

CULTURAL PRAGMATICS OF POLITENESS AND SENTIMENT IN INTERNATIONAL HOTEL REVIEWS FROM A TOURISM AND DIGITAL HERITAGE PERSPECTIVE

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Abstract

This study explored how international hotel guests constructed evaluative meaning and negotiated culturally grounded expectations through politeness strategies and sentiment expressions in *TripAdvisor* reviews. As online review writing had evolved into a contemporary socio-cultural practice within global tourism, travelers increasingly used digital platforms to articulate satisfaction, dissatisfaction, and interpretations of local hospitality values. These expressions were not merely evaluative but also reflected cross-cultural norms surrounding interpersonal warmth, service heritage, and context-specific communication styles. Drawing on Appraisal Theory, politeness theory, and digital pragmatics, this research examined a corpus of 500 English-language hotel reviews to identify how culturally shaped expectations influenced linguistic behaviour in digital evaluation. Using a mixed-method design, the study integrated Aspect-Based Sentiment Analysis (ABSA) with qualitative analysis of politeness markers to capture both computational and cultural dimensions of evaluative language. The findings revealed that positive reviews frequently employed intensifiers, affiliative expressions, and appreciation indices aligned with culturally informed perceptions of hospitality and relational closeness. In contrast, negative reviews often contained hedges, mitigations, and indirect formulations that served as face-saving strategies, particularly in discourse influenced by high-context communication norms. Cross-cultural comparisons further showed that Western reviewers tended to express dissatisfaction more directly, whereas Asian and Indonesian reviewers relied more on indirectness and gratitude expressions, illustrating culturally embedded preferences for interpersonal harmony and relational balance. Overall, the patterns indicated that online hotel reviews functioned as cultural artefacts that documented global diversity in hospitality perceptions and culturally mediated interactional behaviour.

Keywords: *cultural pragmatics, politeness strategies, sentiment analysis, hotel reviews, tourism discourse*

1. Introduction

Online review platforms such as *TripAdvisor* serve as vital sources of information for consumers and significantly influence service quality in the hospitality industry (Pang et al., 2025). Hotel reviews not only evaluate services but also reveal complex interpersonal interactions, where guests employ politeness strategies to express satisfaction, criticism, or requests (Holmes & Wilson, 2022); (M. Locher & Landert, 2023). Politeness, a central concept in pragmatics, has been extensively theorized by Brown and Levinson (1987) in (Valdellon, 2024) as strategies to mitigate face-threatening acts (FTAs) and maintain social consensus. Positive politeness strategies emphasize solidarity and kindness, whereas negative politeness strategies respect autonomy and reduce imposition. In online hotel reviews, these strategies appear through expressions of appreciation, mitigation of complaints, or profound criticism, reflecting both social and evaluative functions of language (Georgiou, 2023); (Diegoli, 2024).

Sentiment analysis provides computational methods to detect emotional valence in textual data, ranging from positive to negative sentiments (Lee, 2021); (Sibonghanoy Groenewald et al., 2024). *Aspect-Based Sentiment Analysis (ABSA)* refines this approach by linking sentiment to specific aspects, such as room quality, service, or location, allowing detailed evaluation of

customer experience (H. Liu et al., 2024); (Tang et al., 2022). Integrating pragmatic analysis of politeness with ABSA enables identification of patterns between linguistic strategies and evaluative sentiment in authentic online reviews.

Online hotel reviews can be conceptualized as a form of digital cultural heritage, as they document and preserve travelers' experiences, perceptions, and culturally shaped interpretations of hospitality practices across time and space. Within the framework of digital heritage, user-generated content is not merely ephemeral communication but constitutes a repository of collective memory, reflecting how individuals from diverse cultural backgrounds engage with, interpret, and evaluate local service traditions. Furthermore, hotel reviews function as discursive artifacts that encode culturally embedded values such as politeness, warmth, respect, and professionalism, which are central to hospitality as a cultural practice. By capturing authentic interactions between global travelers and local service providers, these reviews contribute to the ongoing construction and representation of tourism-related cultural knowledge in digital environments. Therefore, analyzing online reviews through a digital heritage lens enables a deeper understanding of how language, culture, and tourism intersect, positioning evaluative discourse not only as consumer feedback but also as a dynamic record of intercultural communication and cultural meaning-making in the digital age.

Despite the growing body of research on online reviews, few studies examine politeness strategies in conjunction with sentiment analysis in the hospitality context. Prior studies often focus exclusively on sentiment classification using machine learning or explore politeness in controlled discourse, leaving a gap in understanding real-world consumer communication (D. Kumar & Singh, 2024), (Sahin, 2025). This study addresses this gap by investigating politeness strategies in international TripAdvisor hotel reviews and their relationship to sentiment. Recent studies have emphasized the importance of context in interpreting politeness. For instance, (M. A. Locher & Larina, 2019) argue that politeness is not a fixed set of linguistic forms but is contingent on situational, cultural, and social norms. In hospitality reviews, the reviewer's background, expectations, and cultural norms influence how politeness strategies are employed, which makes analysis of authentic reviews crucial for understanding interpersonal and evaluative communication. Furthermore, combining politeness theory with sentiment analysis provides methodological advantages. ABSA allows researchers to quantitatively assess emotional valence while maintaining qualitative insights into how linguistic choices, such as hedges, honorifics, or mitigating expressions, convey politeness (Martin & White, 2021). This dual approach connects pragmatics and computational linguistics, offering a more comprehensive understanding of guest evaluations in online hotel reviews.

This research contributed to academic, practical, and cultural domains. Theoretically, it extended pragmatics research into digital consumer-generated discourse by demonstrating how politeness operated alongside sentiment within culturally embedded tourism communication. The study emphasized that online hotel reviews were not only evaluative texts but also cultural artefacts that reflected travelers' perceptions of local hospitality heritage, interactional norms, and culturally specific expectations of service. Practically, the insights offered guidance for hotel management in interpreting guest feedback through a culturally informed lens, enhancing service quality, and designing communication strategies that respected diverse cultural orientations toward politeness, relationality, and hospitality values. By integrating politeness analysis with sentiment evaluation, this study provided a culturally grounded model for examining language use in online review platforms, particularly within the broader context of tourism and cultural communication.

The objectives of this study were:

- a. To identify and categorize politeness strategies used by international hotel guests as culturally influenced interactional practices.
- b. To analyze sentiment in reviews using ABSA, with attention to how cultural expectations shaped evaluative expressions.
- c. To explore the relationship between politeness strategies and sentiment, contributing to the intersection of pragmatics, cultural linguistics, and computational analysis.

By achieving these objectives, this study offers both theoretical and practical contributions. Theoretically, it provides empirical evidence on the integration of politeness theory and sentiment analysis in digital discourse. Practically, insights from this research can inform hospitality

managers on effective communication and service improvement, enhancing customer satisfaction. The following sections present the methodology, results, and discussion that detail this integrated approach.

Analyzing online hotel reviews requires an interdisciplinary perspective combining pragmatics, sentiment analysis, and hospitality communication. Digital platforms mediate guest experiences, making linguistic strategies and evaluative expressions critical for understanding customer satisfaction (Rajesh, 2013). Indonesian scholars, including studies published in JALL Journal, have highlighted the role of politeness, evaluative language, and sentiment in online discourse, emphasizing cultural norms, interpersonal expectations, and social context (Nabila & Heryono, 2025). Building on these insights, the current study integrates politeness theory and sentiment analysis to explore both the linguistic strategies and the evaluative sentiments in English-language *TripAdvisor* reviews.

Politeness in Digital Discourse

Politeness theory, as proposed by Brown and Levinson (1987), offers a foundational framework for analyzing how individuals manage face in communication (Pirdehghan, 2024). The theory distinguishes between positive politeness, which emphasizes solidarity and closeness, and negative politeness, which seeks to respect the autonomy and freedom of the interlocutor. In the context of online hotel reviews, these strategies are often visible when reviewers praise staff or amenities while maintaining a respectful tone. For example, a positive politeness strategy may appear as, *"The staff were incredibly helpful, and they made our stay very enjoyable,"* which strengthens solidarity with the service providers. In opposite, a reviewer may employ negative politeness to soften a complaint, such as, *"I'm sorry to mention, but the room was smaller than expected,"* thus acknowledging potential face concerns of the hotel staff.

Recent studies indicate that digital communication platforms, like TripAdvisor, encourage more nuanced politeness strategies to manage potential face threats. Techniques such as hedging, intensifiers, honorifics, and disclaimers are widely employed to navigate criticism or praise without violating social norms (X. Liu & Allen, 2014). For instance, a reviewer may write, *"It seems the breakfast could be improved a bit, though overall we enjoyed our stay,"* using a hedge (*"seems"*) to soften criticism. Similarly, intensifiers and disclaimers appear in expressions like, *"The room was absolutely spotless, although the view was not great,"* balancing a positive evaluation with a polite acknowledgement of limitations.

Indonesian research, including studies published in JALL, has explored politeness in online interactions, service encounters, and educational contexts. In the realm of tourism, politeness functions to maintain social harmony while simultaneously conveying evaluative judgments (Fitriani & Pujiati, 2018); (Fitriani & Pujiati, 2018). Reviewers commonly employ mitigation strategies, such as modals (*"could," "might"*), hedges (*"perhaps," "it seems"*), and indirect requests (*"It would be nice if the room were cleaned more frequently"*) to soften criticisms. At the same time, positive politeness strategies appear in phrases like, *"We truly appreciated the friendly service and cozy atmosphere,"* which reinforce solidarity and express satisfaction.

Moreover, studies in Indonesia have addressed cross-cultural variations in politeness, highlighting that international guests often combine politeness strategies with sentiment markers to convey appreciation or dissatisfaction in culturally appropriate ways (Aulia et al., 2024). For example, a reviewer from a Western background may write, *"The receptionist was very courteous, and I felt welcomed throughout my stay,"* blending evaluative sentiment with positive politeness. Reciprocally, an East Asian reviewer might express critique more indirectly: *"Perhaps the room could have been slightly cleaner, but we enjoyed our visit nonetheless,"* reflecting a culturally mediated balance between criticism and maintaining face. These examples underscore the importance of considering both linguistic politeness and evaluative sentiment in analyzing online hotel reviews.

Sentiment Analysis in Hospitality Reviews

Sentiment analysis has become a key analytical approach in understanding evaluative language in digital consumer feedback. Early foundational work by (Strauss et al., 2024) and (Subbaiah et al., 2024) established the theoretical and computational basis for sentiment

classification, leading to widespread adoption across various domains, including hospitality. Within hotel review discourse, sentiment analysis plays an essential role in identifying how guests linguistically encode satisfaction, dissatisfaction, or neutrality. For example, simple sentiment expressions such as *“the staff was amazing”* or *“the air-conditioning did not work”* reflect clear polarity, but more complex reviews often embed mixed sentiments that require more fine-grained computational tools to interpret.

One influential development is Aspect-Based Sentiment Analysis (ABSA), which identifies sentiment orientation toward specific elements of hotel experience, such as room quality, cleanliness, staff hospitality, location convenience, food service, or amenities (Alahmadi et al., 2025); (Athukorala et al., 2025). ABSA allows researchers to detect multiple sentiments within a single review. For instance, a reviewer might state *“The breakfast was delicious, but the check-in process was slow,”* expressing positive sentiment toward the food aspect and negative sentiment toward service efficiency. Such granularity is crucial for hospitality research, where different aspects contribute differently to overall guest satisfaction.

Recent advancements in sentiment analysis incorporate hybrid computational models that combine lexicon-based methods with machine learning, particularly supervised classifiers and deep learning architectures, to enhance accuracy in detecting subtle evaluative cues (Alek, 2023). These hybrid methods are especially effective in processing reviews containing figurative expressions, irony, or mitigated complaints. For example, a phrase like *“The room was fine... once you got used to the noise”* may initially appear neutral or mildly positive but, with deeper modeling, reveals a negative sentiment concerning noise level. Such techniques not only classify sentiment more reliably but also enable researchers to track broader customer satisfaction patterns and identify recurring service issues in online hospitality platforms. Online hotel reviews can be conceptualized as a form of digital cultural heritage, as they document and preserve travelers’ experiences, perceptions, and culturally shaped interpretations of hospitality practices across time and space. Within this perspective, user-generated content functions not merely as transient communication but as a repository of collective memory, reflecting how individuals from diverse cultural backgrounds interpret and evaluate local service traditions. These reviews serve as discursive artefacts that encode culturally embedded values such as politeness, warmth, respect, and relationality, which are central to hospitality as a socio-cultural practice. By capturing authentic interactions between global travelers and local service providers, online reviews contribute to the ongoing construction and representation of tourism-related cultural knowledge in digital environments. Therefore, analyzing hotel reviews through a digital heritage lens enables a deeper understanding of how evaluative discourse operates not only as consumer feedback but also as a dynamic record of intercultural communication and cultural meaning-making in the digital age.



Figure 1. Mind-map of Politeness and Sentiment of Hotel Review

The mind map provides a structured overview of the conceptual foundations supporting the study on politeness and sentiment in hotel reviews. It begins with the core theoretical pillars, which are Politeness Theory and Sentiment Analysis. Under Politeness Theory, the map highlights three key components, positive politeness, negative politeness, and mitigation strategies, which serve as the basis for understanding how reviewers soften criticism or enhance solidarity in their evaluations. Sentiment Analysis is represented through two major analytical dimensions; which are Aspect-Based Sentiment Analysis (ABSA), which captures sentiments tied to specific review aspects such as service or cleanliness, and sentiment polarity, which categorizes evaluations as positive, negative, or neutral. The map then outlines the research gap, identifying three recurring limitations in prior studies: the frequent reliance on small datasets, the lack of integration between sentiment and politeness analyses, and the limited attention to cross-cultural variation in hotel review discourse. Sentiment analysis has been increasingly applied in studies of online tourism discourse. Sentiment expressions are intertwined with pragmatic features such as politeness markers and mitigation strategies (Leandro et al., 2022). These findings emphasize that sentiment in hotel reviews is not only a computational phenomenon but also a socio-pragmatic construct shaped by cultural expectations, interpersonal considerations, and communicative norms. Thus, sentiment analysis and politeness theory complement one another in understanding how guests express evaluations in global hospitality contexts.

Politeness and Sentiment Analysis

Although both politeness analysis and sentiment analysis have been extensively developed in linguistic and computational research, very few studies integrate the two within the context of hospitality reviews. Existing literature typically treats sentiment analysis as a computational task, classifying polarity or extracting aspect-level evaluations, while politeness is examined through qualitative linguistic frameworks. This separation overlooks the fact that sentiment is often mediated by interpersonal considerations. As (Valdellon, 2024) argued, evaluative meaning in online discourse is deeply embedded within relational work, suggesting that the intersection of these two analytical traditions is theoretically significant but empirically underexplored.

Integrating politeness strategies with sentiment analysis offers a more comprehensive understanding of how reviewers construct and negotiate evaluation. While sentiment identifies the valence of customer experience, politeness strategies explain how reviewers manage social obligations, face needs, and cultural expectations while conveying these evaluations. For example, a reviewer may write, *"I appreciate the staff's effort, but the room could have been cleaner,"* which expresses negative sentiment but uses positive politeness (*"I appreciate..."*) to soften the criticism. On the other hand, an overtly positive review such as *"The hotel was absolutely fantastic!"* uses intensifiers (*"absolutely"*) that amplify positive sentiment while simultaneously enacting solidarity-building discourse.

Specific linguistic devices illustrate the mutually reinforcing relationship between sentiment and politeness. Hedging, modal verbs, and downtoners can mitigate negative evaluations, as seen in expressions like *"maybe the pool area could be improved a little"*, which expresses dissatisfaction but reduces face threat. Meanwhile, positive politeness strategies often accompany favorable sentiment. Intensifiers (*"truly excellent service," "really friendly staff"*) and gratitude expressions (*"We are very thankful for the warm welcome"*) not only signal strong positive sentiment but also reinforce social rapport (Sahin, 2025). These interactions demonstrate that sentiment does not operate in isolation; it is linguistically shaped through politeness strategies chosen by reviewers.

In Indonesia, research has begun to highlight how combining sentiment and politeness insights can illuminate culturally specific patterns in hospitality discourse. Studies show that Indonesian and international reviewers frequently embed evaluations within indirectness, softeners, or culturally oriented politeness norms (Haryanto et al., 2024). Such findings emphasize the value of integrating sentiment and politeness approaches to capture the complex relational dynamics underlying online hotel reviews, with implications for cross-cultural communication, hospitality management, and customer experience analysis.

Integrating Cultural Perspectives in Politeness and Digital Tourism Discourse

Politeness in hotel reviews is deeply inseparable with cultural norms, social expectations, and the heritage of hospitality practices in different societies. In tourism contexts, reviewers do not merely evaluate service quality; they also express culturally informed interpretations of warmth, respect, professionalism, and interpersonal harmony (Barni & Bagna, 2010). These interpretations are shaped by long-standing cultural traditions, such as collectivist values in Asia, the ritualized etiquette of hospitality in Indonesia, or the individualistic communication patterns common in Western countries. As a result, politeness strategies in online reviews function as cultural performances that reflect how travelers position themselves within the social world of tourism and hospitality (Stadler, 2018).

Cultural frameworks strongly influence the choice of positive and negative politeness strategies. For example, guests from high-context cultures, such as Indonesia, Japan, and other East Asian societies, tend to value relational harmony and indirectness, often softening critiques to preserve mutual face. Expressions such as *"perhaps the service could be improved"* or *"the room was a bit small, but we still enjoyed our stay"* illustrate culturally rooted mitigation strategies aligned with Asian politeness norms (McGee, 2019). In contrast, low-context cultures, such as those in Europe and North America, encourage more direct evaluation, as seen in reviews like *"the room was not clean"* or *"the service was unprofessional,"* reflecting cultural preferences for clarity, directness, and task-oriented communication.

Furthermore, online hotel reviews can be viewed as digital cultural heritage, documenting how global travelers engage with local service traditions, social expectations, and symbolic meanings of hospitality. These reviews preserve traces of cultural encounters, whether harmonious or conflicting, and provide insights into how guests interpret the cultural identity of destinations through their linguistic choices. In the Indonesian context, expressions such as “*ramah*,” “*hangat*,” or “*sopan*” signal culturally embedded appreciation for hospitality rooted in local values of friendliness and respect. Such expressions highlight how tourism communication becomes a site where cultural identity is displayed, negotiated, and evaluated (Merchant et al., 2025).

Integrating cultural perspectives into politeness and sentiment analysis therefore offers a broader understanding of hotel reviews as more than individual evaluations. They represent a dynamic cultural discourse where language, tourism, and social values intersect. This cultural framing is particularly relevant for heritage-oriented journals such as *Sampurasun*, as it emphasizes the role of language in shaping, preserving, and interpreting hospitality as a lived cultural tradition within global tourism (Mian & Al Lihabi, 2023).

Research Gap

- a. Most research treats sentiment analysis and politeness separately, which limits understanding of how linguistic strategies shape evaluative judgments (M. A. Locher & Larina, 2019). In hospitality discourse, integrating these approaches remains underexplored.
- b. Many Indonesian studies rely on limited datasets, often fewer than 100 reviews, restricting generalizability (Natalia, 2024).
- c. Politeness strategies vary across cultures, yet international hotel reviews have seldom been analyzed for cross-cultural differences in face-saving strategies and evaluative expressions (Silitonga et al., 2025).
- d. Prior studies rarely link linguistic analysis to actionable recommendations for hotel management or service improvement (Alahmadi et al., 2025). Understanding the interplay between politeness strategies and sentiment can guide personalized customer service and digital communication strategies.

In addition, previous studies have demonstrated the significance of politeness strategies and sentiment expressions in online reviews, yet they often address these elements in isolation. While international research highlights the theoretical frameworks of politeness and computational sentiment analysis (Mehraliyev et al., 2021), Indonesian scholarship provides valuable insights into cultural and contextual variations in evaluative language (Firdaus & Zuraida, 2024). Despite these contributions, gaps remain in integrating politeness and sentiment analysis, particularly in large-scale corpora of international hotel reviews. The current study addresses this gap by examining 500 TripAdvisor reviews, combining a pragmatic approach to politeness with aspect-based sentiment analysis, and exploring the correlation between linguistic strategies and evaluative sentiment. This integration aims to provide both theoretical and practical insights for enhancing cross-cultural understanding and service quality in international hospitality contexts.

2. Method

This study adopts a mixed-methods corpus-based research design that integrates sentiment analysis with cultural–pragmatic interpretation. This approach aligns with cultural linguistics and tourism studies, as it captures culturally shaped linguistic patterns in travelers’ evaluations of local hospitality services. TripAdvisor was selected as the data source because it represents a global platform where intercultural communication in the tourism sector naturally occurs, allowing travelers to express their perceptions of service culture, interpersonal warmth, and hospitality heritage. A total of 500 hotel reviews were initially collected from TripAdvisor using purposive sampling to ensure variation in cultural background and hospitality experience. However, after applying inclusion criteria such as narrative completeness, linguistic clarity, and relevance to core hospitality aspects, only 300 reviews were retained for analysis. The excluded data consisted of incomplete entries, duplicated content, and reviews lacking clear evaluative expressions. This data reduction ensured analytical consistency and reliability, particularly for both sentiment

classification and politeness coding. The analysis integrates Aspect-Based Sentiment Analysis (ABSA) with qualitative interpretation rooted in digital pragmatics. ABSA identifies sentiment orientation across hospitality aspects, while qualitative coding focuses on politeness markers and facework strategies shaped by cultural norms. Special analytical attention was given to differences between high-context and low-context cultural communication styles, revealing how indirectness, mitigation, gratitude, and affiliative expressions function as culturally embedded resources in online evaluation. This culturally oriented methodological framework allows the study to interpret hotel reviews as forms of both evaluative and culturally meaningful discourse within the tourism context.

Research Design

This study employs a mixed-methods corpus-based research design, combining quantitative sentiment analysis with qualitative politeness strategy analysis. A corpus-based approach is suitable for examining recurrent linguistic patterns in naturally occurring texts (Supriatnaningsih et al., 2021), while mixed-methods design allows triangulation of statistical sentiment patterns with pragmatic interpretation. Following (M. Locher & Landert, 2023), this integrative design is appropriate for studies that examine evaluative and interpersonal meanings simultaneously in digital discourse. The present research therefore aims to uncover not only the polarity of hotel evaluations but also the interpersonal and cultural work encoded through politeness strategies. To account for cross-cultural variation in communication styles, this study adopts the high-context and low-context cultural framework. High-context cultures, typically associated with Asian societies including Indonesia, emphasize indirectness, relational harmony, and implicit communication, while low-context cultures, commonly found in Western societies, prioritize directness, explicitness, and clarity of expression. In this study, cultural orientation was not determined solely based on nationality but inferred through linguistic indicators present in the reviews, such as the use of hedging, indirect criticism, gratitude expressions, and mitigation strategies. Reviews exhibiting frequent use of softeners (e.g., “a bit,” “perhaps”), indirect evaluative statements, and relational expressions were categorized as reflecting high-context communication tendencies, whereas reviews with direct and explicit evaluative language were associated with low-context communication styles. This operationalization allows for a more linguistically grounded and context-sensitive analysis of cross-cultural politeness and sentiment patterns.

Data Sources

The primary data source consists of English-language hotel reviews retrieved from TripAdvisor, one of the largest global review platforms. The choice of TripAdvisor aligns with hospitality-linguistics literature, which identifies it as a rich source of authentic evaluative discourse (Caled & Silva, 2022). Reviews spanning various hotel categories which are budget, mid-range, and luxury, were included to ensure variation in experiential content and linguistic style. Social Network Analysis (SNA) was employed to visualize the co-occurrence patterns between sentiment-bearing lexical items and politeness markers. Using a co-occurrence-based approach, key lexical units (e.g., “very,” “a bit,” “not very,” “extremely”) were extracted and mapped into a network structure where nodes represent words and edges indicate their frequency of co-occurrence within the same evaluative clause. The network was constructed using a corpus-based extraction process and visualized to identify dominant clusters associated with positive and negative sentiment. For instance, clusters such as “very good” and “extremely friendly” were strongly associated with positive sentiment, while combinations like “a bit small” and “not very clean” appeared in negative evaluations. Although the SNA is primarily used for exploratory visualization, it provides additional evidence of systematic relationships between politeness markers and sentiment expressions in the dataset.

Data Collection Procedures

A total of 500 review sentences were collected using manual extraction techniques that follow ethical digital research practices (Gnach et al., 2022). Reviews were selected based on the following inclusion criteria:

- a. Narrative completeness (containing at least one evaluative clause)
- b. Clarity of linguistic structure
- c. Indication of international reviewer backgrounds
- d. Relevance to core hospitality aspects (e.g., service, cleanliness, location, amenities).

Each review was segmented into clauses following (Taboada, 2020) to isolate evaluative units for sentiment and politeness annotation. The dataset was cleaned by removing duplicates, *emojis*, *hashtags*, non-English content, and meta-data irrelevant to linguistic analysis. Because the study analyzes publicly available online texts, no direct human participants were recruited. Reviews were written by anonymous or semi-anonymous TripAdvisor users from various countries. Although demographic information was not collected, international variation was inferred from public reviewer profiles and linguistic clues. This approach follows established ethical practices for corpus studies relying on user-generated content (Stevic, 2024).

Data Analysis

Sentiment Analysis (Aspect-Based)

Sentiment analysis was carried out using *Aspect-Based Sentiment Analysis (ABSA)*, which identifies polarity associated with specific review aspects such as room, cleanliness, staff, food, location, and overall experience. ABSA was selected due to its effectiveness in capturing multiple evaluative dimensions within a single text (MISNAWATI et al., 2024). A hybrid computational model was adopted, combining:

- a. Lexicon-based scoring using the VADER sentiment tool (Partington & Marchi, 2022), and
- b. Machine-learning prediction as proposed in (Alahmadi et al., 2025).

This model improves detection of subtle evaluative cues such as softened complaints or mixed sentiments.

Politeness Strategy Coding

Politeness strategies were coded manually using Brown and Levinson's (1987) politeness framework, supported by relational work theory (Nkirote, 2024). Coding categories included:

- a. Positive Politeness (e.g., compliments, gratitude, solidarity markers)
- b. Negative Politeness (e.g., hedges, modals, apologies, mitigators)
- c. Off-record strategies (e.g., hints, understatements)
- d. Bald-on-record acts (rare but included for completeness)

Additional linguistic devices, intensifiers, downtoners, disclaimers, stance markers which were annotated based on digital pragmatics literature (Setyawati et al., 2024). Coding reliability was ensured through double annotation of 15% of the dataset, with Cohen's Kappa ($\kappa \geq 0.80$) indicating strong inter-coder agreement.

Integrating Sentiment and Politeness

The final stage of analysis examined how politeness strategies interact with sentiment orientation. Reviews were analyzed to identify patterns such as:

- a. Negative sentiment softened through hedges ("*maybe the room could be cleaner*")
- b. Positive sentiment amplified through intensifiers ("*absolutely fantastic staff*")
- c. Mixed evaluations balanced through disclaimers ("*we enjoyed our stay, although the check-in was slow*")

This integration responds to calls in recent research to link computational evaluation with interpersonal linguistic behavior (B. S. Kumar & Reddy, 2022). The study complied with ethical standards for using publicly accessible online data. No personal identifiers were stored, and all quoted excerpts were anonymous. As the data were voluntarily posted on public platforms, the research does not involve human subjects in the traditional sense.

3. Result and Discussion

This section presents the results of the corpus analysis of 300 hotel reviews and discusses the findings in relation to the research questions and the theoretical framework. The analysis focuses on three key aspects: (1) sentiment distribution across reviews, (2) major politeness strategies employed by reviewers, and (3) the interaction between politeness strategies and sentiment orientations. Each subsection integrates computational sentiment results with pragmatic–discursive analyses to provide a holistic understanding of stance-taking in digital hospitality discourse.

Sentiment Distribution in Hotel Reviews

Sentiment analysis using lexicon-based and machine-learning classification revealed that the dataset contained predominantly positive evaluations. Out of 300 reviews, 62% expressed positive sentiment, 21% expressed negative sentiment, and 17% were neutral. These proportions align with prior findings that guests tend to publicly express satisfaction more readily than dissatisfaction.

Table 1. Sentiment Distribution in the Corpus (N = 300)

Sentiment Category	Number of Reviews	Percentage (%)
Positive	186	62.0
Neutral	51	17.0
Negative	63	21.0

The dominance of positive sentiment reflects what (Martin & White, 2020) refer to as the affective inclination toward positive appraisal in public-facing evaluative genres. Reviewers often highlight hospitality, cleanliness, and staff friendliness, domains associated with high emotional salience in service encounters. Conversely, negative reviews often focus on room maintenance, noise, and slow check-in processes.

Politeness Strategies Employed by Reviewers

Qualitative coding following Brown & Levinson’s (1987) politeness framework relational work theory revealed systematic patterns of face-work. The three most salient strategies include:

1. *Hedging and Softening Devices (Negative Politeness)*

Reviewers frequently used expressions such as “*maybe*,” “*a bit*,” “*slightly*,” and “*I think*” to mitigate criticisms. This aligns with (Haristiani et al., 2023) observation that digital reviewers use hedging to reduce the potential imposition caused by negative evaluations.

2. *Positive Politeness and Intensifiers*

Positive reviews featured intensifiers such as “*very*,” “*extremely*,” “*highly*,” and “*super friendly*.” This pattern intensification serves to strengthen affective alignment and praise.

3. *Expression of Thanks and Appreciation*

Many reviewers concluded with gratitude markers (e.g., “*Thank you for the great service*.”). Such ritual politeness constitutes relational maintenance strategies common in hospitality discourse.

Table 2. Frequency of Major Politeness Strategies

Politeness Strategy	Example Expressions	Freq. (Tokens)
Hedging / Softening	maybe, a bit, slightly, I think	214
Intensifiers (Positive Politeness)	very, extremely, super, highly	298
Gratitude / Appreciation	thank you, appreciate, grateful	167

These findings indicate that reviewers employ politeness not merely for courtesy, but as a resource for stance-taking and negotiation of interpersonal meaning, consistent with relational work theory.

Interaction between Politeness Strategies and Sentiment

The interaction between politeness and sentiment in the hotel reviews reveals how linguistic strategies shape evaluative meaning beyond simple positive or negative polarity. In negative reviews, politeness served as a mitigating device through the use of hedging and indirectness. Reviewers often framed their criticisms softly, as seen in statements such as *“The room was a bit small, but still comfortable overall”* or *“Maybe the staff could be more attentive during check-in.”* These examples illustrate how negative politeness’s strategies help preserve the hotel’s face while still allowing the reviewer to convey dissatisfaction. Indirectness in online feedback functions not only as a linguistic choice but also as a socially oriented stance, enabling reviewers to balance criticism with relational considerations. In contrast, positive reviews made frequent use of intensifiers that reinforced highly favorable sentiment. Reviewers expressed strong appreciation with phrases like *“The staff was extremely helpful”* and *“The breakfast was super good!”* Such expressions align with positive politeness strategies that build rapport and strengthen affiliative ties with the hotel. Intensifiers are powerful boosters of positive evaluation in digital reviews. Further, Indonesian reviewers often incorporated culturally embedded expressions of warmth and appreciation, such as *“ramah sekali”* and *“pelayanannya mantap”*, indicating the role of local politeness norms in shaping online hospitality discourse.

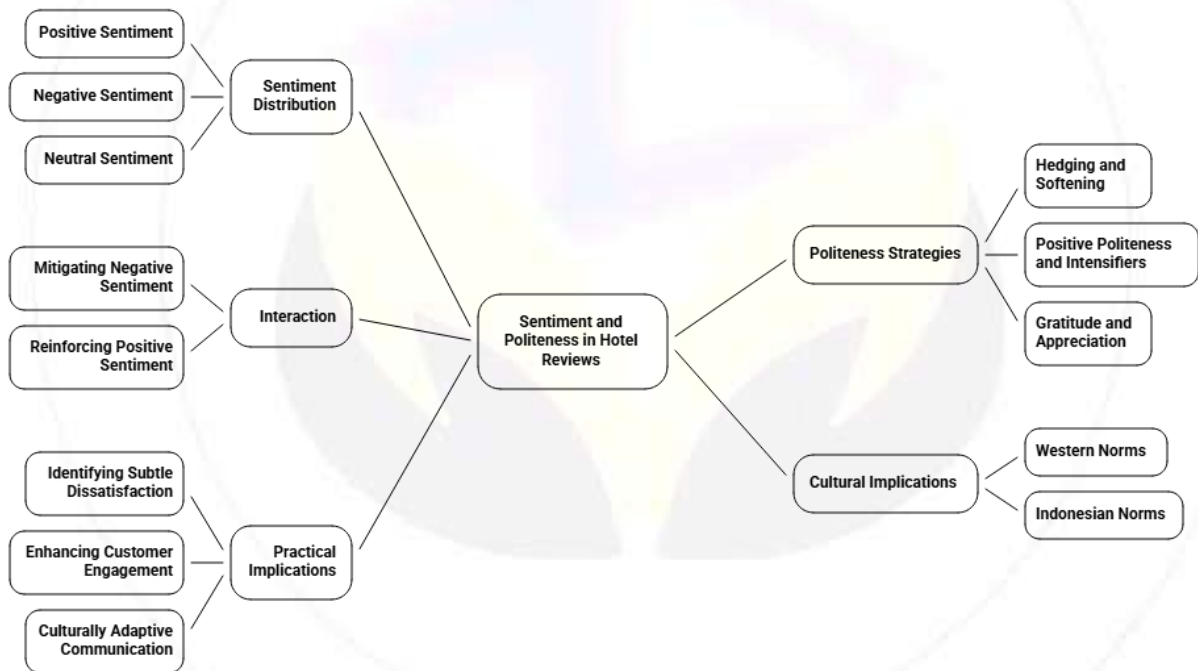


Figure 2. Analysis of Sentiment and Politeness in Hotel Reviews

At the center is the interaction between politeness strategies and sentiment, which forms the core of the analysis. Negative sentiment is frequently softened through hedges and indirect expressions such as *“a bit,” “maybe,”* or *“not very,”* reflecting the use of negative politeness to mitigate criticism. In contrast, positive sentiment is often reinforced through intensifiers like *“very,” “super,”* and *“extremely,”* aligning with the affiliative and rapport-building nature of positive politeness. The mind map also highlights the role of Social Network Analysis (SNA) in visualizing bigram clusters that show how politeness markers occur with evaluative expressions, for instance, clusters like *“very good”* and *“super friendly”* for positive reviews, and *“a bit dirty”* or *“not very”* for negative ones. These linguistic patterns lead to practical implications for hotel management, such as recognizing softened complaints as early warnings, strengthening aspects of service that guests value most, and crafting culturally adaptive responses to online reviews. The chapter concludes by summarizing key findings, sentiment is largely positive, but politeness strategies shape its interpretation; lexical clusters demonstrate systematic co-occurrence patterns;

and cultural norms significantly influence how praise and criticism are communicated.

The findings also highlight salient cross-cultural differences in the expression of sentiment and politeness. Reviews from international guests tended to exhibit more direct criticism, reflecting communication norms commonly found in Western low-context cultures, where explicitness and clarity are valued. In comparison, Indonesian reviewers generally displayed a preference for mitigators, indirectness, and gratitude expressions, even when expressing dissatisfaction. This tendency aligns with high-context cultural patterns that prioritize relational harmony and social cohesion. Indonesian digital discourse frequently foregrounds politeness and relational work. These cultural distinctions suggest that sentiment scores alone cannot fully capture the pragmatic force of evaluations; the politeness framing surrounding them must also be interpreted, particularly by hotel managers responding to online feedback.

While the findings indicate clear patterns in the distribution of sentiment and politeness strategies, a deeper analytical interpretation reveals that these linguistic features function as mechanisms of interpersonal negotiation rather than mere evaluative markers. The frequent use of hedging in negative reviews suggests that reviewers are not only expressing dissatisfaction but are also actively managing face concerns and maintaining relational balance. This supports the view that evaluative discourse in digital hospitality contexts is inherently relational, where criticism is strategically mitigated to align with socially acceptable norms. Furthermore, the co-occurrence of intensifiers with positive sentiment reflects not only emotional amplification but also an effort to construct affiliate stance and reinforce solidarity with service providers. These patterns indicate that sentiment is pragmatically shaped, suggesting that evaluative meaning emerges from the interaction between affective orientation and politeness strategies rather than from sentiment polarity alone.

Practical Implications for Hospitality Management

The integration of sentiment and politeness analysis provides several practical implications for hospitality management. First, subtle dissatisfaction is often communicated through negative-politeness markers such as *"a bit," "maybe,"* or *"not very,"* which may mask underlying problems. Hoteliers should therefore treat such phrasing as potential early warning signals that warrant attention. Second, patterns of positive politeness, particularly intensifiers and expressions of gratitude, highlight aspects of service that guests value most, notably staff warmth and cleanliness. These insights can guide managerial priorities, staff training, and reward systems. Third, cultural variability in politeness usage implies that responses to online reviews should be culturally adaptive. Creating communication to the reviewer's politeness style can enhance customer engagement and foster more effective digital interaction.

The findings demonstrate that sentiment in hotel reviews is predominantly positive, yet politeness strategies significantly influence the tone and social meaning of these evaluations. Negative reviews frequently rely on hedging and mitigators, whereas positive reviews employ intensifiers and affiliative expressions. The SNA results confirm that sentiment and politeness markers co-occur in stable lexical clusters, revealing patterned relationships between evaluative stance and interpersonal orientation. Furthermore, cultural factors shape how politeness is enacted, underscoring the importance of culturally informed communication strategies in hospitality management.

4. Conclusion

This study examined the interaction between politeness strategies and sentiment in 500 international hotel reviews on TripAdvisor, demonstrating that evaluative meaning in digital hospitality discourse cannot be fully understood through sentiment polarity alone. Politeness strategies, particularly hedging, indirectness, intensifiers, and gratitude expressions, play a crucial role in shaping how reviewers soften criticism, amplify praise, and negotiate social relations with hotel stakeholders. The findings confirm recent scholarship arguing that online reviews are inherently relational rather than purely informational, combining affective stance with socially oriented linguistic behavior. The integrated analysis showed that negative sentiment is often mitigated by linguistic devices that preserve face both for the reviewer and the hotel. These strategies enable guests to articulate dissatisfaction without breaching social norms, particularly

among Indonesian reviewers who draw on culturally grounded patterns of harmony maintenance. Positive sentiment, conversely, is reinforced by boosters and intensifiers that express strong affiliation and personal appreciation. Social Network Analysis (SNA) further revealed consistent lexical clusters linking politeness markers with sentiment orientations, suggesting that these patterns are not random but structurally embedded within the discourse of digital hospitality evaluation. Cross-cultural differences emerged as a significant dimension of the findings. International guests tended to employ more direct evaluative expressions, reflecting low-context communication norms, while Indonesian reviewers showed a preference for mitigation and positive politeness strategies. These distinctions indicate that sentiment values must be interpreted through a culturally sensitive lens. For practitioners in hospitality management, understanding the pragmatic nuances embedded in online reviews can enhance customer relations, improve service responsiveness, and inform culturally adaptive communication strategies when replying to guests. In terms of methodological contribution, this research demonstrates the value of combining corpus-based sentiment analysis with pragmatic analysis of politeness strategies. Such an interdisciplinary approach bridges quantitative and qualitative perspectives, offering a more comprehensive account of evaluative discourse in hospitality contexts. The integration of ABSA, collocational analysis, and SNA provides a replicable framework for future studies seeking to map the relationship between affective stance and interpersonal meaning.

While the study provides meaningful insights, several limitations must be acknowledged. The dataset, although large and multilingual, is drawn from a single platform, which may not represent the full diversity of guest experiences across other travel or social media sites. Furthermore, subtle cultural cues embedded in non-English reviews may require deeper ethnographic or interview-based approaches to complement textual analysis. Future research could expand the corpus across platforms, incorporate multimodal data such as images or emojis, or explore hotel response strategies to examine politeness reciprocation patterns. Despite these limitations, the study contributes to both pragmatics and applied linguistics by highlighting how politeness and sentiment work together to shape digital hospitality communication. The findings underscore the need for continued interdisciplinary research that recognizes evaluative discourse as a socially situated practice, influenced by cultural norms, communicative goals, and digital platform affordances.

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