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Sociocultural Dimensions of Emotionally Evoked Language in Bali's Online Hotel Reviews

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Abstract The hotel industry is sensitive to the language of praise, feedback, and even complaints expressed through online reviews. By analyzing these linguistic features, hotels can gain a deeper understanding of what guests truly value. This study investigated the use of emotion-evoking language (EEL) in online reviews as a persuasive tool in Bali's hotel marketing. Employing a qualitative linguistic analysis, it examined 250 reviews of 5-star hotels in Bali, totaling 27.885 words, sourced from the TripAdvisor platform. Ekman's principles of emotions were applied to identify and classify emotions, while Aristotle's rhetorical theory (pathos, ethos, and logos) was used to understand how the emotions are evoked. Findings revealed happiness (61%) as the most frequently expressed emotion, followed by anger (15%), disgust (11%), fear (7%), surprise (4%), and sadness (2%). The EELs in these reviews were leveraged through positive affective language, authentic narratives, and concrete details. The findings contributed to sociolinguistics by demonstrating how EELs in online reviews lead to persuasion and enhance communication strategies.

Keywords: *Emotion-evoking language, Persuasion, Sociolinguistics, Hotel industry, Online reviews*

1. Introduction

Language, whether spoken directly or indirectly through writing, is an expression of culture, which is influenced by religion, history, customs, environment, and perspective (Tariq et al., 2019). The relationship between language and culture is strongly influenced by non-linguistic factors, such as dialect, idiolect, language variety, formality, age, groups of speakers, and register (Ninsiana, 2018). However, apart from carrying cultural values, language also often describes a person's emotional state. Language expressions, both spoken and written, often represent a person's state of mind and feelings. Due to differences in emotional content across languages and relevant cultural differences, people from different cultural backgrounds have varying metapragmatic abilities to recognize and express emotions (Zhu, 2016). Therefore, emotions expressed in various forms are also greatly influenced by perception and experience (Lindquist et al., 2015; Pishghadam & Shayesteh, 2017).

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The language conveyed through online reviews must be handled carefully because it carries emotional messages influenced by culture, for the sustainability of the hotel business in the digital world. Therefore, linguistics plays a significant role in digital marketing (Munaro et al., 2024; Shankar et al., 2022) as the unseen force that steers successful campaigns (Alaaid & Naji Meidani, 2024). It encompasses much more than mere "words"; it explores how language operates, how individuals process it, and how it shapes behavior (Grewal et al., 2022; Lindquist et al., 2015). In the intensely competitive global tourism sector, which is increasingly dependent on digital platforms (Fang et al., 2025; Tian, 2024), the capacity to establish genuine connections with prospective travelers is crucial for effective destination marketing. Within this dynamic context, Bali confronts the dual challenge of maintaining its attractiveness and transforming digital interactions into actual bookings (Lei et al., 2023). A significant, yet frequently overlooked, resource in this pursuit is the genuine testimonials of past visitors, particularly through the emotive, resonant language present in online guest reviews.

Online reviews are divided into two types of content: non-emotional content, which describes a product's advantages and disadvantages, and emotional content, which expresses the reviewer's emotional response to the product. Emotional content is a fundamental part of online reviews and plays a crucial role in influencing customers' purchasing decisions (Guo et al., 2020). Online reviews have emerged as influential forms of social proof that substantially affect consumer decision-making in the hospitality industry (Qiu et al., 2023; Wang et al., 2025; Zhang et al., 2025). Travelers frequently consult these reviews, seeking factual information, authentic experiences, and emotional vibes. Digital hotel campaigns in Bali have adopted various persuasive strategies (Japutra & Situmorang, 2021; Rosalina et al., 2023). However, the impact of emotion-evoking language (EEL) in these guest testimonials remains underexplored. Most hotels still consider that language that evokes emotions in online reviews is normal (Wu et al., 2022), even though the expression of emotions describes the guest's experience during their visit to the hotel. In fact, addressing positive guest feedback and leveraging positive reviews on social media are effective review management strategies (Sufi et al., 2025) and greatly influence potential hotel guests who read the review to make a room reservation and experience the hotel's service (Brunner-Sperdin & Peters, 2009). Despite extensive research on the role of emotions in consumer behavior, a significant gap persists in understanding how specific the *linguistic patterns convey emotion-evoking* within guest reviews are strategically leveraged by digital hotel campaigns to improve persuasion. Furthermore, the distinct travel experience during the guest's stay in Bali suggests that the efficacy of such language may be particularly pronounced, yet lacks empirical investigation. Therefore, by conveying emotions and fostering connections, this linguistic dimension holds significant potential for enhancing persuasive outcomes (George & Sahoo, 2024; Lestari et al., 2025; Oyibo & Toyonaga, 2024; Younis et al., 2023).

In the field of persuasive communication, emotional responses can be evoked by idiosyncratic social and personal experiences (Pishghadam & Shayesteh, 2017). This linguistic strategy aims to create a deeper, more resonant connection. By carefully selecting the lexicon of affective adjectives (e.g., "amazing," "wonderful," "great") verbs (e.g., "recommend," "enjoy,"), rich sensory imagery (e.g., "spacious," "scenic", "delicious"), and compelling figurative language (e.g., "mesmerizing blend of luxury and tranquility"), the speaker can directly stimulate the audience's desired emotional states, including joy, serenity, or excitement (Lindquist et al., 2015). This activation of Aristotle's rhetorical appeal and Ekman's (1999) concept of basic emotions allows messages to deliver empathy, build aspiration, and establish an engaging rapport with the receiver (Absattar et al., 2022). Ultimately, such language encourages a more engaged and positive reception, making the conveyed message informative, yet emotionally compelling and memorable.

While the emotive language function is acknowledged, there's a gap in linguistic understanding of how specific EEL within online reviews is strategically leveraged in official hotel campaigns for a persuasive purpose. This analysis of hotel guest reviews is designed to uncover the specific linguistic features that contribute to their persuasive power in hotel digital marketing. This systematic approach allows us to pinpoint how language evokes emotion, builds credibility, and provides logical appeals, ultimately influencing potential guests. This present study formulated two research questions:

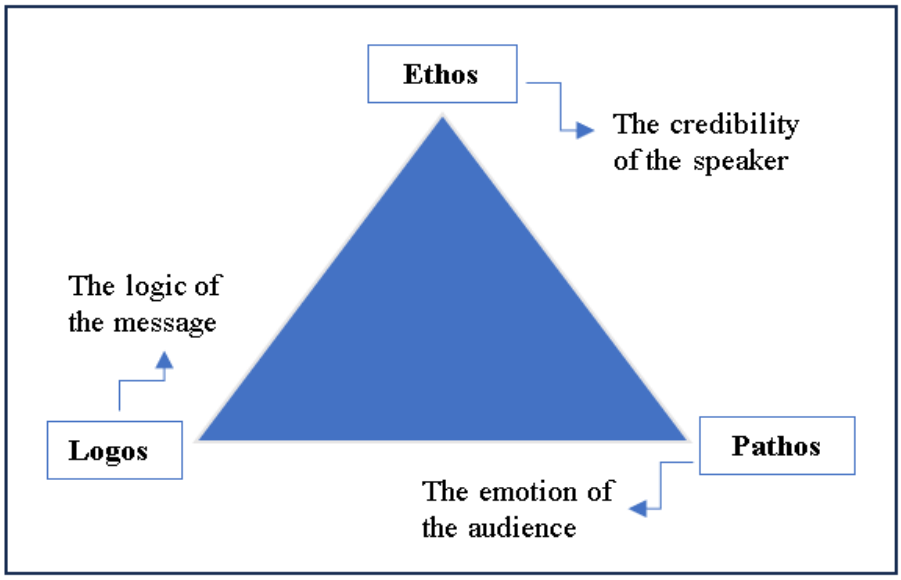
1. What specific EELs were expressed in Bali's hotel reviews?
2. How can these features leverage the persuasion in hotel campaigns?

2. Theoretical Framework

2.1. Rhetorical Appeals

To understand how persuasion works in the hotel guest reviews, this research relied on the concept of Aristotle's rhetorical appeals, including the meanings that arise from the presented arguments (*logos*), those arising from the character of the speaker (*ēthos*), and those designed to put the listener into a certain frame of mind (*pathos*) (Barnes, 1984). Aristotle developed Rhetorical elements (see Figure 1) for a theory of emotion and emphasized the importance of emotions in many other domains, including political practices (Jörke, 2010), cross-cultural aspects (Seliverstova et al., 2023), restaurant menus, as well as academic performance and learning styles (Alzaanin, 2025).

Figure 1
Aristotle's Rhetorical Triangle (Adapted from The Complete Works of Aristotle: Barnes, 1984)



2.2. Basic Emotions

The EEL in this research is based on Ekman's (1999) theory of emotion, which includes six basic emotions, i.e., happiness, sadness, fear, anger, surprise, and disgust. Happiness is associated with feelings of contentment, pleasure, and satisfaction; sadness is characterized by feelings of disappointment, grief, and hopelessness; fear is a powerful emotion triggered by a perceived threat; anger is an antagonistic reaction to perceived wrongdoings or frustration; surprise is a brief emotional state resulting from something unexpected, which can be positive or negative; yet disgust is a strong feeling of revulsion or aversion to something unpleasant, offensive, or contaminating.

Table 1
Theoretical Matrix that Aligns Ekman's (1999) Principles of Emotions with Aristotle's Rhetorical Appeals

Emotions (Ekman)	Associated Rhetorical Appeals (Aristotle)
Happiness	Pathos (Appeal to positive feelings)
Sadness	Pathos (Appeal to sympathy) & Ethos (Claiming a negative experience)
Fear	Pathos (Appeal to apprehension) & Logos (Justifying a warning)
Anger	Pathos (Appeal to outrage) & Ethos (Can be damaged or enhanced)
Surprise	Pathos (Appeal to apprehension) & Logos (reasoning)
Disgust	Pathos (Appeal to repulsion) & Logos (Justifying a negative claim)

The matrix (Table 1) can be explained as follows:

1. The reviewer uses language to evoke feelings of happiness, satisfaction, and pleasure in the reader. This aims to create a positive emotional connection. For example, "The staff provides very excellent service. So friendly and helpful!"
2. Sadness is often expressed through disappointment and regret, which contributes to the reviewer's credibility (ethos), making their claims seem more authentic. For example, "I am really disappointed, it is absolutely not as in the photos, they sell dreams for nothing!"
3. Fear is used to warn others about potential dangers, creating a sense of apprehension. For example, "The hallway ceiling fell down that day. We're lucky we're alive".
4. Anger is used to generate outrage or indignation in the reader. Extreme anger can sometimes damage the reviewer's ethos, making them appear unreasonable or biased. If the anger is perceived as justified, it can strengthen their credibility. For example, "Broken drawers, curtains not on rails, an AC that needed a gas refill, and lagging mattresses were notable concerns. How disappointing!".
5. Surprise is often a sudden and brief emotion that can precede fear or disgust. These appeals are used for reasoning, which is a form of logos. For example, "I told them I was shocked they were taking this stance given the circumstances and that I was very disappointed someone wasn't being honest".
6. Disgust is evoked through vivid descriptions of unsanitary or unpleasant conditions. This is a strong form of pathos. The details provided to evoke disgust often serve as the logical evidence (logos) for a negative review. For example, "Elevator is dirty, room is dirty. Sink is dirty. Bathroom has mold everywhere. Walls are damaged everywhere".

2.3. Recent Linguistic Studies on Emotion

Such distinguished linguists as Absattar et al. (2022), Seliverstova et al. (2023), Garaeva et al. (2023), Nasibullova and Bolatovna (2023), and Nurgalieva et al. (2023) have conducted comprehensive investigations into the role of language in expressing human emotions. These studies employed corpus linguistics and discourse analysis to identify linguistic features, such as specific lexical items, syntactic structures, or even intonational patterns, that correlated with emotional states. Building upon this, Qiu et al. (2023) offered a practical application of these principles by analyzing the intimacy behind online reviews in the context of shared accommodation. Their research highlighted how linguistic choices by hosts and guests build rapport and trust, demonstrating that emotional and relational dimensions were crucial to the success of the interaction.

Furthermore, Ädel et al. (2024) broadened the scope to explore how persuasion was systematically performed through rhetorical functions within tourism discourse. Their analysis revealed that constructing a persona of a helpful and expert guide was the most frequent function used to influence readers, followed by strategies aimed at building rapport and anticipating potential reader reactions. This underscored that effective communication involved not only expressing emotions but also strategically employing language to shape identity and guide behavior. Most recently, Sudajit-apa (2025) extended this line of inquiry into the field of AI, using critical discourse analysis to reveal the genuine voices and emotions of women embedded within AI narratives. This work demonstrated the relevance of linguistic analysis in understanding how language constructs and reflects social realities, even in emerging technological domains.

3. Methodology

3.1. Corpus

To construct a robust corpus for linguistic analysis, this study employed a qualitative method with a systematic approach to data collected from both official provincial statistics (see Table 2) and a prominent online travel agency (see Table 3).

Table 2
Number of 5-Star Hotels by Regency/Municipality in Bali Province in 2024 (Source: Statistics of Bali Province)

Regency/Municipality	Number of 5-Star Hotels
Badung	85
Gianyar	27
Denpasar	7
Tabanan	4
Klungkung	4

From the nine regencies in Bali, five specific regencies (i.e., Badung, Gianyar, Denpasar, Tabanan, and Klungkung) were purposively selected due to their high concentration of tourism activities and five-star accommodations. This selection ensures a representative sample of Bali's diverse tourism landscape. Subsequently, the TripAdvisor platform was utilized to refine the selection of hotels and collect guest reviews. The following criteria and filters were applied to the initially identified five-star hotels:

1. "5-star hotel" filter to ensure consistency with the initial dataset.
2. "Travelers' Choice Best of the Best" award winners, which signifies that a hotel is among the top 1% of listings on TripAdvisor globally, based on a significant volume of highly positive reviews and opinions. This criterion ensures the selection of highly-regarded and frequently reviewed properties.
3. Sorted by "Traveler Ranked", reflecting the "Highest rated hotels on Tripadvisor based on traveler reviews", allowed for prioritization of hotels with consistently strong guest sentiment.

From this filtered list, five hotels were selected as the primary focus for review collection, specifically for the period of January 1, 2025, to June 30, 2025. This six-month timeframe was chosen to capture recent guest sentiments and linguistic trends, providing the most current insights into traveler experiences. For each selected hotel, the top 50 most recent reviews were extracted. The total corpus of guest reviews comprises approximately 250 reviews, totaling 27.885 words.

Table 3
The Word Count of the Top 50 Most Recent Reviews (January-June 2025)

No.	Name of The Hotel	Regency	Number of Reviews	Words
1.	Padma Resort Legian	Badung	50	5.307
2.	The Kayon Jungle Resort	Gianyar	50	3.761
3.	Bali Beach Hotel Sanur	Denpasar	50	4.754
4.	Soori Bali	Tabanan	50	7.689
5.	Wyndham Tamansari Jivva Resort Bali	Klungkung	50	6.374
Total			250	27.885

3.2. Procedure

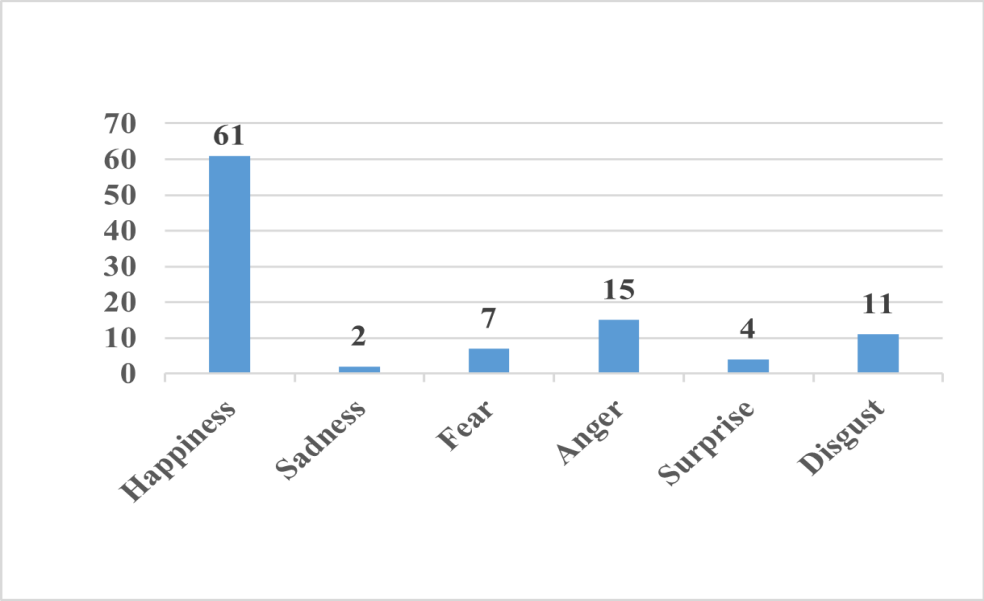
After data collection, the analysis procedure was initiated with meticulous data cleaning to standardize the guest review text, removing inconsistencies and preparing it for analysis. This was followed by a preliminary reading phase, allowing an initial understanding of the reviews' themes and linguistic patterns. Close reading and note-taking were followed by highlighting the relevant data showing the classifications of the basic emotions included within the online hotel reviews.

Data display in this study was elaborated based on the six basic emotions, i.e., happiness, sadness, fear, anger, surprise, and disgust, continued by analyzing the utterances to describe the specific rhetorical features (*ethos* and *logos*) that evoke emotions in the audience (*pathos*). The results were presented descriptively to explain how the features contribute to the persuasion of the hotel campaigns. The last phase was conclusion drawing, to ensure the comprehensive analysis in accordance with the Ekmans' (1999) theory of emotions.

4. Results

In accordance with Ekman's (1999) theory of basic emotions, the present study discovered six emotions that appeared in 250 online hotel reviews. These emotions were happiness, sadness, fear, anger, surprise, and disgust. The distribution of the basic emotions within 27.885 words is presented in Figure 2.

Figure 2
Distribution of Basic Emotions in Hotel Reviews



The bar chart (Figure 2) illustrates the overall distribution of basic emotions expressed in hotel reviews collected during the first half of 2025. The unit of analysis was the complete review. A single dominant emotion was assigned to each review based on the overall tone and context. The X-axis categorizes the six emotions, while the Y-axis represents the percentage each emotion constitutes. The graph clearly shows a predominantly positive emotional landscape within the hotel reviews.

The most frequently expressed emotion is happiness, accounting for a significant 61% of all identified emotional instances. This indicates that the majority of guest experiences are positive, leading to sentiments of happiness and satisfaction. The second most prevalent emotion is anger, with a much lower proportion of 15%. This suggests that while positive experiences dominate, some reviews reflect disappointment or unhappiness. Disgust and fear follow closely at 11% and 7% respectively, often stemming from intensely negative or threatening experiences. Surprise and sadness are the least common emotions, each contributing a small fraction at 4% and 2% respectively, highlighting that specific negative incidents or unexpected events are relatively rare among the reviews analyzed.

This study presented examples of how EELs were implemented within Bali's hotel online reviews. Table 4 shows the EELs with a focus on the happiness expressed in the positive hotel reviews.

Table 4
Emotion-Evoking Language (EELs) in Bali's Hotel Reviews

Types of EELs	Subtypes of EELs	Hotel Online Reviews Examples
1. Highly Positive Affective Language (Pathos)	a. Intensified Positive Adjectives and Adverbs	(1) "Best hotel we have stayed at in Bali out of the 10 we visited during the last two years." (2) "*Arya Seruni* provides excellent service, so friendly and helpful, English is good, and very attentive to our needs!" (3) "The service is of very good quality, and the staff is always smiling and attentive to your needs."

	b. Verbs of Sensory Experience and Emotional Transformation	(4) "Don't miss the Balinese cultural nights—beautiful performances and great food. Padma Resort Legian is truly a five-star experience. Can't wait to return" (5) "The food is also amazing; you cannot skip breakfast." (6) "We felt really pampered at Soori and for us, service is foremost in this level of hotels."
	c. Exclamations and Hyperbole	(7) "Wonderful service!" (8) "Def will recommend it to others!" (9) "*Soori Bali* is the epitome of luxury, perfect for those seeking sophistication and relaxation."
2. Authentic Personal Narratives and Social Proof (Ethos)	a. First-Person Pronouns	(10) "We had such a wonderful stay at *Padma Legian* after being recommended it by several friends." (11) "Our stay at *Kayon* was one of the best experiences. We were sad to leave, but cannot wait to return." (12) "We honestly can't wait to return – this resort has captured our hearts and we're already looking forward to planning our next trip." (13) "I wish to come back and stay longer, on departure, I am so sad to leave…"
	b. Specific Mentions of Staff Names	(14) "The staff there is amazing, again a special mention to our butler Dewa, who was great!" (15) "A very special mention must go to Angga, who made such a difference to our stay." (16) "All staff are wearing smiles all day, asking if you need something."
	c. Testimonials with Context	(17) "The hotel is now famous for the honeymooners!" (18) "Perfect for families! We had the most wonderful experience at this beautiful resort. … He was incredibly friendly, patient, and so helpful with our 2-year-old, which meant a lot to us as parents."
3. Concrete Details and Values	a. Specific Amenities and Features	(19) "I tried the Svasana Spa with Pipin (therapist), it was great." (20) "I especially enjoyed the fun activities like the market visit and cooking class."
	b. Location-Specific References	(21) "The location is unbeatable—right on Legian Beach." (22) "*Kayon* Jungle also has a story regarding the large statue called *Kumbakarna,* which is in front of the *Kepitu* Restaurant." (23) "Good location close to the city and the beach."
	c. Value-for-Money Assertions	(24) "Try the spa—a bit pricey, but worth every rupiah!" (25) "We truly were taken care of by the best staff the whole time, and the food at both restaurants was amazing! If you are on your honeymoon, it is absolutely worth it to do the Sky Lounge dinner!!"
	d. Keywords related to Balinese culture and nature	(26) "The resort grounds are stunning—lush gardens, koi ponds, and beautifully maintained pools (including a massive lagoon-style pool and an adults-only infinity pool with ocean views)." (27) "Apparently, it is famous for the *Rama Shinta* story, a forbidden love story. We had the special *Megibung* dinner one night, and it was delicious!" (28) "I missed the traditional charm - the lush gardens, waterlilies, and the warm, natural feel that older Bali hotels offer."

Examples 1 through 6 were the implementations of EELs in happiness, leading to positive reviews.

Example 1:

> "We had such a wonderful stay at *Padma Legian* after being recommended it by several friends. I can see why people continue to go back time and time again. The resort grounds are stunning—lush gardens, koi ponds, and beautifully maintained pools."

Example 2:

> "Our stay at *Kayon* was one of the best experiences. The staff there is amazing, again a special mention to our butler Dewa, who was great! He gave us information when we arrived about the history linked to the hotel. Apparently, it is famous for the *Rama Shinta* story, a forbidden love story, so the hotel is now famous for the honeymooners! *Kayon* Jungle also has a story regarding the large statue called *Kumbakarna*, which is in front of the *Kepitu* Restaurant. I am sure you will learn more about it when you get there!"

Example 3:

> "Wonderful service! Arya Seruni provides excellent service, so friendly and helpful, English is good, and very attentive to our needs! 5-star review for him. We truly were taken care of by the best staff the whole time, and the food at both restaurants was amazing! If you are on your honeymoon, it is absolutely worth it to do the Sky Lounge dinner!!"

Example 4:

> "Best hotel we have stayed at in Bali out of the 10 we visited during the last two years. Good location close to the city and the beach. Fabulous Resort/Hotel Spa. Probably the best on-site Spa experience we have had. Amazing design of the Spa. Try the spa—a bit pricey, but worth it. Don't miss the Balinese cultural nights—beautiful performances and great food. Padma Resort Legian is truly a five-star experience. Can't wait to return!"

Example 5:

> "For travellers who have seen it all in terms of luxury hotels, Soori Bali is one notch above."

Example 6:

> "We honestly can't wait to return – this resort has captured our hearts and we're already looking forward to planning our next trip."

The present study revealed that within the reviews, the guests mostly expressed their happiness about the human element (hotel staff) and the physical environment. The happiness related to the staff was expressed in examples 2 and 3. In contrast, those related to the physical environment were presented in examples 4 and 5. Further, the overall value proposition was expressed in examples 1 and 6.

The second most frequently expressed emotion in the reviews was anger, occurring 15% of the time. It is categorized as a strong emotional response from the guests whose expectations were not met during their stay at the hotel. Examples 7 to 15 showed the implementations of EELs in anger, which led to negative reviews.

Example 7:

> "I never eat the worst food ever, they do not even know how to cook! Very bad food, very bad experience I had in this resort."

Example 8:

> "The hotel being so unoccupied, it was unpleasant. There was nobody at the main pool, nor at the restaurants. Best case during the whole week of our stay was one other table occupancy."

Example 9:

> "However, several maintenance issues detracted from the experience. Broken drawers, curtains not on rails, an AC that needed a gas refill, and lagging mattresses were notable concerns. The couch in the room was uncomfortable, and the stained cushions added to the discomfort. Additionally, odours in the bathroom were quite off-putting."

Example 10:

> "Very disappointed! We just arrived, and really, there is nothing around the hotel, it is empty and in the middle of works!!!! The view from our room is horrible, but the hotel's even rate pool is under construction, we bathe with the scaffolding! I am really disappointed, it is absolutely not as in the photos, they sell a dream for nothing!"

Example 11:

> "It definitely does not have the services I would expect from a 4/5-star resort. Like many other comments, the resort is run down and aging."

Example 12:

> "Very bad experience in this resort, first of all, they have many stupid policies about linen and towels, and the room mattress was not good, and in the whole room, there were many places with red ants, and when I complain they come and spray but not clean the dead ants."

Example 13:

> "Only regret was the spa. The worst experience ever. Don't go to the spa. A waste of time and money. The masseuse was smelly. The sheets felt dirty, and the masseuse was inexperienced. They should shut it down or change the masseuse."

Example 14:

> "This stay was a huge disappointment and did not meet the expectations set by other Wyndham properties."

Example 15:

> "The hotel quoted us 450.000 for transport from the airport to the hotel. Get yourself the Grab App, or book a driver in advance. You pay this amount for an 8-hour tour with a driver. Never ask them to arrange transport; it is a complete rip-off."

The primary reasons why anger occurs in hotel reviews include room-related issues (examples 9, 10, and 12), amenities and facilities (examples 8, 13, and 14), service failure (examples 7 and 13), and unexpected charges (example 15). Guests often express anger in online reviews, hoping for a resolution, compensation, or at least an acknowledgment of their bad experience. By doing this, reviewers may want to warn potential future guests about problems they encountered. Hotels that effectively manage guest complaints, listen actively, apologize sincerely, and offer prompt solutions can handle the guests' anger and even turn a negative experience into a positive one for the guest.

The third emotion expressed within the hotel review was disgust, with 11% occurrence. Examples 16 to 20 showed the implementation of EELs in disgust, which also led to negative reviews.

Example 16:

> "Previous review deleted as if they don't want to hear the truth. Flies, centipedes, ants everywhere."

Example 17:

> "The bungalows are all under the waters and we couldn't dare to enter, there are lots of squid floating in all of them, such as a stink of shrimp pools. We chose this hotel by trusting the name of Wyndham, but unfortunately, disappointed."

Example 18:

> "Smells bad everywhere - outside, in lift, in corridor, or in room. The elevator is dirty, and the room is dirty. The sink is dirty. The bathroom has mold everywhere. Walls damaged everywhere."

Example 19:

> "Many nails that stand out make it very dangerous, the door handle is rusty, the cord is dirty."

Example 20:

> "We ordered room service for dinner. Within an hour of eating it, my partner became violently ill with stomach cramps and diarrhoea. An hour or two after that, I became violently ill with the same symptoms. We were extremely ill for 3 days and then had lingering effects long after that. We had to have the doctor visit us in our villa at least once."

Disgust is another powerful emotion, as a basic human instinct to avoid something perceived as contaminated, unhygienic, or morally offensive. Within the hotel reviews, disgust is triggered by issues related to the presence of pests (as in example 16), cleanliness (as in examples 17, 18, and 19), and poor hygiene (as in example 20).

Fear was the fourth emotion expressed in hotel reviews, appearing 7% of the time. Examples 21-24 illustrate how its presence, often linked to EELs, contributed to negative reviews.

Example 21:

> "However, despite these strengths, the pension leaves a strange impression. With exorbitant awards, one would expect a vibrant experience, but the pension seems empty, almost ghostly. This creates a cold and impersonal atmosphere that contrasts with the elegance of the place."

Example 22:

> "The worst thing: at 3.20 in the morning, the alarm suddenly goes off very loudly and a voice in English asks us to go out immediately because of the fire. We go down very scared, and an Indonesian gentleman tells us to go back to the room because the system is broken. Out of shock (the corridor is long and we were on the second floor) and out of fear that there really was a fire, I never closed my eyes again."

Example 23:

> "Resort was in poor condition, the building would shake when waves hit the beach. Parts of the roof are falling off, and the huts (which would make lovely rooms) are falling apart and not currently in use. My room was nice, but had noisy neighbours."

Example 24:

> "The hallway ceiling fell down that day. We waited for room cleaning for about 10 minutes in that hallway. We're lucky we're alive."

Within the hotel reviews, fear stems primarily from a perceived threat to a guest's safety, security, and well-being. Unlike anger, which resulted from frustration or disappointment, fear signifies a more primal response to potential harm. The hotel issues that evoked fear in guests include vulnerability (example 21), fire hazard (example 22), and safety concerns (examples 23 and 24).

Coming in fifth, surprise was present in 4% of hotel reviews. Reviews showing this emotion, particularly those with specific EELs as highlighted in examples 25 through 28. The element of surprise can lead to positive or negative feedback.

Example 25:

> "I saw a program on CNA about this resort and went to book right away. I wasn't aware such a place existed, but apparently it was before under the Alila umbrella."

Example 26:

> "We were pleasantly surprised with an upgrade from a Beach Pool Villa to an Ocean View Villa, which made our stay even better."

Example 27:

> "I mentioned to the team I would like a stop on the way to the cruise terminal for an Ice Matcha and they came back with a planned route to do this, given it would have taken 45 minutes extra in traffic, I didn't want to be a bother, and told the team thanks so much, but it is not a big deal, and let's skip it. On checkout, to our surprise, they had to ready for us to take in the car for our journey back to the terminal."

Example 28:

> "I told them I was shocked they were taking this stance given the circumstances and that I was very disappointed someone wasn't being honest. You live and you learn, I guess."

This review in example 25 is slightly positive. The excitement of the act "book right away" implies an initial positive impression. The phrases "pleasantly surprised" and "made our stay even better" in example 26 are clear indicators of a positive experience due to an upgrade, which enhances satisfaction. Similarly, example 27 shows exceptional customer service. The phrase "to our surprise" indicates delight and appreciation for the thoughtful gesture, which significantly elevates the guest's experience and perception of the hotel. Quite the opposite, example 28 implies a negative review. Phrases like "shocked," "very disappointed," and "someone wasn't being honest" clearly convey negative emotions and dissatisfaction with the hotel's actions. "You live and you learn, I guess," is a bitter closing, reinforcing the negative sentiment.

Sadness accounted for only 2% of emotions expressed in hotel reviews, making it the least common. As demonstrated by examples 29 to 31, instances of sadness, similar to surprise, can result in either negative (example 29) or positive (example 30 and 31) review outcomes.

Example 29:

> "The hotel is ultra-modern, with sleek black marble interiors that felt to me more like a city business hotel than a tropical Balinese retreat. I missed the traditional charm - the lush gardens, waterlilies, and the warm, natural feel that older Bali hotels offer."

Example 30:

> "We were sad to leave but cannot wait to return."

Example 31:

> "I wish to come back and stay longer. On departure, I am so sad to leave. I wish to cancel my next booking and continue my stay at Kayon, but they said they are fully booked."

The review in example 29 expresses significant dissatisfaction with the explicit statement of what the guest missed. The guest had an expectation of a "tropical Balinese retreat" and found a "city business hotel" instead. The phrases "felt to me, more like..." and "I missed the traditional charm" indicate that the hotel did not meet their desired aesthetic or atmosphere, which is a negative outcome for their personal experience. On the contrary, examples 30 and 31 imply clearly positive reviews.

How to leverage these specific linguistic features to enhance persuasion in online communication is discussed as follows.

5. Discussion

This study aimed to discover the use of EELs in online hotel reviews. The results showed that happiness was the most frequently expressed emotion in Bali hotel reviews, which directly supports Ekman's (1999) principles of basic emotions, which identify happiness as one of the fundamental and universally

recognized human affects. The use of domestic language and hybrid language displays in marketing communications can positively influence consumer perceptions and behaviors (Zhu, 2016). Additionally, the cultural background and language attitudes of consumers play a significant role in shaping their evaluations and language preferences. Based on the result, there are three types of EELs found in the online reviews.

Firstly, the consistent use of highly positive affective language (e.g., 'amazing,' 'excellent,' 'enjoy') across these reviews serves as a compelling real-world illustration of Aristotle's rhetorical appeal to pathos (Barnes, 1984). As Aristotle posited, effective persuasion often relies on evoking an emotional response in the audience (Jörke, 2010). In the context of online reviews, these specific linguistic features are not merely descriptive; they function as a deliberate, albeit often unconscious, strategy by the reviewer to transfer their positive emotional experience to prospective guests (Talaue, 2022). This aligns with Aristotle's view that pathos influences judgment by altering the audience's emotional state, making them more receptive to the positive perception of the hotel.

Bali hotels frequently use superlatives and intensifiers “very” and “so” to amplify the positive emotional experience. These linguistic features can be leveraged in headlines, social media posts, and testimonial sections to immediately convey a sense of ultimate happiness. The use of verbs of sensory experience and emotional transformation, i.e., “don’t miss” and “can’t wait”, “cannot skip”, and “felt really pampered, emphasizes what the guest felt and experienced rather than just what they saw. It creates unique experiences that involve gaining knowledge and evoking emotions. The use of exclamation marks directly expresses the strong emotions of the guests. Moreover, the hyperbolic use of the word “epitome” embodies all the characteristics of the following nouns, respectively: luxury, sophistication, and relaxation, in their most ideal forms. These linguistic features show great enthusiasm and can often be leveraged in straightforward social media captions or ads for Bali’s hotels.

When a reviewer uses highly positive affective language, they are employing a pathos-evoking strategy to persuade the audience. Experience is an honest emotional language because it has been experienced in real life; thus, it can influence the perception of people who read it (Lindquist et al., 2015; Pishghadam & Shayesteh, 2017). The linguistic features, i.e., positive adjectives like “amazing”, “wonderful”, or “excellent”, sentiment lexicons, i.e., “happy”, “relaxed”, “enjoy”, and “very”, or “extremely” are designed to evoke feelings of awe, joy, and excitement, all positive emotions, serving the overall appeal to pathos. These adjectives are leveraged to make the potential guests imagine the emotional benefits of staying in Bali’s hotels.

Secondly, authentic personal narratives and social proof are powerful tools and strategies used to establish and enhance ethos, i.e., the credibility, trustworthiness, and authority of the speaker or writer. The goal of using ethos is to convince the audience that the source of the message is reliable and knowledgeable, making their arguments believable and persuasive.

The use of first-person pronouns "I," "we," "my," and "our" establishes a direct and authentic connection, thus reinforcing the idea of real experiences from real guests, building trust and social proof. Moreover, the phrases "sad to leave" and "cannot wait to return" clearly indicate that the guests enjoyed their stay so much that they didn't want it to end. “I wish to come back and stay longer” is a strong endorsement and desire to return. Leveraging these authentic personal narratives and social proof for building credibility (ethos) in hotel reviews is very crucial because people trust the experiences shared by real people more than traditional hotel advertising. Additionally, when guests mention staff by name or recount specific helpful interactions, it adds the values of authenticity and human interaction. Highlighting the personalized and warm Balinese hospitality may leverage trust in the hotel’s service quality so that it gives a deep impression and strong perception, thus encouraging the guests to express emotions through written reviews.

Adding brief contextual tags to quotes, e.g., “Honeymooners” and “Families,” helps target a specific audience. This can be leveraged by making the review more relevant to potential guests with similar travel purposes and enhancing credibility. Language, besides describing emotional states, also carries a certain cultural context and is sometimes aimed at a specific context (Pishghadam, 2025; Tariq et al., 2019; Zhu, 2016). Authentic personal narratives and social proof significantly enhance the credibility

and trustworthiness (ethos) of a source, particularly in persuasive hotel reviews. When individuals share their genuine experiences, they contribute directly to the perceived ethos of the subject. Furthermore, these authentic personal narratives act as powerful social proof, showcasing that numerous others have found positive outcomes from the experience. Thirdly, the relationship between concrete details (i.e., the sensory pieces of information) and values is essential to creating persuasive and impactful communication; they work together to evoke strong emotional responses in the audience (pathos). Concrete details provide logical justification of the guest experience, e.g., the *Svasana* Spa, the market visit, and the cooking class, immediately trigger emotional responses. Enjoyable experiences, such as a fun cooking class and a relaxing spa bath, evoke emotions of happiness that one wants to share with everyone, so that others can experience the same.

Highlighting the hotel's location and its proximity to famous attractions appeals to those who wish to gain prior knowledge of the actual geography and culture. Bali's natural conditions and rich culture leave a deep impression, thus encouraging the guests to come back or share their experience so that everyone knows the beauty of Bali. The hotel reviews that mention elements unique to Bali can reinforce the destination's appeal. This can be leveraged by enhancing the desire for unique cultural immersion and connection with nature, which are primary motivators for visiting Bali. The phrases "lush gardens", "*Rama Shinta* story", "*Megibung*", and "traditional charm" create a sense of exoticism and an authentic experience of a Bali stay. The written reviews illustrate that language carries cultural messages and depicts emotional impressions related to pleasant experiences when in contact with beautiful nature and original culture, thus giving rise to strong perceptions to be expressed through writing (Pishghadam & Shayesteh, 2017; Tariq et al., 2019; Tomak, 2022).

Overall, the data underscores the hotel's success in creating positive guest experiences, expressed in Happiness, Surprise, and Sadness (of leaving the hotel). However, it also points to areas in which negative emotions, particularly Anger, Fear, and Disgust, could be further investigated for improvement.

The study of EEL in online hotel reviews has several important linguistic implications. It provides insights into how language is used in digital communication, and it shows the relationship between language and emotion. The positive EELs within the reviews can be leveraged as a successful persuasion by employing a pathos-evoking strategy to stir a specific emotional response in the audience to persuade them. The linguistic features included in the online hotel reviews are adjectives like "amazing", "wonderful", and "excellent", sentiment lexicons, i.e., "happy", "relaxed", and "enjoy", and intensity modifiers amplifying sentiment, e.g. "very", and "extremely", designed to evoke feelings of awe, joy, and excitement, which are all positive emotions, serving the overall of memorable experience.

To further study emotions in online hotel reviews, several key areas should be explored. Future studies could examine the intensity of discrete emotions such as joy, anger, fear, sadness, disgust, and surprise to provide a richer understanding beyond positive or negative sentiment analysis. It is also necessary to investigate how specific emotions are tied to particular aspects of the reviewers' experience during their stay. For example, anger relates more to a lack of facilities and billing issues, while disgust is linked to hygiene and sanitation. Analyzing the context in which emotions are expressed can enlarge the scope of applied linguistics related to the hospitality industry.

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