Knowledge Sharing through Culturally Embedded Online Customer Behavior in the Era of Human-Centric Industry 5.0

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Abstract

In the era of human-centric Industry 5.0, the knowledge customers shared in the online environment becomes critical for company's competitiveness. However, little is known about the emotional knowledge customers shared and the influence of their mental models on the adopted behavior. The current research aims to determine how cultural specificity influences the emotional content of the hotel's online reviews and ratings. Thus, 5445 unique comments posted by customers from across 77 countries are analyzed. The results show that: (i) customers' emotions incorporated in online reviews positively influence hotel's ratings; (ii) the emotions shared through online reviews are positively influenced by customers' cultural specificity; and (iii) customers' cultural specificity influences hotel's ratings. The model has low predictive power, and the differences are significant when it comes to online ratings. These findings extend the hospitality literature and help managers understand customers' online behavior.

Key words: online reviews, ratings, cultural specificity, hospitality
J.E.L. classification: L83, M10, D83

1. Introduction

Unlike previous industrial revolutions which tried to eliminate or alienate people from the operational processes, focusing on standardization and digitalization, Industry 5.0 brings back humans in the center of attention. Thus, employees become the most important organizational resource due to their explicit and tacit knowledge while customers start to be actively involved in decision-making through co-creation and co-design activities. While plenty of studies emphasize the knowledge sharing strategies that could be used within the company's boundaries, enhancing knowledge dissemination among employees, little is known about the explicit and tacit knowledge that customers share with the business environment.

As Hemmington (2007, p.749) points out, customers' experience is multidimensional, especially in the hospitality industry, since they "do not but service delivery, they buy experiences; they do not buy service quality, they buy memories". In other words, it combines the cognitive component with the affective one; the former reunites tangible characteristics (such as, location, rooms design, cleanliness etc.) and is usually objectively evaluated while the latter describes intangible aspects (like, employees' helpfulness, comfort, value for the money etc.) and its evaluation is based on the mental representation of the attributes and benefits sought at a hotel. The development of this representation is currently fostered by individuals' decision of sharing their thoughts, feelings and beliefs in the online environment which takes the form of reviews and / or ratings. The former synthesizes customers' emotional knowledge while the latter is the result of an internal evaluation process.

Despite their influence on the purchase decision and online behavior, little is known about how they interact and how they are influenced by customers' cultural specificity. Hong et al. (2016) claim that the customers who belong to individualist cultures are more likely to deviate from the prior average rating and to express openly their emotions than those from collectivistic cultures while

Martin et al. (2017) take into account the cultural distance and show that tourists respond more negatively to high cultural distance hotel environments compared with the low cultural ones. Last but not least, Leon (2019) goes further and argues that detailed reviews tend to be provided by the guests who belong to a low-power distance culture, are collectivistic, are masculine, have a low uncertainty avoidance, are long-term orientated or are indulgent while the customers who tend to deviate from the prior average ratings come from high-power distance societies, are individualists, are feminists, belong to a high uncertainty avoidance culture, are long-term oriented or are indulgent. So, the focus is on performing a country-based analysis or on emphasizing the influence of one cultural dimension at a time. However, no customer comes from a single-cultural dimension culture and the hotel managers are put in a difficult situation when the behavior predicted by various cultural dimensions is contradictory. As aforementioned, the customers who come from a short-term oriented culture are expected to post negative reviews while those who belong to a collectivistic culture are expected to suppress their emotions. But what should a manager expect if the customers come from cultures that are collectivistic and short-term oriented? An answer to this question is provided by analyzing customers' cultural specificity. Unlike the other ways of viewing cultural differences, cultural specificity, and implicitly culture's "net effect" (Hofstede, 1981), brings forward the complexity of individuals' mental models and cognitions. In other words, cultural specificity defines individuals' ability to analyze reality based on systemic, structural, and goal-oriented mental models. This issue remains unexplored despite the fact that it has major importance for the service providers from the hospitality industry where cultural awareness is the cornerstone of sustainable competitive advantage, and the review aggregators that collect reviews from an international pool of customers.

Given the gaps identified in the hospitality literature, the current study aims to determine how cultural specificity influences the emotional content of the hotel's online reviews and ratings. In order to achieve this goal, the following objectives are pursued: (i) to analyze the reviews posted by hotel's customers; (ii) to measure the emotional content of each review; (iii) to determine the influence of reviews' emotional content on hotel's ratings; (iv) to analyze the influence of customers' cultural specificity on reviews' emotional content and ratings; and (v) to determine whether customers' cultural specificity could predict reviews' emotional content and ratings.

The current article is organized around five sections. Section 2 brings forward the theoretical model regarding the relationships established among cultural specificity, reviews emotional content and hotel ratings. Further, the methodological design is described and then the main results are highlighted. Section 5 closes the article by drawing several conclusions and future research directions.

2. Theoretical background

The existing literature emphasizes the key role of online reviews and ratings in the hospitality industry, but most of the time the focus is only on one of them. Vermeulen and Seegers (2009) claim that reviews increase customer awareness of hotels while Zhou et al. (2014) emphasize their effect on customer satisfaction and hotel performance. Furthermore, Gao et al. (2020) prove that positive hotel reviews have a strong influence on hotel brand reputation while Xie et al. (2016) emphasize that the effect of review quality lasts for a couple of quarters. On the other hand, several scholars (Radojevic et al., 2015; Viglia et al., 2016) concentrate on ratings and argue that a 1% increase in ratings can generate a 1.42% increase in revenues per room and a 7.5% increase in occupancy rate (Viglia et al., 2016).

In line with the congruity theory, which argues that people prefer to have consistency between their thoughts and actions, they assume that reviews' content matches the assigned rating. The two elements are seen as complementary; the former sheds light on the feelings and emotions that customers felt during the service delivery while the latter synthesizes, using a numeric and standardized format, the result of an evaluation process which analyzes whether customers' expectations and desires were met or not.

Despite the assumed dependency, some scholars (Antonio et al., 2018; Geetha et al., 2017; López Barbarosa et al., 2015) analyze the relationship between reviews' emotional content and ratings. Thus, López Barbarosa et al. (2015) analyze more than a million English written reviews of 3535 hotels from 7 cities and show that the percentage of positive reviews can predict the overall hotel

ratings. Furthermore, Antonio et al. (2018) make the difference between city and resort hotels and state that the text sentiment strength of a review is associated with the corresponding rating; hence, reviews' emotional content can be used for predicting the ratings. However, Geetha et al. (2017) claim that only 44% of the variation in customer ratings is explained by reviews' emotional content, for budget category hotels, and 21% of the variation in customer ratings is explained by reviews' emotional content, for premium category hotels. Despite the valuable insights provided by the previously developed studies, it must be mentioned that they tend to focus mainly on English written reviews; therefore, given customers' language ability, some differences may appear between the emotions expressed and the ratings. As Antonio et al. (2018) who focused on the reviews written in English, Spanish, and Portuguese point out, sometimes customers give low rates although their reviews are positive; the hotel managers should give special attention to these since they could either be fraudulent reviews or customers' attempt to adapt to prior opinions. Since those who had negative experiences are more likely to post detailed reviews and it is expected for those who write longer reviews to assign lower ratings (Leon, 2019), it can be stated that:

H1: The emotional content of online reviews positively influences the ratings.

Based on the theory of planned behavior, Dixit et al. (2019) state that individuals' decision of sharing publicly their experiences is influenced by subjective norms, ego involvement, perceived behavioral control and taking vengeance. In other words, before sharing their emotions, thoughts, and ideas in an online environment, individuals tend to determine whether: (i) their behavior will be approved or not by those who belong to the same social circle (subjective norms); (ii) the image they will display will be in accordance with how they usually define themselves (ego involvement); (iii) they are aware of the platforms where they can share their experiences (perceived behavioral control); and (iv) they can punish the company if they want to (taking vengeance). These elements describe what Hofstede (1981) generally labeled as "culture"; they bring forward "the collective programming of the mind which distinguishes the members of a group or category of people from others" (Hofstede, 1981, p.51). Thus, they emphasize the importance of cultural specificity which describes the concepts, constructs, and models that are specific to a group, and it highlights the fissures and connections that divide and reunite various populations. As Leon (2019) argues, cultural specificity emphasizes the myriad ways of living exhibited by a particular group of people, ways that are transmitted from one generation to another and which distinguish one group from others.

In line with these, several scholars decide to analyze the relationship between reviewers' culture and their reviews but only a few of them concentrate on the hotel industry. Previous studies (Leon, 2019; Wen et al., 2018) show that detailed reviews tend to be provided by hotel's guests who belong to a low-power distance culture, are collectivistic, are masculine, have a low uncertainty avoidance, are long-term oriented, or indulgent. Nevertheless, the aforementioned studies take into account one cultural dimension at a time and neglect the impact of cultural specificity. This reflects the global effect of all cultural dimensions, and it is based on the fact that "when all the cultural dimensions are considered together, each country is a heterogeneous cultural mosaic, with a unique and distinctive cultural profile" (Gupta et al., 2018, p. 227). Starting from these and in line with King et al. (2014, p.175) who sustain that "understanding these differences and being able to adapt the review process to meet these needs are critical to retailers so that they can design systems that provide this information in the best manner possible", it can be argued that:

H2: The emotions shared through online reviews are positively influenced by customers' cultural specificity.

Gao et al. (2018) claim that those who come from a high-power distance culture provide low ratings while Mariani and Predvoditeleva (2019) argue that the higher the levels of individualism, masculinity, uncertainty avoidance and power distance, the lower the hotel's online ratings. Moreover, Radojevick et al. (2017) emphasize the moderate effect of culture on hotel's ratings by demonstrating that, in about 95% of all possible cross-cultural combinations, culture is expected to have an impact of less than ±0.2 on ratings. Starting from these findings and taking into account the fact that online ratings are the result of an internal evaluation process based on a continuous comparison between the perceived reality and customers' expectations, values, and beliefs, it can be claimed that:

H3: Customers' cultural specificity negatively influences hotel's online ratings.

Nevertheless, according to Leon (2019) and Tseng (2017), the hotel guests who come from high-power distance culture, are individualists, are feminists, belong to a high uncertainty avoidance culture, are long-term oriented or indulgent tend to deviate from the prior average ratings. In other words, the ratings reflect not only customers' emotions during the accommodation but also the image they are willing to promote within the online community about themselves. Against this backdrop, customers may be willing to adjust their reviews and ratings in order to achieve congruity. Thus, the following hypothesis can be made:

H4: Customers' cultural specificity has a mediated effect on ratings through the emotional content of the review.

*Figure no. 1. Conceptual model*
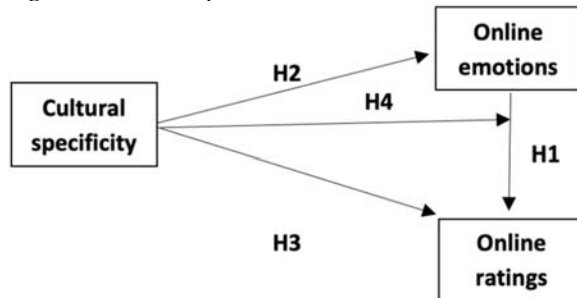
Source: Authors' own elaboration

Synthesizing, the conceptual model (Figure no. 1) is developed based on the relationships established among three variables, namely: (i) cultural specificity; (ii) the emotional content of online reviews; and (iii) online ratings.

3. Research methodology

The analysis focuses on analyzing the relationships established among three variables, namely: (i) cultural specificity; (ii) the emotions incorporated in online reviews; and (iii) online ratings. Thus, data collection and processing is a multistage process (Figure no. 2), and it is based on two sources, such as the Booking.com platform and Itim International (2017).

Figure no. 2. Data collection and processing
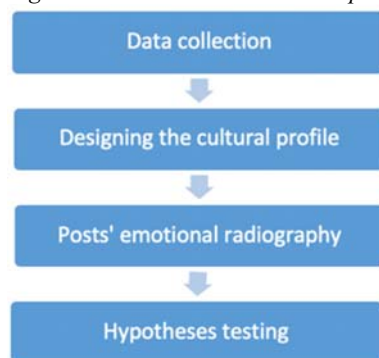
Source: Authors' own elaboration

Stage 1. Data collection: Using a web crawler, 5445 reviews, and 5575 ratings, posted from September 2022 until March 2025 on Booking.com, are extracted. This platform is chosen due to the fact that: (i) the reviews are 100% verified (only those who acquired the service through Booking.com can write a review and evaluate the service), and (ii) it was successfully used in previous studies (Mariani et al., 2019; Rodriguez Diaz & Espino-Rodriguez, 2018).

Given the research goal, the analysis concentrates only on those 5445 customers who decided not only to rate the hotel but also to present their experience in a comment. Data are organized around three criteria, such as: (i) customer's nationality; (ii) the rating provided by each customer for the hotel's services; and (iii) customer's comment. Preliminary results show that the hotel's customers came from 77 different countries and rated the service from 2.4 to 10, on a scale of 1 to 10.

Stage 2. Designing customers' cultural profile: A cultural profile is designed for each customer, using nationality as a proxy for cultural specificity (Alcántara-Pilar et al., 2017; Yates & de Oliviera, 2016). Although various differences appear among individuals, the national culture: (i) uniformly impacts the members of a society in a similar manner; (ii) it is based on the law of big numbers; and (iii) it reflects what is generally accepted within the society (Itim International, 2017; Hong et al., 2016).

Thus, cultural specificity is operationalized based on Hofstede's cultural dimensions and it focuses on: (i) power distance (PD); (ii) individualism (IDV); (iii) masculinity (MAS), (iv) uncertainty avoidance (UA); (v) long term orientation (LTO); and (vi) indulgence (IND). Data regarding countries' scores for each of these dimensions are retrieved from Itim International (2017).

Stage 3. Posts' emotional radiography: The 5445 reviews are either written in English or in customers' mother tongue. Each and every one of them is analyzed using Lexalytics® in order to determine its emotional content. This: (i) acts as an add-in for Excel; (ii) it uses Boolean queries, sentiment phrases, custom entities, and concept topics; and (iii) it is highly used in the hospitality, healthcare, and retail industries (Lexalytics, 2017). Besides, it is based on a lexicon and it makes the distinction among negative, neutral and positive emotions by providing an overall score that ranges from -1 (negative emotions) to 1 (positive emotions). Hence, at the end of this phase, each review has a score that indicates whether customers' emotions are positive, neutral, or negative.

Stage 4. Hypotheses testing: The relationships established among the research variables (cultural specificity, reviews' emotional content, and online rating) are analyzed. Within this framework, Partial Least Square – Structural Equation Modeling (PLS-SEM) is applied as: (i) it is a versatile technique, capable of testing path models (Marcoulides et al., 2009) and dealing with both formative and reflective constructs (Zhang, 2009). Besides, this approach is suitable for the current research due to the fact that: (i) the analysis is concerned with testing a theoretical framework from a prediction perspective and the assumed cause-and-effect relationships are not sufficiently explored (Hair et al., 2019); (ii) the research is based on secondary data (Hair et al., 2019; Henseler et al., 2018); and (iii) the path model includes formatively measured constructs (Hair et al., 2019). In other words, the use of PLS-SEM is appropriate because this study aims to extend an existing theory towards the new cross-cultural online behavior area and the causal relationships present a relatively new approach for the hospitality market.

Furthermore, in order to assess the statistical model's predictive power, PLSPredict is employed. This "offers a means to assess a model's out-of-sample predictive power (i.e. a model's accuracy when predicting the outcome value of new cases)" (Shmueli et al., 2019), and brings forward three dimensions, namely: (i) predicting construct versus manifest items; (ii) predicting in-sample versus out-of-sample cases; (iii) generating average-case prediction versus case-wise predictions. The predictive power of the model is established by comparing the root means squared error (RMSE) values of PLS-SEM and naïve linear regression model (LM) benchmark. Thus, according to Shmueli et al. (2019), the predictive power of the model is (i) zero if the RMSE values of PLS-SEM are smaller than those of LM for none of the indicators; (ii) low if the RMSE values of PLS-SEM are smaller than those of LM for a minority of the indicators; (iii) medium if the RMSE values of PLS-SEM are smaller than those of LM for a majority of the indicators; or (iv) high if the RMSE values of PLS-SEM are smaller than those of LM for all the indicators.

4. Findings

According to convergent validity, the measurement model is adequate. All items meet the acceptable limits suggested by Hair et al. (2014). Thus, the composite reliability is higher than 0.7 and the average variance extracted (AVE) overcomes the level of 0.5.

The model is also adequate if the discriminant validity is taken into consideration. As it can be observed from Table no. 1, the model complies with the Fornel Larcker criterion and also with the Heterotrait-Monotrait (HTMT) ratio of correlation criterion. According to the former, the model is valid due to the fact that the values of the diagonal elements are higher than other values in their respective rows and columns; thus, there are no correlations higher than AVE. According to the latter which measures the mean value of the item correlations across constructs relative to the geometric mean of the average correlations, the discriminant validity is not an issue due to the fact the value of the HTMT ratio is less than 0.85 (Henseler et al., 2015).

Table no. 1 Discriminant Validity

	Cultural specificity	**Online emotions**	**Online ratings**
Fornel Larcker criterion			
Cultural specificity	0.786		
Online emotions	0.442	1.000	
Online ratings	0.073	0.538	1.000
Heterotrait-Monotrait (HTMT) ratio of correlation criterion			
Cultural specificity			
Online emotions	0.383		
Online ratings	0.094	0.538	

Source: Authors' own elaboration

The results show that cultural specificity explains 19.5% of online emotional content variability while 32.3% of online rating variability can be explained by both cultural specificity and the emotional content of online reviews. In other words, cultural specificity influences both the emotions shared through online reviews and customers' ratings; besides, the rating is in accordance with customers' emotions.

Given the path coefficients, it can be stated: (i) if cultural specificity increases by one standard deviation from its mean, the emotions shared through online reviews would be expected to increase by 0.442 its own standard deviation from its own mean, while all the other constructs remain constant (t=7.218; p=0.001); (ii) if cultural specificity increases by one standard deviation from its mean, the online ratings would be expected to decrease by 0.205 its own standard deviation from its own mean, while all the other constructs remain constant (t=2.02; p=0.044); and (iii) if the emotions shared through online reviews increases by one standard deviation from its mean, online ratings would be expected to increase by 0.628 its own standard deviation from its own mean, while all the other constructs remain constant (t=8.973; p=0.001).

Nevertheless, it must be noticed that the emotions shared through online reviews are influenced by cultural specificity (they act as a dependent variable) and they influence online ratings (they serve as an independent variable). Therefore, if cultural specificity increases by one standard deviation from its mean, online ratings would be expected to increase its own standard deviation by at least 0.072 units; a decrease of 0.205 units would represent the direct effect that cultural specificity would have on online ratings while an increase of 0.277 units would represent the mediated effect. In other words, if cultural specificity increases by one standard deviation from its mean, the emotions shared through online reviews would be expected to increase by 0.442 its own standard deviation from its own mean; in turn, this will generate an increase by 0.277 units of online ratings. Furthermore, cultural specificity has a mediating effect of 0.28 on online ratings through the emotional content of the reviews.

Table no. 2 Testing the research hypothesis

Hypothesis	Relationship	St. dev.	T statistics	P values	Hypothesis validation
1	Online emotions -> Online ratings	0.07	8.973	0.001	Supported
2	Cultural specificity -> Online emotions	0.06	7.218	0.001	Supported
3	Cultural specificity -> Online ratings	0.10	2.019	0.044	Supported
4	Cultural specificity -> Online emotions -> Online ratings	0.05	4.810	0.000	Supported

Source: Authors' own elaboration

Hence, the four research hypotheses are validated (Table no. 2) since: (i) customers' emotions incorporated in online reviews positively influence hotel's online ratings (β=0.628; t=8.973; $p<0.05$); (ii) the emotions shared through online reviews are positively influenced by customers' cultural specificity (β=0.442; t=7.218; $p<0.05$); (iii) customers' cultural specificity negatively influences hotel's online ratings (β=-0.205; t=2.019; $p<0.05$), and (iv) cultural specificity has a positive mediating effect on online ratings through the emotional content of the reviews (β=0.28; t=4.81; $p<0.05$).

Table no. 3 PLSPredict assessment

Construct	PLS-SEM		LM		PLS-SEM - LM
	RMSE	$Q^2_{predict}$	RMSE	$Q^2_{predict}$	RMSE
Online emotions	0.413	0.164	0.406	0.194	0.007
Online ratings	1.886	-0.020	1.891	-0.026	-0.005

Source: Authors' own elaboration

The model's predictive power is tested using PLSPredict and according to data presented in Table no. 3, the model has a low prediction power. The constructs outperform the naïve benchmark only in the case of the online emotions ($Q^2_{predict} > 0$) and the differences between the RMSE values of PLS-SEM and those of naïve LM are negative only for one out of two constructs, namely, online ratings (PLS-SEM based RMSE=1.886; LM based RMSE=1.891).

5. Discussions and conclusions

The current research analyzes the influence of the cultural specificity on reviews' emotional content and customers' ratings. Thus, the main results show that: (i) reviews' emotional content has a positive influence on hotel's ratings; (ii) customers' cultural specificity influences both the emotions shared in a review and the ratings, but its direct effect is positive in the first case and negative in the second one; and (iii) customers' cultural specificity has a positive mediated effect on ratings through emotions. Furthermore, it brings forward that customers' positive emotions tend to be generated by the hotel's intangible assets (such as comfort and employees' attitude) while the negative emotions are related to tangible assets (like location and price).

Nevertheless, although the model has a low prediction power, the results indicate that online ratings produce a better prediction than the emotional content of customers' reviews. Hence, it is surmised that the model using online ratings is an efficient tool to explain customers' online behavior when cultural specificity is taken into account.

These findings have both theoretical and practical implications. At the theoretical level, the current research is situated at the nexus between cross-cultural management and hospitality management, and it emphasizes the influence of cultural specificity on customer online behavior (especially, reviews and ratings). Thus, it complements the findings of López Barbarosa et al. (2015) and Antonio et al. (2018) who argue that the percentage of positive reviews can predict the overall hotel ratings. On the one hand, it shows that reviews' emotional content has a positive influence on ratings. On the other hand, it goes further and emphasizes that the hotel's intangible assets generate positive emotions while the tangible ones tend to be associated with negative emotions. Unlike the aforementioned studies, it considers also the link between negative reviews and ratings, and it identifies their sources.

Furthermore, the current results are in line with Geetha et al. (2017) who state that the variation in customer ratings is explained by reviews' emotional content. However, they complement these findings by bringing forward the case of a standard/comfort category hotel. Thus, while Geetha et al. (2017) argue that reviews' emotional content explains 44% of the variation in customer ratings, for budget category hotels, and 21% of the variation in customer ratings, for premium category hotels, the current research shows that, in a standard/comfort category hotel, if the reviews' emotional content increases by one standard deviation, the ratings are expected to increase by 0.628. Moreover, the importance of cultural specificity is unveiled by highlighting that 32.30% of the variation in customer ratings is explained by reviews' emotional content and customers' cultural specificity.

Against this backdrop, it can be argued that the current research extends the literature from the hospitality field by bringing forward the net effect of cultural specificity. Unlike the previous studies which analyze the impact of each cultural dimension on the online customer behavior (Huang & Crotts, 2019; Leon, 2019; Mariani & Predvoditeleva, 2019), this study reveals the interdependences developed among the cultural dimensions. Thus, it asserts that online customer behavior (especially, reviews and ratings) is the result of these interdependencies and not a consequence of a certain cultural dimension. This approach is in line with Gupta et al. (2018, p.227) who specifies "when all the cultural dimensions are considered together, each country is a heterogeneous cultural mosaic, with a unique and distinctive cultural profile". Thus, an integrative perspective is required since no customer comes from a single cultural dimension society and the hotel managers have to understand their customers in order to better adapt to their requirements.

At the practical level, the current study emphasizes the elements on which hotel managers should concentrate on and it also helps them to understand why their customers behave differently in an online environment. Along, it facilitates managers' access to the cultural and behavioral profile of their customers, and it highlights several strengths and weaknesses from the customers' perspective. Yet, given these results, the hotel's managers could use this study as a starting point for:

- adapting their services to international customers' expectations. Knowing the elements that tend to generate positive emotions among customers and customers' cultural profile, the hotel managers can provide slightly personalized services. Since customers' cultural specificity has a positive influence on reviews' emotional content and the latter tends to be positive when associated with intangible assets such as employees' attitude, the hotel managers can recommend to their employees to pay special attention to those customers who have a high level of cultural specificity. Besides, they can design specific service packages for their customers, based on their cultural specificity.
- identifying fraudulent reviews. A significant difference between the emotional content of a review and its associated rating signalizes the presence of a fake review. This generates frustration (at the management and employees' level) and it also affects the hotel's image and reputation. Therefore, its identification helps managers deal with it promptly by understanding its content in a better way.

Furthermore, these results are also useful for review aggregators and online practitioners who must consider various approaches that encourage or deter certain online behavioral patterns.

Despite these findings, the research is limited by the fact that: (i) the analysis focuses on a single case-study, and (ii) it overlooks the influence that customers' language ability could have on their reviews. Therefore, future research can explore: (i) which other cultural factors (age, gender, religion, status) influence customers' emotions and ratings; (ii) why do customers decide to share their experiences in an online environment; and (iii) how does cultural specificity influence the expression of specific emotions (joy, anger, disappointment, excitement, etc.) in an online environment.

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7. References

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