviewers' face wants, sociality rights and interactional goals, and indicated the managers' ignorance of their obligations.

Research into the effect and functions of the review response genre suggested that the genre could help the hotel to increase customers' level of satisfaction and trust, and boost its business. A study that analyzed data collected from a Chinese travel website found that hotels' responses to online complaints generated by customers with low satisfaction could significantly improve their future satisfaction (Gu and Ye, 2014). Another study found that managerial responses could lead to a significantly higher level of customers' trust in the hotels and a larger extent to which the hotels are perceived to be "attentive, caring, and responsive to customer needs, preferences, and emotions" (Sparks et al., 2016: 76). It has also been argued that responses to appropriate, timely and sincere negative reviews could increase customer loyalty, boost a hotel's reputation, online bookings, and business (Liu et al., 2015; Ye et al., 2008). The above effect and functions of the review response genre are highly important to hotels whose accommodation services have been negatively commented as negative reviews and negative word-of-mouth can have severe negative impact on an organization's business (Tax et al., 1998; Zaugg, 2006).

Research into the effectiveness of the review response genre has generated findings that fall into two broad categories: the relationship between the star-rating of hotels and the effectiveness of strategies used; and the factors contributing to the effectiveness of the response. Results of the first category suggest that the same strategies, when used by hotels of different star-ratings, would have differing effectiveness. The strategies examined included the provision of timely responses, the provision of lengthy responses, and the designation of the writer of the response (Xie et al., 2017). Results of the second category suggest that a number of factors would contribute to an effective response, including (1) the types of reviews addressed ℮ addressing only extreme reviews would lead to a more effective response than addressing reviews randomly; (2) the match between nature of reviews and purpose of responses ℮ a response that apologized would be effective for product failure reviews, while a response that denied, excused or justified would work well for ordinary negative reviews; and (3) the components of responses ℮ the rapport-enhancing move Acknowledging Problem and the metadiscourse categories transitions, code glosses, boosters, attitude markers, self mentions, and engagement markers seem to characterize effective managerial responses (Ho, 2018; Li et al., 2017).

Based on our common knowledge, we can assume that hotel managers are tasked with maintaining a heathy and lasting relationship with customers, promoting the hotels and ultimately boosting the hotels' business, the use of rapport-enhancing moves. Rather surprising, however, is the use of moves that could potentially damage rapport. While we may presume that the managers probably mean it when they enhance rapport, we may wonder how serious the managers could be when they challenge it. The study is therefore guided by the two research questions below:

(1) Do hotel managers enhance and challenge rapport with the same degree of commitment?
(2) If yes, how do they show different degrees of commitment to these two acts?

The next section will attempt to establish a link between the management of rapport and the use of metadiscourse with a view to answering the two research questions.

3. The link between rapport management and metadiscourse

3.1. Rapport management

Rapport refers to the (dis)harmony between interactants and has three bases: face sensitivities, sociality rights and obligations, and interactional goals (Spencer-Oatey, 2008:14). Rapport management refers to "the use of language to promote, maintain or threaten harmonious social relations" (Spencer-Oatey, 2008: 3) and entails the management of these three bases of rapport. It follows that for one to enhance rapport with others, one will need to attend to:

(1) others' face wants: to let others know or feel that their positive attributes such as "sense of worth, dignity, honour, reputation, competence" are acknowledged;
(2) others' sociality rights: to let others know or feel that they are entitled to certain membership or affiliation, formal or informal (association right), or they are entitled to fair treatment and are free from undue imposition (equity right);
(3) others' expectation of one's fulfilment of one's obligations: to show others that one has fulfilled his/her own obligations that s/he is expected of. For example, a frontline civil servant would be expected to be listening to customers/clients patiently and providing prompt assistance when requested; and
(4) others' interactional goals: to facilitate the achievement of others' goals which may be relational and/or transactional. For example, the frontline civil servant in (3) above should endeavour to provide the right kind of service that the customers/clients request (but not the kind of service that the civil servant thinks the customers/clients need).

The following brief review and summary of previous research in rapport management will allow us to see how rapport can be managed by attending to individuals' face needs, sociality rights, obligations, and interactional goals. Instances of managing rapport by attending to individuals' face wants include a salesperson's attempt at making a customer feel that s/he was being

respected and recognized by acknowledging and agreeing to his/her evaluation of an object or a person (Clark et al., 2003), and Facebook users' attempt at enhancing mutual respect through the use of elliptical compliments in Facebook posts to provide opportunities for users to co-construct meaning (Maíz-Arévalo and García, 2013). Attempts to manage rapport by fulfilling individuals' sociality rights include participants' effort to align with and compliment one another's viewpoints in an online discussion forum (Ådel, 2011), and IT professionals' attempts at downplaying the difference in power and status between themselves during face-to-face interactions to signal to each other that they were equal (Fletcher, 2014). Attempts to manage rapport by fulfilling individuals' own obligations include the taking of actions by hotels to address issues raised by dissatisfied customers on a travel website (Ho, 2017a). Finally, instances to manage rapport by fulfilling individuals' interactional goals include participants' acts of thanking and encouraging one another in an online discussion forum (Ådel, 2011), and hotel managers' offer of an apology and explanation for the inconvenience experienced by hotel customers (Ho, 2017b).

A closer look at the four ways of enhancing rapport and the brief summary of previous research in rapport management above would lead us to conclude that to successfully enhance rapport, one in fact is attempting to arouse a pleasant feeling or emotion in one's interactant: making one feel one is important, valued, accepted, autonomous, and satisfied. In other words, appealing to one's pathos е feelings and emotions е can be regarded as the meta strategy for managing (enhancing or challenging) rapport. This would allow metadiscourse to play a key role in the management of rapport.

3.2. Metadiscourse

Metadiscourse has been defined in various ways and it is generally agreed that it refers to discourse about discourse. Despite this generally acceptable definition, its fuzziness is widely recognized (Ådel, 2006; Hyland, 2005). To allow a systematic way of studying metadiscourse, Hyland (2005) proposed the interpersonal model of metadiscourse which has then become one of the most popular models in metadiscourse studies. It recognizes two main categories of metadiscourse е interactive and interactional. Interactive metadiscourse functions to guide the reader through the text by providing various signposts and additional information. Interactional metadiscourse functions to involve the reader by expressing the writer's stance and drawing the reader into the text and become a discourse participant. The model, with some modification, is shown in Table 1 below. The modification mainly concerns the omission of evidentials which, according to Hyland (2005), mark explicitly a textеexternal relation. This text externality contradicts one of the principles of metadiscourse put forward by Hyland himself (2005: 38) е "that metadiscourse refers only to relations which are internal to the discourse".

Table 1
Modified interpersonal model of metadiscourse.

Category and Sub-category	Function	Example
Interactive	Help to guide the reader through the text	
transitions	Express relations between main clauses	*in addition; but; thus*
frame markers	Signal discourse acts, sequences or stages	*finally, to conclude*
endophoric markers	Refer the reader to information in other parts of the text	*noted above, in the next paragraph*
code glosses	Elaborate propositional meanings	*such as, that is*
Interactional	Involves the reader in the text	
hedges	Withhold commitment and open dialogue	*may, perhaps*
boosters	Emphasize certainty or close dialogue	*certainly, it is clear that*
attitude markers	Express writer's attitude to proposition	*surprisingly, unfortunately*
self mentions	Refer explicitly to author	*I, my,* and *(exclusive) we* and *our*
engagement markers	Explicitly build relationship with reader	*please note that, consider,* and *(inclusive) we and our*

Adapted from Hyland (2005: 49).

One important pragmatic function of metadiscourse is to help the writer or speaker (writer thereafter) to persuade the reader or hearer (reader thereafter) into believing him or her. Metadiscourse can fulfil this persuasive function as it can serve to make appeals to the writer's rationality, writer's credibility and character, and reader's feelings and emotions, corresponding respectively to the Aristotle's means of persuasion, namely logos, ethos, and pathos (Hyland, 2005).

Writers can appeal to logos with metadiscourse as they can make the logical relationship between clauses explicit (with transitions) and the flow of ideas clear and smooth (with frame markers and endophoric markers), and elaborate the meaning of key terms (with code glosses). Mur-Dueñas (2011), in her study of cross-cultural differences in interpersonality, presented clear evidence showing the writers' use of interactive metadiscourse in English and Spanish research articles in an attempt to persuade their readers by responding to their diverging needs and expectations. Khedri et al. (2013) showed that the abstracts of research articles in both applied linguistics and economics were interspersed with interactive discourse that functioned to create a well-organized discourse which would in turn make the text persuasive. Writers can appeal to ethos as they can establish a credible persona by showing cautiousness and reservation (with hedges) while maintaining a certain degree of certainty and commitment (with boosters). Research has repeatedly and clearly demonstrated the use of a balanced combination of hedges and boosters in establishing a writer's credibility and thus enhancing the persuasiveness of academic texts (Hyland, 2008; Lee and Deakin, 2016). Writers can appeal to pathos by making readers a discourse participant, allowing them to feel for themselves what it is like to be in the situation described in the ongoing discourse (with engagement markers), and by expressing their own attitudes, feelings and emotions towards a proposition (with attitude markers). Previous studies have reported frequent use of engagement markers for creating "a sense of disciplinary solidarity and shared endeavor" in academic book reviews (Tse and Hyland, 2006: 781), and the use of attitude markers in expressing affective values of research article writers (Abdollahzadeh, 2011).

3.3. The link

Since managing rapport is in fact an act that appeals to individuals' pathos, metadiscourse can contribute to rapport management in two ways. First, it can help a writer to make appeal to readers' feelings and emotions in the way explained in the preceding paragraph. Second, as rapport management can be achieved through written discourse (e.g. moves in the managerial responses addressing negative online reviews), writers (e.g. hotel managers) can use metadiscourse in their text to highlight their own rationality (logos) and credibility and character (ethos), and to appeal to the viewers' feelings and emotions (pathos), making the rapport managing text more persuasive. In other words, metadiscourse would be able to further strengthen the appeals to pathos achieved by the rapport-managing acts.

4. Methods

4.1. Data collection

The data comprised 200 responses selected from a larger corpus of responses downloaded directly from TripAdvisor for the purpose of the author's on-going research project. This source corpus contains a total of 2577 responses given by 200 hotels spread across the five regions designated by TripAdvisor: (1) China, Taiwan, Hong Kong, Macau; (2) Japan and Korea; (3) Southeast Asia; (4) European cities; and (5) Top destinations.

The 200 responses forming the data of the present exploratory study were selected this way: for each star-rating, ten responses from each of the five regions were chosen e the first response to the first Average review given by the first four cities (i.e. cities 1 to 4), the first response to the first Poor review given by the next three cities (i.e. cities 5 to 7), and the first response to the first Terrible review given by the last three cities (i.e. cities 8 to 10) were collected. For illustration, Table 2 below shows how the data were collected for 2-star hotels in regions 1 and 2.

Table 2
Data collection for 2-star hotels.

	Region 1			Region 2		
	Average	Poor	Terrible	Average	Poor	Terrible
2-star	R1C1	R1C5	R1C8	R1C1	R1C5	R1C8
	R1C2	R1C6	R2C9	R1C2	R1C6	R1C9
	R1C3	R1C7	R3C10	R1C3	R1C7	R1C10
	R1C4			R1C4		

R1: The first response.
C1/2/3 …: The first/second/third city.

A total of 50 responses (10 responses$\times$5 regions) were then collected from hotels of each of the four star-ratings. The total number of responses would then add up to 200 (4 star-ratings$\times$50 responses). The average lengths of responses given by hotels were 137 (5-star), 180 (4-star), 153 (3-star), and 129 (2-star).

4.2. Data analysis

Qualitative and quantitative analyses were conducted to (1) identify the rapport-enhancing and rapport-challenging moves; (2) identify the metadiscourse categories used in these two types of moves; and (3) determine if the hotel managers showed the same degree of commitment to their rapport-enhancing and rapport-challenging moves e in particular, attempts were made to determine if the star-ratings of the hotels were associated with the frequency of use of metadiscourse in the moves.

Following Ho (2017a, b), the moves in the responses were identified by drawing upon Genre Theory (Bhatia, 1993, 2004; Swales, 1990, 2004). These moves were then classified into either rapport-enhancing or rapport-challenging, depending on the communicative functions they performed (Biber et al., 2007). The modified interpersonal model of metadiscourse, as introduced in Section 2 above, was then used in the identification of metadiscourse used in the rapport-managing moves.

Inter-rater reliability was achieved by having two raters (one being the author himself and the other a master's degree holder in linguistics) analyse 10% of the responses selected randomly in order to work out and agree upon a set of criteria for identifying moves and metadiscourse tokens (Ho, 2018). The two raters then analysed the rest of the data independently and discrepancies were resolved through discussion.

The statistical significance of the association between the star-ratings of hotels and the frequency of use of metadiscourse in the two types of rapport managing moves was determined using the KruskaleWallis test.

5. Findings

5.1. Rapport-managing moves

A total of 10 moves were identified in the managerial responses, with seven of them being rapport-enhancing, and the other three rapport-challenging.[2] The total number of rapport-enhancing and rapport-challenging moves were respectively 1066 and 322. The moves, their functions, and extracts are shown below.[3]

5.1.1. Rapport-enhancing moves

These moves served to (1) attend to the face wants, sociality rights, or interactional goals of the customers who left the negative reviews on TripAdvisor, or (2) highlight the hotel's fulfilment of its obligations as the customers had expected.

Move 1: Acknowledging Problem

This move functioned to admit the existence of the problem mentioned in the review and to recognize the truth value of the review, thereby attending to the reviewer's face needs and fulfilling his/her interactional goals (e.g. the reviewer was probably expecting an apology or an explanation for the problem from the management).

Extract 1 below shows how a manager could acknowledge the existence of the problem raised with the sub-move Apologize (the manager would not have the need to apologize if the problem raised had not existed).

Extract 1

We must apologize for all the inconveniences and service that needs to be polished.

Move 2: Agreeing with Reviewer

This move served to tell the reviewer explicitly that the manager agreed with him/her on certain issue, thereby fulfilling the face wants of the former. Extract 2 below shows the hotel management's complete agreement with the reviewer about the service provided by the hotel.

Extract 2

I agree with you that we definitely could have done better.

Move 3: Continuing Relationship

This move functioned to invite the reviewer to contact the manager or to stay in the hotel again in their future visits to the city. It signalled to the reviewer the manager's intention and desire to form solidarity, and thus the attempt at fulfilling the reviewer's sociality rights (association rights). Extract 3 below shows how a reviewer can be encouraged to stay in the hotel again.

Extract 3

Please feel free to contact me directly if and when you are looking to book another stay and I will be happy to assist you with choosing the best room for you.

Move 4: Expressing Feelings

It allowed the managers to make known their feelings and what they wanted/wished/hoped, thereby developing an affective relationship and forming solidarity with the reviewers. Extract 4 shows an instance of expression of negative feelings.

Extract 4

… it saddens all of us when our guests express disappointment with their stay.

Move 5: Offering Assistance

With this move, the manager could offer to provide the reviewer with necessary assistance in the form of, for example, useful information, help with booking of restaurants/tours, and immediate action like fixing of defects found in the hotel room. The manager would then be able to fulfil his/her obligation through such offer. Extract 5 shows an offer to provide the reviewer with assistance during his/her stay.

Extract 5

… and if you have any doubts about our services, you can always come to the reception and we will be pleased to help you.

Move 6: Recognizing Reviewer's or Comment's Value

This move emphasized the importance of the reviewer as a person or the comments that s/he has left on TripAdvisor, thereby highlighting the positive attributes of the reviewer whose face want would then be satisfied. Extract 6 states explicitly how the reviewer's comment could help the hotel.

Extract 6

I am sure your comments will be an incentive for us to keep improving and delivering exceptional service to our guests.

Move 7: Thanking Reviewer

With this move, the manager thanked the reviewer for his/her stay at the hotel or comments and opinions given to the hotel on the TripAdvisor platform, thereby fulfilling the manager's obligation. Extract 7 illustrates how a manager could express gratitude to the reviewer for his/her time and effort in writing and sharing the comments online.

Extract 7

We greatly appreciate the time and effort you took to share this kind feedback.

One may wonder why the customer's feedback, which included criticisms, would still be qualified by "kind" in the above extract. This is indeed a rather common phenomenon which could be interpreted as an attempt at rapport enhancement.

5.1.2. Rapport-challenging moves

These moves threatened/ignored the reviewer's face wants, sociality rights, and interactional goals, or suggested the hotel's reluctance to fulfil its obligations.

Move 8: Accusing Reviewer

This move served to accuse the reviewer for directly or indirectly causing the problem complained about in the comment or performing acts that should not have been performed, threatening boldly the reviewer's face wants. Extract 8 points out boldly that the reviewer was wrong in demeaning others' opinions.

Extract 8

I would say that everyone is given an opportunity to review on travel sites - you have quite rightly been given yours but it's not right to demean others opinions if they do not coincide with yours.

Move 9: Denying Problem

This move allowed the manager to explicitly or implicitly point out that the reviewer's evaluation of the accommodation services was not fair or the complaints made/issues raised were not valid. The denial, explicit or implicit, would lead to a threat to the reviewer's face as the manager was just casting doubts on his credibility. Extract 9 shows how a manager could offer a rebuttal (with evidence) to the reviewer's accusation that no television was provided by the hotel.

Extract 9

Unfortunately the television did have an issue with the antenna which stopped the signal from coming through, this was fixed early next morning when the technician was able to come in.

Move 10: Self-promoting

This move primarily served to promote the hotel and bore no relevance to the complaints made or issues raised by the reviewer, ignoring blatantly the reviewer's interactional goals which might include receiving an apology or explanation from the hotel, or indicating that the manager's primary concern was the hotel's reputation and business but not the customers' well-being or satisfaction. In other words, the Self-promoting move failed to fulfil reviewers' interactional goals and the hotel's obligations. Extract 10 mentions a hotel's achievement that did not bear any direct relevance to the issue raised by the reviewer.

Extract 10

We must be doing something right as we have consistently been rated by our guests from number 2 to number 4 out of more than 300 hotels in this city which is remarkable for a small place such as ours.

As presented in Section 2, studies that interrogated the move structures of managerial responses to comments given on the TripAdvisor platform includes Levy et al. (2013), Sparks and Bradley (2017), and Zhang and Vásquez (2014). Approaching the task from different orientations, these studies identified a number of moves that could be regarded as performing either the rapport-enhancing or rapport-challenging functions, as Table 3 below shows.

Table 3
Functions of moves.

	Present study	Levy et al. (2013)	Sparks and Bradley (2017)	Zhang and Vásquez (2014)
Rapport-enhancing	• Acknowledging Problem • Agreeing with Reviewer • Continuing Relationship • Expressing Feelings • Offering Assistance • Recognizing Reviewer's or Comment's Value • Thanking Reviewer	• Active Follow-up • Apology • Appreciation • Compensation • Correction • Explanation • Passive Follow-up • A Request for Future Patronage	• Acknowledgement: Thank, Appreciate, Apologize, Recognize, Admit, Accept, Dismiss • Action: Investigate, Referral, Rectify, Policy, Training, Direct Contact, Compensate	• Express Gratitude • Apologize for Sources of Trouble • Invitation for a Second Visit • Opening Pleasantries • Proof of Action • Acknowledge Complaints/Feedback • Refer to Customer Reviews • Closing Pleasantries • Avoidance of Reoccurring Problems • Solicit Responses
Rapport-challenging	• Accusing Reviewer • Denying Problem		• Account: Excuse, Justify, Reframe, Penitential, Denial	

While Sparks and Bradley (2017) also found moves that could challenge rapport with reviewers, the other two studies, however, only identified moves that could improve hotel's relationship with reviewers. The absence might be attributed to the different criteria for move identification used in the studies and to the fact that these two studies only examined a relatively limited scope of managerial responses ⊖ responses given to Terrible reviews (among Excellent, Very Good, Average, Poor, and Terrible) by hotels based in Washington D.C. (Levy et al., 2013), and responses by 4-/5-star Chinese hotels (Zhang and Vásquez, 2014). Both the clientele and managers responsible for addressing online comments were considerably less diverse than those in the present study which analysed responses given by 200 hotels of different star-ratings based in cities around the world.

5.2. Metadiscourse in rapport-managing moves

Table 4 below shows the abundance of the various metadiscourse sub-categories in the rapport-managing moves used in terms of normalized frequency (per 1000 words).

Before we proceed to a detailed discussion of the use of metadiscourse in the two types of rapport managing moves, let us address two phenomena common to all the hotels regardless of their star-ratings. First, interactive metadiscourse was used considerably less frequently than interactional metadiscourse ⊖ 84.3 vs 152.1, i.e. 80.4% less. A similar phenomenon has also been observed in studies of other text types including government policy documents ⊖ 48.6% less (Ho, 2016), professional workplace emails ⊖ 513% less (Ho, 2018), and newspaper opinion columns ⊖ 33.9% less (Dafouz-Milne, 2008). The varying

Table 4
Abundance of metadiscourse in rapport-enhancing and rapport-challenging moves.

	Rapport-enhancing	Rapport-challenging
Interactive		
Transitions	7.8	4.6
Frame markers	62.4	5
Endophoric markers	0.6	1.6
Code glosses	0.6	1.7
Sub-total	71.4	12.9
Total	84.3	
Interactional		
Hedges	10.8	4
Boosters	12.3	8.1
Attitude markers	25.3	1.3
Self mentions	16.4	1.8
Engagement markers	69.3	2.8
Sub-total	134.1	18
Total	152.1	

degrees of difference suggests the specificity of text types in terms of metadiscourse use. This aspect of text specificity is further supported by the fact that more interactive metadiscourse was used in such other text types as postgraduate dissertations (Hyland, 2004; Li and Wharton, 2012) and letters of commercial company CEOs and directors (Hyland, 1998).

Recalling that interactive metadiscourse serves to help the reader to navigate through the text, its relatively infrequent use would mean that the hotel managers believed the readers of the responses could follow and understand the responses without much assistance. The extremely low frequency of use of two interactive metadiscourse sub-categories in the responses ⊖ endophoric markers and code glosses ⊖ would best illustrate the manager's belief. The scarcity suggests the managers believed that the readers would be able to locate the necessary information (hence the rare use of endophorics) or understanding key terms used (hence the rare use of code glosses) in the responses. This should not be surprising given the short average length of the responses ⊖ ranging from 129 words to 180 words that can normally be packed into 9 to 12 lines on a standard A4-size sheet. Readers should normally not encounter any difficulty in locating specific pieces of information in a text of this length which is generally manageable. The rare use of code glosses should also be understandable as the managers were mainly addressing the issues raised by the reviewers so the terms used in the responses should be familiar to the latter. Even when the managers were bringing up some points which bore no direct relevance to the reviewers' comments, they were mainly referring to various aspects of their hotels like the awards won, the facilities and services, and future promotional activities or offers (e.g. Move 10 Self-promoting, please refer to Section 5.1.2 above). Readers would normally not find those points difficult to understand. Similar observations concerning the infrequent use of endophorics and code glosses have been made in a study of workplace emails where the conciseness of the text and the email sender's intention to make appeal to pathos were argued to be the respective reason for the infrequent use of endophorics and code glosses (Ho, 2018).

The second common phenomenon was that seven of the nine metadiscourse sub-categories used recorded a higher frequency in rapport-enhancing moves than in rapport-challenging moves (except endophoric markers and code glosses). The degree of significance and implications of these differences observed will be discussed below.

5.2.1. Metadiscourse in rapport-managing moves in hotels across different star-ratings

Table 5 shows the distribution of these metadiscourse categories across hotels of different star-ratings.

Independent samples Kruskal⊖Wallis test was run to determine the statistical significance of the observed differences in the frequency of use of various metadiscourse sub-categories in the rapport-enhancing and rapport-challenging moves

among hotels of different star-ratings. Significant differences were only found in two metadiscourse sub-categories in

Table 5
Distribution of metadiscourse in rapport-enhancing (emboldened) and rapport-challenging (italicised) moves across hotels of different star-ratings.

	2-star		3-star		4-star		5-star	
Interactive								
Transitions	2.1	*1.4*	1.6	*1.0*	2.4	*1.4*	1.7	*0.8*
Frame markers	16.0	*0.6*	15.1	*2.0*	12.1	*1.5*	19.2	*0.9*
Endophoric markers	0.2	*1.5*	0.1	*0.1*	0.1	*0.0*	0.2	*0.0*
Code glosses	0.3	*0.0*	0.0	*0.9*	0.3	*0.6*	0.0	*0.2*
Total	18.6	*3.5*	16.8	*4.0*	14.9	*3.5*	21.1	*1.9*
Interactional								
Hedges	2.6	*1.4*	2.1	*0.9*	3.3	*1.2*	2.8	*0.5*
Boosters	2.0	*1.4*	3.1	*2.1*	2.9	*2.8*	4.3	*1.8*
Attitude markers	5.0	*0.0*	8.1	*0.5*	5.8	*0.6*	6.4	*0.2*
Self mentions	1.6	*0.0*	4.2	*0.5*	4.6	*0.7*	6.0	*0.6*
Engagement markers	16.6	*0.3*	12.2	*0.9*	16.1	*1.1*	24.4	*0.5*
Sub-total	27.8	*3.1*	29.7	*4.9*	32.7	*6.4*	43.9	*3.6*

rapport-enhancing moves e engagement markers (between 3-star and 5-star hotels, p 0,000) and frame markers (between 4-star and 5-star hotels, p 0.013), with the median values of the 5-star hotels larger than those of the 3-star and 4-star hotels. This indicates that managers of 5-star hotels, in their attempt to enhance rapport with reviewers, had a higher ten- dency to engage with the readers and to signal clearly what discourse acts they were about to perform in the responses than those of 3-star and 4-star hotels respectively. This difference could be attributed to the different clientele of hotels of different star-ratings. Customers of 5-star hotels might expect more attention from the managers (resulting in the more frequent use of engagement markers which shows the managers' stronger willingness and eagerness to attend to the customer and involving them as a discourse participant). They might also expect a clearer indication of the managers' intended discursive acts including a topic shift, an introduction of a list of reasons, or the intention to conclude (resulting in the more frequent use of frame markers). The managers of hotels of different star-ratings, however, did not show significant differences in their use of metadiscourse in rapport-challenging moves.

The above findings strongly suggest that managers of hotels of different star-ratings did not differ greatly in the degree to which they enhanced the effect of rapport-managing moves. Their degree of commitment to enhancing or challenging rapport, as a result, did not seem to differ to an extent that deserves our further scrutiny.

5.2.2. Metadiscourse in rapport-managing moves by hotels of the same star-rating

Managers of hotels of the same star-rating showed significant differences in their use of seven of the nine metadiscourse sub-categories in constructing rapport-enhancing and rapport-challenging moves. Table 6 below shows the presence/absence of statistically significant differences in the managers' use of metadiscourse in rapport-enhancing and rapport-challenging moves and the p values of those metadiscourse categories that show such a difference.

There are three interesting observations we can make from Table 6:

Table 6
Statistically significant differences in metadiscourse use in rapport-managing moves by hotels of the same star-rating (Y/N e Yes/No; p value in bracket).

	2-star	3-star	4-star	5-star
Interactional				
Engagement markers	Y (.000)	Y (.000)	Y (.000)	Y (.000)
Attitude markers	Y (.000)	Y (.000)	Y (.000)	Y (.000)
Self mentions	Y (.005)	Y (.002)	Y (.000)	Y (.000)
Hedges	N	N	Y (.013)	Y (.007)
Boosters	N	N	N	Y (.015)
Interactive				
Frame markers	Y (.000)	Y (.000)	Y (.000)	Y (.000)
Transitions	N	N	N	Y (.033)
Endophorics	N	N	N	N
Code glosses	N	N	N	N

1) Among the 36 comparisons made (9 metadiscourse sub-categories x 4 hotel star-ratings), 20 of them showed highly significant differences, indicating a distinctive stronger tendency for hotel managers to use metadiscourse when they attempted to enhance rapport with reviewers. This is consistent with studies of managerial responses in that more rapport-enhancing moves than rapport-challenging moves were identified, as Table 2 above shows;

2) Four metadiscourse sub-categories recorded a statistically significant higher frequency of use by managers of hotels of all the four different star-ratings in their rapport-enhancing moves than in rapport-challenging moves. These sub-categories are: engagement markers, attitude markers, self mentions, and frame markers. In other words, managers tended to appeal to reviewers' feelings and emotions by drawing them directly into the discourse (with engagement markers), and sharing with them their own stance and attitudes (with attitude markers). The managers' personal involvement in these two acts

was highlighted by the use of first person pronouns (with self mentions). The effect of the appeal to pathos as achieved by the rapport-enhancing moves was then strengthened as a result. With frame markers, managers could make it clear to readers their intention, telling them what discourse acts they were about to perform (e.g. to conclude, to request), and the sequence of events that had happened or list of things that they wanted the readers to pay attention to (e.g. first, finally, next). Its higher frequency of use in the rapport-enhancing moves suggests managers' desire to make the ideational meaning of the moves explicit to the readers in order to make more effective appeal to rationality. Extracts 11 to 14 below illustrate the use of these four metadiscourse markers in the rapport-enhancing moves of the responses (metadiscourse emboldened):

Extract 11 (Metadiscourse: Engagement marker; Move: Acknowledging Problem)
Please note that we have addressed both feedbacks with the team, to avoid any future inconvenience.

Extract 12 (Metadiscourse: Attitude marker; Move: Acknowledging Problem)
Unfortunately, we fell short of our goal in regards of food quality/variety.

Extract 13 (Metadiscourse: Self mention; Move: Expressing Feeling and Continuing Relationship)
… hope to hear back as I would like to get more details.

Extract 14 (Metadiscourse: Frame marker; Move: Thanking Reviewer)
Once again, we thank you for taking the time to share with us your experience.

3) The other three metadiscourse sub-categories recorded a statistically significant higher frequency of use in rapport-enhancing moves than in rapport-challenging moves by hotels of higher star-ratings �

e hedges in 4- and 5-star hotels, and transitions and boosters in 5-star hotels. It suggests that hotels of higher star-ratings were even more eager to enhance rapport than to challenge rapport with customers. With hedges and boosters, they attempted to strike a balance between being authoritative, sounding certain and accommodating, sounding reserved in order to establish their own credibility. With transitions, they allowed reviewers to follow the flow and development of their responses more easily. This helped to appeal to their own rationality. Extracts 15 to 17 illustrate the use of hedges, boosters, and transitions in the rapport-enhancing moves of the responses given by managers of 4- or 5-star hotels.

Extract 15 (Metadiscourse: Hedge; Move: Continuing Relationship)
I hope therefore that you may allow me to speak with you to ascertain a little more information on your preference.

Extract 16 (Metadiscourse: Booster; Move: Expressing Feeling)
I really do hope that we may have the chance to welcome you back in the future.

Extract 17 (Metadiscourse: Transition; Move: Agreeing with Reviewer, Thanking Reviewer)
I reckon that we were perhaps not the perfect choice for you, though I am grateful for you for recognising your visit

The above observations ⏤ the more frequent use of metadiscourse in constructing rapport-enhancing than in rapport-challenging moves, thereby producing a more profound effect of the appeals to pathos ⏤ allow us to see that managers exhibited differing degrees of commitment to their acts of rapport-enhancement and rapport-challenge ⏤ they committed themselves to enhancing rapport to a considerably larger extent than to challenging rapport. The fact that hotels of higher-star ratings show a stronger degree of commitment to their acts of rapport-enhancement than those of rapport-challenge might also be explained by the fact that they are serving a clientele that differs from that of hotels of lower star-rating. Their customers, who pay a considerably larger amount of money for the accommodation service than those of hotels of lower star-ratings, would normally expect not only a higher quality of accommodation services, but also more effective communication with the hotel management. The latter expectation would translate into requiring hotel managers to construct their messages more tactfully (thus a higher frequency of use of hedges and boosters to show reservation and emphasis respectively) and clearly and reader-friendly (thus a higher frequency of use of transitions to make the logical relationship between clauses).

Previous studies of metadiscourse have primarily been concerned with the way the interactive and interactional meta-discourse has been used to enhance the persuasiveness of a text. For example, the interactive metadiscourse sub-categories transitions, code glosses, and frame markers were employed frequently in PhD theses as writers had a clear reader orientation and made an attempt to organize the discourse of the theses to allow readers to understand more readily (Hyland, 2004). Interactional metadiscourse has been demonstrated to play a key role in more successful undergraduate argumentative essays as they allowed the writers to strike a balance between caution and certainty more effectively, to clearly express stance, and to mark personal attitudes (Lee and Deakin, 2016). However, no attempt has been made to explore the role of meta-discourse in rapport management. The study, probably the only one, that has investigated both the use of metadiscourse and management of rapport in the review response genre did provide some support to the findings in points (2) and (3) above ⏤ it found that six metadiscourse sub-categories had a higher abundance in managerial responses that were perceived as effective by experienced travellers and users of TripAdvisor: transitions, code glosses, boosters, attitude markers, self mentions, and engagement markers (Ho, 2018).

Table 7 summarizes the distribution of such differences among hotels of different star-ratings.

Table 7
Distribution of statistically significant differences.

	Distribution A	Distribution B
2-star 3-star	Attitude markers Self mentions	
4-star	Engagement markers	
		Hedges
5-star	Frame markers	Boosters, Hedges, Transitions

5.3. Metadiscourse at work

Two extracts of the managerial responses containing rapport-enhancing and rapport-challenging moves interspersed with metadiscourse will be presented below to illustrate how metadiscourse could help enhance the effect of the rapport-enhancing moves by making appeals to logos, ethos, and pathos one the one hand (achieved by Extract 18), and highlight the low level of commitment to rapport challenge on the other (achieved by Extract 19). The differing degree of commitment to rapport enhancement and rapport challenge will then be revealed. The metadiscourse markers are highlighted and the responses are tabulated for clearer illustration.

The extract below shows how a customer's complaint about the unpleasant conditions of the hotel room that s/he had stayed in can be addressed.

Extract 18

The response	Metadiscourse	Moves
Thank you -	● Engagement marker	1. Thanking Reviewer
your point of view is very helpful for us to improve our service to meet our guests' expectations even better.	● Engagement marker	2. Recognizing Comment's Value
I am indeed very happy to see that you enjoyed a nice breakfast at our restaurant.	● Self mention ◗ Booster ◗ Attitude marker	3. Expressing Feelings
On the other hand it would be great to convince you also with regards to our room product, ventilation and bedding.	● Transition ◗ Hedge ◗ Attitude marker ◗ Engagement marker	4. Denying Problem
It is a shame that you could not enjoy your overall stay with us.	● Attitude marker	5. Expressing Feelings
Please be assured that I have already spoken to my staff and shared your comments,	● Engagement marker	6. Acknowledging Problem
for us it would be very helpful if we know the room you have stayed in so we can renovate it and take care of the broken air-conditioning.	● Hedge	7. Acknowledging Problem
Thank you again for your feedback.	● Frame marker ◗ Engagement marker	8. Thanking Reviewer
I hope you do accept my sincere apology	● Self mention ◗ Engagement marker ◗ Booster	9. Acknowledging Problem
and that we will have the chance to welcome you again.	● Engagement marker	10. Expressing Feeling

Please feel free to contact me or Susan Smith, my secretary, at any time.

We are very much looking forward to your next stay with us.

● Self mention   11. Continuing
Relationship
12. Expressing Feeling

The manager in the extract did care a lot about the relationship between the reviewer and him-/herself or the hotel ꟷ 11 of the 12 moves were rapport-enhancing, constituting, and thus explaining, the huge difference in abundance between rapport-enhancing and rapport-challenging moves as reported at the beginning of Section 5.1. Let us see below how metadiscourse could enhance the strength of the rapport-enhancing moves by looking at the way the appeals to logos, ethos and pathos were made.

Appeals to logos, ethos and pathos have been made repeatedly throughout the whole extract, with pathos receiving the most attention and logos the least. To appeal to pathos, the manager throughout the whole response attempted to involve the reviewer by drawing him/her directly into the discourse with tokens of engagement markers ꟷ "you" and "your". The reviewer would then probably feel that s/he was being respected ꟷ s/he was thanked twice (see Moves 1 and 2), his/her act of commenting was acknowledged and appreciated twice (see Moves 6 and 8), his/her decision or feeling was valued (see Move 9), and s/he was a popular and important person (see Move 10). The manager also attempted to appeal to the reviewer's feelings and emotions by expressing his/her own towards the phenomena described with attitude markers. S/he was "very happy" as the reviewer had enjoyed breakfast at the hotel (see Move 3), s/he felt it would be "great" for him/her to have the chance to say how good the services provided by the hotel actually were (see Move 4), and s/he felt that it was "a shame" that the reviewer could not get the highest level of enjoyment while staying at the hotel (see Move 5). The effect of the attitude markers and engagement markers has indeed been strengthened on two occasions ꟷ the manager resorted to the use of boosters ꟷ "indeed" and "do" ꟷ to emphasize his degree of happiness (see Move 3) and his desire for the reviewer to forgive him/her or the hotel (see Move 9). The engaging of the reviewer, expressing of attitude, and adding of emphasis would result in more persuasive and effective rapport-enhancing moves as perceived by the reviewer whose feelings and emotions have been aroused.

Ethos was appealed to in two ways. First, s/he showed the reviewer that s/he was an accountable person who was willing to commit to his/her own opinion or willing to handle further enquiries or complaints him-/herself with self mentions either in combination with other metadiscourse sub-categories (see the use of "I" in Moves 3 and 9) or alone (see the use of "me" in Move 10). Second, s/he showed tenderness towards the reviewer's feelings with an act of hedging while attempting to challenge rapport with the reviewer in Move 4 or to enhance rapport in Move 7. On the rapport-challenging occasion (Move 4), the manager minimized the imposition on the reviewer by using "would", indicating that the reviewer was given the option not to be subjected to the manager's act of convincing. On the rapport-enhancing occasion (Move 7), the manager was acknowledging the problem being complained about by making a highly indirect request for more information which s/he thought would help the hotel to improve. His/her use of the hedge "would" signal to the reviewer that s/he was given the option not to provide the additional information requested (see Move 7). The manager should then be able to appeal to ethos with the use of self mentions and hedges which, in turn, would enhance the persuasiveness and effectiveness of the rapport-enhancing moves.

Only two attempts at logos appeal were made, one with a token of transition markers ꟷ "On the other hand" ꟷ in the only rapport-challenging move (see Move 4), and the other one of frame markers ꟷ "again" ꟷ in a rapport-enhancing move (see Move 8). Move 4, immediately following the manager's expression of a positive attitude in Move 3 ꟷ "I am indeed very happy", functioned to deny the problems complained about (that the room was old, the air-conditioner could not be turned off, and the non-provision of duvets even when requested) by implicitly saying that it was possible for the manager to provide evidence to show that the problems were not as described or even non-existent. The reviewer was forewarned of such a change of mood by the transition. The manager was therefore in fact preparing the reviewer for such a challenge, thus softening it in effect, with the transition. In other words, the transition used in this single instance functioned not only to make explicit the relations between main clauses (Moves 3 and 4), which would contribute to the appeal to logos, but also to appeal to the manager's own character as being a considerate person who was willing to prepare the reviewer for an act which would not be a desirable one. The appeals to logos and ethos would result in enhanced persuasiveness and effectiveness of the rapport-enhancing moves. Move 8 served to emphasize to the reader the manager's high level of sincerity when he expressed gratitude for the feedback given on TripAdvisor with the frame marker "again". This metadiscourse token explicitly signalled to the reader that the manager had just performed the discourse act "Thank you" the second time in the same text. In other words, it reminded the reviewer that the manager had already expressed gratitude earlier (Move 1). This frame marker, then, served to provide signpost to the reviewer helping him/her to appreciate the intention of the manager ꟷ to thank him/her, emphasizing the rapport-enhancing effect of the move by strengthening the appeal to pathos.

The extract shows that the metadiscourse used in the rapport-enhancing moves all functioned to make the text more persuasive, which in turn, would further strengthen the appeal to pathos made as a result of the performing of the rapport enhancement acts. This strongly suggests the manager's willingness to commit him-/herself to the acts. The manager's use of metadiscourse in the rapport-challenging move as we just observed above, however, seemed to reflect his/her limited commitment to the act. In fact, it suggests the manager's desire to soften the challenge to rapport ꟷ s/he was preparing the reviewer for such a challenge with the transition "On the other hand". The absence of full commitment and the attempt at preparing the reviewer for the challenge to rapport provide partial support to the observation that the rapport-challenging act could in fact serve purposes other than making the challenge itself (Ho, 2017b).

Extract 19 is part of a response addressing a criticism of the bed (being a queen but not a king bed) and size (being small) of the room the customer had stayed in. Unlike Extract 18, it contains more rapport-challenging moves than rapport-enhancing ones.

Extract 19

The response	Metadiscourse	Moves
Unfortunately, no rooms with King sized beds were available for us to offer you as an upgrade.	● Attitude marker	1. Acknowledging Problem
We are saddened to find the room was not to your liking	● Attitude marker	2. Expressing Feeling
but it is worth noting that our rooms vary in size, the average being 225 square feet as stated to you; however, our rooms with King size beds are 250ᴇ260 square feet.	● Transition	3. Denying Problem
We are also very transparent about what we offer ᴇ there is an abundant amount of information about our rooms on our website, accurate pictures, floor plans and dimensions. In our smaller rooms, our flat screen televisions are smaller to conserve space.	● Code gloss	4. Self promoting
I know that not everyone has time to read the details of what they are booking.	● Self mention	5. Accusing Reviewer

The level of the hotel management's stronger commitment to enhancing rapport than challenging it can be seen from the amount of work done in enhancing the rapport management effect of the two types of moves in Extracts 18 and 19. While Extract 18 above contains predominantly rapport-enhancing moves whose strength was enhanced by up to three instances of use of metadiscourse, Extract 19 contains more rapport-challenging moves, and the strength of each of them was enhanced by only one instance of use of metadiscourse. Appeal to logos was made with "however", a token of transition, in Move 3 and a dash ("-"), a token of code gloss, in Move 4. Appeal to ethos was made with the self mention "I" in Move 5.

6. Conclusion

While rapport management has been studied extensively since the introduction of the concept of rapport more than 15 years ago (Spencer-Oatey and Jiang, 2003), the focus has mainly been on the strategies used in managing rapport (e.g. Clark et al., 2003; Planken, 2005; Gordon and Luke, 2012). Few, if any, studies have specifically aimed to identify the strategies or resources that individuals can use to strengthen or weaken the rapport-managing effect, be it enhancing or challenging, of the strategies used, or to re-examine rapport management from a meta perspective, that is, what exactly an individual is doing while s/he is said to be managing rapport. It follows that we have not yet been able to take a step further to examine the individuals' commitment to their act of enhancing or challenging rapport.

What is also missing from the literature, surprisingly, is the link between metadiscourse and rapport management, or more precisely, the role of metadiscourse in rapport management. A relatively large proportion of metadiscourse research concerns, among others, the identification of the characteristic patterns of use of metadiscourse by individuals of different academic disciplines (e.g. Hu and Cao, 2015; Khedri et al., 2013), of different first languages (e.g. Ådel, 2006; Li and Wharton, 2012), at different stages of knowledge pursuit (e.g. Crossley et al., 2016; Lancaster, 2016), and different writing proficiencies (e.g. Ho and Li, 2018; Lee and Deakin, 2016). The first study that put metadiscourse and rapport management together was probably Ho (2018) who identified the characteristics of rapport management strategies and persuasive strategies (as constituted by metadiscourse use) used in effective managerial responses to negative online comments. However, no attempt was made to directly relate metadiscourse to rapport management.

The present study has taken the previous research endeavour a step forward by (1) arguing that appealing to pathos is the meta strategy for managing rapport; (2) establishing the link between metadiscourse and rapport management e meta-discourse can further enhance the rapport-managing effects of the relevant moves, i.e. the strength of the appeals to pathos, by making appeals to logos (the rationality of the manager or the response s/he has written), ethos (the credibility and character of the manager), and pathos (the feelings and emotions of the reviewers); and (3) showing how metadiscourse can further strengthen the rapport-enhancing effect and weaken the rapport-challenging effect of the moves.

While previous studies of the review response genre have argued that the inclusion of components like referential explanation and apology, the use of a lengthier response, and the expression of attentiveness were characteristic of responses given by higher-rating hotels (Sparks and Fredline, 2007; Xie et al., 2017; Yavas et al., 2004), the present study took a step further and showed that managers of hotels of higher ratings were more committed to their act of rapport enhancement than rapport challenge, and such different degree of commitment was achieved with the pattern of use of metadiscourse in the rapport-enhancing and rapport-challenging moves.

The present study will have significant contribution to both the theoretical and practical fronts. Theoretically, it has proposed that making appeals to pathos is the meta strategy for rapport management, allowing us to investigate and appreciate the role of metadiscourse in rapport management. On the practical front, the findings will make excellent reference for hotel managers who are responsible for dealing with customers' complaints and criticisms on TripAdvisor and other travel websites. It is also highly possible that the findings can be extended well beyond the hotel industry to other services industries that need to address online comments.

The present study, despite the significant contribution as discussed above, can be further improved in two ways. First, apart from analysing the data from the researcher's perspective, two important discourse participants of the managerial responses e the managers (or the personnel as designated or commissioned by the hotel management) writing the responses and the customers (old and potential) reading the responses e can be interviewed to find out why the managers wrote the responses in the way they did and how the customers perceived the effectiveness of the managers' rapport management attempts. Second, responses written in a language other than English (e.g. Chinese) on a platform other than TripAdvisor (e.g. CTrip) can also be analysed to investigate first cross-linguistic differences, and second the possible effect of using English as a lingua franca in writing the managerial responses.

References

Ådel, Annelie, 2006. Metadiscourse in L1 and L2 English. John Benjamins Publishing Company, Amsterdam/Philadelphia.

Ådel, Annelie, 2011. Rapport building in student group work. J. Pragmat. 43, 2932e2947.

Abdollahzadeh, Esmaeel, 2011. Poring over the findings: interpersonal authorial engagement in applied linguistics papers. J. Pragmat. 43, 288e297.

Bhatia, Vijay, 1993. Analysing Genre: Language Use in Professional Settings. Longman, London.

Bhatia, Vijay, 2004. Worlds of Written Discourse: A Genre-Based View. Continuum, London, New York.

Biber, Douglas, Connor, Ulla, Upton, Thomas (Eds.), 2007. Discourse on the Move: Using Corpus Linguistics to Describe Discourse Structure. John Benjamins, Amsterdam.

Clark, Colin, Drew, Paul, Pinch, Trevor, 2003. Managing prospect affiliation and rapport in real-life sales encounters. Discourse Stud. 5 (1), 5e31.

Crossley, Scott, Kyle, Kristopher, McNamara, Danielle, 2016. The development and use of cohesive devices in L2 writing and their relations to judgments of essay quality. J. Sec Lang. Writ. 32, 1e16.

Dafouz-Milne, E., 2008. The pragmatic role of textual and interpersonal metadiscourse markers in the construction and attainment of persuasion: a cross-linguistic study of newspaper discourse. J. Pragmat. 40 (1), 95e113.

DMR, 2018. https://expandedramblings.com/index.php/tripadvisor-statistics/. (Accessed 11 September 2018).

Fletcher, Jeannie, 2014. Social communities in a knowledge enabling organizational context: interaction and relational engagement in a community of practice and a micro-community of knowledge. Discourse Stud. 8 (4), 351e369.

Gordon, Cynthia, Luke, Melissa, 2012. Discursive negotiation of face via email: professional identity development in school counselling supervision. Ling. Educ. 23, 112e122.

Gu, Bin, Ye, Qiang, 2014. First step in social media: measuring the influence of online management responses on customer satisfaction. Prod. Oper. Manag. 23 (4), 570e582.

Ho, Victor, 2016. Discourse of persuasion: a preliminary study of the use of metadiscourse in policy documents. Text Talk 36 (1), 1e21.

Ho, Victor, 2017a. Giving offence and making amends: how hotel management attempts to manage rapport with dissatisfied customers. J. Pragmat. 109, 1e11.

Ho, Victor, 2017b. Achieving service recovery through responding to negative online reviews. Discourse Commun. 11 (1), 31e50.

Ho, Victor, 2018. Exploring the effectiveness of hotel management's responses to negative online comments. Lingua 216, 47e63.

Ho, Victor, 2019. Hotel management's attempts at repairing customers' trust: the use of apology and denial. Pragmat. Soc. 10 (4), 493e511.

Ho, Victor, Li, Cissy, 2018. The use of metadiscourse and persuasion: an analysis of first year university students' timed argumentative essays. J. Engl. Acad. Purp. 33, 53e68.

Hu, Guangwei, Cao, Feng, 2015. Disciplinary and paradigmatic influences on interactional metadiscourse in research articles. Engl. Specif. Purp. 39, 12e25.

Hyland, Ken, 1998. Exploring corporate rhetoric: metadiscourse in CEO's letter. J. Bus. Commun. 35 (2), 224e245.

Hyland, Ken, 2004. Disciplinary interactions: metadiscourse in L2 postgraduate writing. J. Sec Lang. Writ. 13, 133e151.

Hyland, Ken, 2005. Metadiscourse. Continuum, London; New York.

Hyland, Ken, 2008. Persuasion, interaction and the construction of knowledge: representing self and others in research writing. Int. J. Engl. Stud. 8 (2), 1e23.

Khedri, Mohsen, Heng, Chan, Ebrahimi, Seyed, 2013. An exploration of interactive metadiscourse markers in academic research article abstracts in two disciplines. Discourse Stud. 15 (3), 319e331.

Lancaster, Zak, 2016. Expressing stance in undergraduate writing: discipline specific and general qualities. J. Engl. Acad. Purp. 23, 16e30.

Lee, Joseph, Deakin, Lydia, 2016. Interactions in L1 and L2 undergraduate student writing: interactional metadiscourse in successful and less-successful argumentative essays. J. Sec Lang. Writ. 33, 21e34.

Levy, Stuart, Duan, Wenjing, Boo, Soyoung, 2013. An analysis of one-star online reviews and responses in the Washington, D.C., lodging market. Cornell Hosp. Q. 54 (1), 49e63.

Li, Chunyu, Cui, Geng, Peng, Ling, 2017. The signalling effect of management response in engaging customers: a study of the hotel industry. Tourism Manag. 62, 42e53.

Li, Ting, Wharton, Sue, 2012. Metadiscourse repertoire of L1 Mandarin undergraduates writing in English: a cross-contextual, cross-disciplinary study. J. Engl. Acad. Purp. 11, 345e356.

Liu, Xianwei, Schuckert, Markus, Law, Rob, 2015. Can response management benefit hotels? Evidence from Hong Kong hotels. J. Trav. Tourism Market. 32 (8), 1069e1080.

Maíz-Arévalo, Carmen, García, Antonio, 2013. 'You look terrific!' Social evaluation and relationships in online compliments. Discourse Stud. 15 (6), 735e760.

Mazzarol, Tim, Sweeney, Jillian, Soutar, Geoffrey, 2007. Conceptualizing word-of-mouth activity, triggers and conditions: an exploratory study. Eur. J. Market. 41, 1475e1494.

Mur-Dueñas, Pilar, 2011. An intercultural analysis of metadiscourse features in research articles written in English and in Spanish. J. Pragmat. 43, 3068e3079.

O'Connor, Peter, 2010. Managing a hotel's image on TripAdvisor. J. Hospit. Market. Manag. 19, 754e772.

Page, Ruth, 2014. Saying 'sorry': corporate apologies posted on Twitter. J. Pragmat. 62, 30e45.

Planken, Brigitte, 2005. Managing rapport in lingua franca sales negotiations: a comparison of professional and aspiring negotiators. Engl. Specif. Purp. 24 (4), 381e400.

Smith, Robert, 1993. Integrating information from advertising and trial: processes and effects on consumer response to product information. J. Market. Res. 30, 204e219.

Sparks, Beverly, Bradley, Graham, 2017. A "triple A" typology of responding to negative consumer-generated online reviews. J. Hospit. Tourism Res. 41 (6), 719e745.

Sparks, Beverly, Fredline, Liz, 2007. Providing an explanation for service failure: context, content, and customer responses. J. Hospit. Tourism Res. 31 (2), 241e260.

Sparks, Beverly, So, Kevin, Bradley, Graham, 2016. Responding to negative online reviews: the effects of hotel responses on customer inferences of trust and concern. Tourism Manag. 53, 74e85.

Spencer-Oatey, Helen (Ed.), 2008. Culturally Speaking: Culture, Communication and Politeness Theory. Continuum, London, New York.

Spencer-Oatey, Helen, Jiang, Wenying, 2003. Explaining cross-cultural pragmatic findings: moving from politeness maxims to sociopragmatic interactional principles (SIPs). J. Pragmat. 35 (10/11), 1633e1650.

Swales, John, 1990. Genre Analysis: English in Academic and Research Settings. Cambridge University Press, Cambridge.

Swales, John, 2004. Research Genres: Exploration and Applications. Cambridge University Press, Cambridge.

Tax, Stephen, Brown, Stephen, Chandrashekaran, Murali, 1998. Customer evaluations of service complaint experiences: implications for relationship marketing. J. Market. 62 (2), 60e76.

Tse, Polly, Hyland, Ken, 2006. So what is the problem this book addresses? Interactions in academic book reviews. Text Talk 26 (6), 767e790.

Xie, Karen, So, Kevin, Wang, Wei, 2017. Joint effects of management responses and online reviews on hotel financial performance: a data-analytics approach. Int. J. Hospit. Manag. 62, 101e110.

Yavas, Ugur, Karatepe, Osman, Babakus, Emin, Avci, Turgay, et al., 2004. Customer complaints and organizational responses: a study of hotel guests in Northern Cyprus. J. Hospital. Leisure Market. 11 (2/3), 31e46.

Ye, Qiang, Gu, Bin, Chen, Wei, Law, Rob, 2008. Measuring the value of managerial responses to online reviews-A natural experiment of two online travel agencies. In: Proceedings of International Conference on Information Systems. Paris, pp. 1e8.

Zaugg, Alexandra, 2006. Online complaint management @Swisscom: a case study. Working Paper No. 183. Instituts fur Wirtschaftsinformatik der Universitat Bern, Bern.

Zhang, Yi, Vásquez, Camilla, 2014. Hotels' responses to online reviews: managing consumer dissatisfaction. Discourse Context Media 6, 54e64.

Victor Ho completed his PhD in linguistics at Macquarie University, Australia. He is currently Associate Professor in the Department of English, The Hong Kong Polytechnic University. His research interests include pragmatics, professional communication, and English for academic purposes. He has published in the Journal of Pragmatics, Discourse Studies, English for Academic Purposes, and Journal of Politeness Research.