How Do Small Hotels Handle E-Complaints in Egypt?

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Abstract

This research aimed to assess the strategies implemented by small-sized hotels to handle e-complaints via website and TripAdvisor as a social media platform and to identify the most common reasons for online customers' complaints. To achieve research objectives, data were collected using a mix of quantitative and qualitative approaches. First, an online survey targeted 150 customers who had made e-complaints in the last year. Second, content analysis of 198 collected complaints from the hotels' websites and accounts on TripAdvisor site during the last 12 months. The findings have highlighted that the low quality of food and beverage service was the most common reason for online complaints. The results also revealed that the majority of hotels neither responded to nor monitored complaints via social media, so it was not surprising to find out that the respondents were not satisfied with the aspects of handling e-complain process that adapted by the investigated hotels.

The results pointed out that the surveyed hotels did not provide an explanation of what mistakes have been made and did not describe the action taken to ensure it won't occur again. One of the main finding that the small sized hotels did not make the required effort for investigating and collecting all relevant information surrounding the complaints to make the picture clear and determine the suitable taken action. These results will benefit small hotels management to develop better handle customer e-complaints system with precise procedures as well as, they will distinguish the major aspects that they should change and improve. Future research may consider each hotel category investigations deeply to find more about their complaint management strategies.

Keywords: E-complaints, Hotels, Handling

Introduction

Managing customers' complaints is an important issue for the hospitality enterprises that are keen to improve service quality and achieve customer satisfaction especially for organizations working in highly competitive environment. Currently, Customers are considered very internet savvy, they are using their mobiles and laptops to choose a destination or reserve a hotel room. Word of mouth and reviews of other customers on social media effect on their choices. With limited resources and budgets, social media is a cost-effective tool to reach out customers. Web sites and social media are playing an important role in managing complaints and maintain a high level of experience effectively. The social media has changed not only promotion, advertising formats and customer service, but also the relationship between companies and customers which has become a relationship of dialogue and discussion through comments and suggestions on the premises official pages. Social networking sites also have the ability to listen and its tools allow tapping the words about brands (Harte, *et al.*, 1990; O'connor and Frew, 2002; Tyrrell and Wood, 2004; Litvin *et al.*, 2008; Min *et al.*, 2014).

Unfortunately, many premises still instead of encouraging their clients to express their opinions and submit their complaints and work to solve them, they insist on accusing the customers and consider that spending a lot of time with the client in an attempt to understand his problem and reach a solution is unnecessary and will waste time, effort and money, and it will disrupt the work (Sparks and Browning, 2010; Malthouse *et al.*, 2013; Xia, 2013). Whatever its nature, the company must recognize mistakes and solve them in a satisfactory way for the customer, because that is the best way to maintain the company, the employees and customers together. Companies should not waste their time in justifying of making mistakes for their customers. Rather, they must quickly recognize and work to solve them;

any debating the client and not the company is the winner (Xia, 2013). Earlier studies indicated that the client, who has unsolved problem, will tell by 9 or 10 people, who in turn may tell other people (Eccles & Durand, 1998; Chen *et al.*, 2011). While customers who have a problem that are resolved satisfactorily tell five people about their experience (Edvardsson *et al.*, 2011).

Malthouse *et al.* (2013) mentioned that implementing and integrating social media, as customer's engagement channels, is one of the top challenges facing the hospitality industry. The premises images and reputations are formed in a virtual space, so they have to give high priority to monitor and intervene with customers on these channels. Because not paying attention to customer problems can lead to greater problems or no clients at all. Therefore, attention should be paid to this aspect, and the human resources needed to deal with the demands of customers (O'connor and Frew, 2002; Dickinger and Bauernfeind, 2009; Mattila *et al.*, 2003; Xia, 2013). Prior studies showed that many premises are not able to handle customer complaints via social media effectively. A study conducted by Estelami (2000) revealed that almost forty percent of customers, who were disappointed of service quality, were consequently complained of the premises' strategies of handling their complaints, and assured that premises must enhance their complaint management system intensely. Other similar studies conducted by Andreassen (2001), Grainer (2003) and Ang and Buttle (2012) pointed out that that many complaint owners refuted the complaint handling system. The authors also argued that ineffective handling of complaints affect customers' satisfaction.

Recently, Satmetrix Company (2015) aimed to explore the procedures of handling e-complaint in 234 companies of Middle East and North Africa (MENA). The results declared that the surveyed companies still show little interest in what their customers want. More than half of the participated companies did not provide feedback for complaints and more than one third did not monitor replies via social media. Since there is little research has been conducted within the Egyptian hotel context, this research aimed to assess the strategies adapted by the investigated hotels to handle e-complaints via websites and TripAdvisor as a social media platform and to identify the most common reasons for online complaints and.

Review of literature

Complaint is the customer's expectations that are disappointed or not satisfied. Each client has its own expectations. These expectations revolve around the quality of products and services. When the client express of his complaint, he believes that some of his expectations have been disappointed and some of his hopes of products and services quality have faded (Barlow and Moller, 1996; Oliver, 1997; Matusitz & Breen, 2009; Kandampully, 2012). But when the client complains, it gives the premises a second chance to renew his frustrating hopes and satisfy his own disappointed expectations. The customer also gives an opportunity to answer his questions and fill expectations gap between what he wants and what he perceive (Barlow and Moller, 1996; Heung and Lam, 2003; Stauss and Seidel, 2007).

Complaint-related studies have highlighted others consequences of successful complaints management process, such as; service failure recovery (Barlow and Moller, 1996; Tyrrell and Wood 2004; Tanrisevdi, 2008; Zheng *et al.*, 2009), increase customers' satisfaction (Smith, Bolton& Wagner, 1999; Stauss and Seidel, 2007; Mowatt, 2010; Zhang and Vásquez, 2014), customer retention (Bowie and Buttle, 2011), customers' loyalty (Barlow and Moller, 1996)., prospect intention for re-purchase (McCole, 2004; Tianshu Zheng *et al.*, 2009), improve the operational proficiency and organizational performances (Bowen and Johnston, 1999; Slack *et al.*, 1998) and positive word of mouth (Spreng *et al.*, 1995; Özer *et al.* 2013).

The International Organization for Standardization (ISO) has developed a standard to handle customers' complaints; ISO 10002:2014 is a customer satisfaction system that helps to develop a system to effectively handle customer complaints. It also helps to identify

complaints and the method of treatment and disposal gradually, in addition to identifying the places that need improvement, which helps to eliminate the causes of complaints from the roots. ISO 10002 defines controls and processes that allow organizations to handle customer complaints professionally and effectively and ensure customer satisfaction with the level of service provided. The standard structure has nine regulatory principles; Communication, receipt of complaint, tracking of complaint, acknowledgement of complaint, initial assessment of complaint, investigation of complaints, response to complaints, and communication of the decision (Ang and Buttle,2012; ISO, 2017).

Dealing with dissatisfied and disgruntled customers on social media can be hard and critical and need a framework helping to manage this in a correct and effective way (Chen *et al.*, 2011; Dinnen and Hassanien, 2011; Kooyman, 2016). This framework can be represented by F.S.R.I. four rules. Firstly, find all complaints that mention brand name. It is easy to track a complaint in traditional means of customers support such as telephone or even an email. If someone contacts a company, either the call will be answered, or the caller will leave a message. So there's no need to make an effort to track complaints, it will be on a computer, smartphone, or tablet. But the task will become harder on social networking and other customer complaint sites (Peters *et al.*, 2013; Einwiller and Steilen, 2015). In general, all companies should use social listening tools to track mentions and discussions across social media channels that related to a brand name or other interest topics.

Examples of specialized packages for monitoring complaints that mention a brand name include; Hotsuite, Facebook insights, Twitter Analyzer, Google Analytics, Graphs API, YouTube Analytics (Hennig-Thurau *et al.*, 2004; Karatepe, 2006; Jansen *et al.*, 2009; Kaplan and Haenlein, 2010; Dekay, 2012). These web applications are also considered useful tools in search for customer feedback on social networks, because most feedback does not specifically mention the name of the company (Kim *et al.*, 2014). The number of people who complain on corporate social networks does not exceed only about half, so in many cases, they do not express their complaints in a way that clearly refers to the company (Kaplan and Haenlein, 2010; Kooyman, 2016). No so differently, Kim *et al.* (2014) found that one-third of corporate tweets were customer service problems, and only 3% contained the company's name with the @ symbol. This means that many references to company on the internet, on twitter or otherwise, can be indirect. That is why it is very important to have a system that monitors such complaints and comments (Hennig-Thurau *et al.*, 2004; Jansen *et al.*, 2009; Winch, 2011).

Secondly, show empathy and positive attitudes towards customer complaint; it smooth the way to search for solutions, leading to quick access to consensus decisions, and thus improving brand impressions (Davidow, 2000; Min *et al.*, 2014; Kooyman, 2016). Dissatisfied customers or complainers may not expect companies to respond, but they certainly want an audience to support and comfort them. That is why they may magnify the problem and openly publicized their objections. They want the public to support them with various comments (Kucuk and Krishnamurthy, 2007; Kaplan and Haenlein, 2010). Complaints may be often filling with critical terms, rude and violent language to get the reaction they seek from the public and also annoys the service providers (Tianshu Zheng *et al.*, 2009; Kooyman, 2016). In case of a very negative comment, the service provider may respond angrily. These are not the ideal conditions to respond to customer complaints quickly and sympathize (Sen and Lerman, 2007; Dekay, 2012; Xia, 2013; Wagner, 2015). So companies have to find a way to keep calm and sympathize when handling complaints, it is recommended to use statements like; "I cannot imagine how frustrated you can be",' I agree with you this is terrible", "No one should have gone through what you have gone through" and "I am glad you told me about this, now I can fix it" (Hennig-Thurau *et al.*, 2004; Einwiller and Steilen, 2015). It is never right to engage in a series of rude accusations and

debate with customers publicly on the internet. The public does not view the company as the winning party, even if it is entirely right (Lee and Hu, 2004). However, it is possible to find a debate between the complainers and the service providers, and this often happens because the person replying the complainers is unable to show empathy and prevent customers physiological desires in the dispute (Kucuk and Krishnamurthy, 2007; Liao, 2007).

The team responsible for customer service through social networking is the brand voice and must be trained enough to be able to choose different scenarios for the best ways to deal with behaviors in social networking sites (Liao, 2007; Zheng *et al.*, 2009). They should be carefully selected and trained because they are at the forefront of the confrontation, and in the end they are a necessary investment for business (Thøgersen *et al.*, 2003; O'Fallon and Rutherford, 2011). If an employee is unknowledgeable of handling complaints procedures or unable to resolve a specific complaint speedily, the complainants perception of the employee will be unskilled, unqualified and inefficiently trained which could lead dissatisfaction within the complaint resolution and the complaint process (Egan, 2008; Tianshu Zheng *et al.*, 2009; Winch, 2011).

The interaction with the complainers on the social networks in a soft and sympathetic manner does not mean the client is always right (Lee and Hu, 2004; Tianshu Zheng *et al.*, 2009). It means that the customer always has an audible opinion, and that companies must recognize, at the moment and often, the customer is having a problem caused by company in one way or another (Jansen *et al.*, 2009; Kaplan and Haenlein, 2010). The first step in handling complaints successfully, is by using a simple and short phrase like "I'm sorry" (Lee and Hu, 2004; Tianshu Zheng *et al.*, 2009). Copying and pasting prepared answers rarely convey customers' feelings of understanding and empathy (Tianshu Zheng *et al.*, 2009; Min *et al.*, 2014). A customer service employee, especially on the web sites and social media, who use standard responses that appear to be automated, copied from somewhere, in some cases pre-prepared and standardized responses can be as bad as never responding (Hennig-Thurau *et al.*, 2004; Liao, 2007;Einwiller and Steilen, 2015).

Third, respond quickly and publicly (Lee and Hu, 2004). Prior to replying customers' queries, the service providers should have a policy to deal with each social networking platform (Mattila *et al.*2003; Karatepe, 2006). Quick action has to be taken on how to communicate with customers. About 80% of inquiries or complaints can be summarized in about 10 topics to increase responsiveness significantly. A list of frequently asked questions can be prepared and answered, , the remaining 20% of the questions, need to take into account the seriousness of the complaint, and develop a contingency plan for complaints that need more time to resolve (Harrison- Walker, 2001; Melián-González *et al.*, 2013).

Quick response is critical when it comes to responding to social media. According to research conducted by Grégoire *et al.*, (2015), 40% of all social media complainants expect to receive the answer within one hour. However, the average time it takes to respond is actually five hours. Filling this gap is critical and should be the focus of any model customer service program on social media (Melián-González *et al.*, 2013). A similar recent study conducted by Einwiller and Steilen (2015), 42% of customers expect to be answered within one hour, while 32% expect to be answered within 30 minutes. Of those who tried to communicate with a brand social media for technical support, 57% expected the response time at night and on weekends to be similar to the response during normal business days. Some brands assigned two accounts, one for trained customer service agents to answer queries and sole problems, and another account for marketing purposes. This enables to take advantage of analytical data, remove chaotic entries from visitors, and reassure customer service (Harrison- Walker, 2001; Karatepe, 2006).

Public response is an important part of the rules for handling complaints on social networks (Lee and Hu, 2004). No doubt that any company aims to satisfy disgruntled customers

(Harrison- Walker, 2001; Kaplan and Haenlein, 2010). If a customer chooses to communicate publicly, the service provides have to respond in the same way, at least initially, whether by apologizing or responding to a positive comment (Kucuk and Krishnamurthy, 2007). Answer should be no more than twice, because it can lead to a spiral of negativity and rivalry (Dekay, 2012). In most scenarios one response is sufficient to solve complaint (Schoefer, 2004; Karatepe, 2006; Melián-González *et al.*, 2013).

Fourth, interact adequately with diverse methods. The nature of many social contacts means that it may be impossible to fully handle a complex complaint through only one interaction (Jansen *et al.*, 2009). So, the service providers may need a customer account number or other personal details to assist in complaint solution. A previous research by Kim *et al.* (2014) revealed that 60% of companies are unable to deal with customers' complaints through one interaction on social media. Some companies switch from public to private means, such as telephone call, to build a kind of empathy and to add a human touch (Lee and Hu, 2004; Min *et al.*, 2014). Twitter is the current leader in such opportunities because they have enabled businesses and consumers to create and send short videos instead of text and images. Facebook is also looking for more companies to use WhatsApp in similar circumstances (Einwiller and Steilen, 2015; Grégoire *et al.*, 2015).

Research methods

Globally, small and medium sized hotels are the majority of the accommodations premises, it accounted for more than 90 percent (Morrison and Thomas, 1999; Anckar and walden, 2001). There is a great argument regarding how small premises in the hospitality should be defined. Some defined criteria included; numbers of rooms (from 20 to 100 rooms), employees (less than fifty) and finance and management (one individual or small group) (Buick, 2003). According to Egyptian legislation, the term "small" included activities that have not more than fifty employees. According to Egyptian hotel guide (2015), there are 104 small hotels in Cairo, represent 68% of the total accommodations premises. From which a convenience sample of fifty hotels were chosen.

Data was collected using mixed methods. First, online survey targeted customers who had made a complaint in the last year via TripAdvisor and hotels' websites. Trip Advisor was chosen for many reasons. It is considered the most prominent site in travel search engine (Xiang and Gretzel 2010). The site is based on collecting people's opinions and comments about the places they visited and if anyone searches for a city, he will find information and advice from real travelers. Currently, the number of visitors to the Trip Advisor website is 340 million visitors per month, with over 320 million reviews and comments on more than 4.9 million accommodation and entertainment around the world (tripadvisor.com, 2017). After a preliminary scanning for the accounts of the investigated hotels, one hundred ninety eight complainants were found during the period (November 2016 to November 2017), the sampling frame included one hundred fifty of who were chosen randomly and invited to complete web-based questionnaire by sending a message containing a link to their emails. For validation purpose, 20 respondents were targeted for to validate the construct of the study. The questionnaire was pilot tested in order to make sure that the respondents were able to answer the questionnaire with any problems from wording, content, language and sequence and also the data were recorded smoothly. Changes in wording and sequence were made to improve the final data instrument.

The online survey included twenty four questions within two sections; the first section comprised of four questions and related to demographic data of the complainants (Age, gender, education level and travel type). The second section contained twenty questions and focused on assessing the customers satisfaction of the hotels handling complain process, this involved six aspects modified from (Chen *et al.*, 2011; Kuo , 2011; Winch, 2011; Ang and

Buttle, 2012; Dekay, 2012; Einwiller and Steilen, 2015) and included; ease of making the complaint, quickness of acknowledgement, speed of response to the complaint, capability of the human resource, satisfaction with the results of complaining, follow up procedures. Five-point Likert type scale was used (Strongly agree=1, Agree=2, Neutral=3, Disagree=4 and Strongly disgree=5).

Second, complaints content analysis. Of the one hundred ninety eight collected complaints from the hotels' websites and accounts on TripAdvisor site, the investigated hotels responded only to ten (5% response rate). The content analysis included identifying the type of complain as well as, assessing the strategies adapted by the investigated hotels to handle each complaint. The complaints categories were adapted from previous research issues (Harrison-Walker, 2001; Changuk Lee & Hu, 2004; Özer Sar, Alikılıç and Onat, 2013) and included; impolite contact person, unskilled employee and unknowledgeable employees, monetary problem, ambiguous advertising, low service quality, failure to keep promise, unacceptable additional fees; lack of sympathy to requests, complaints related to guestroom, noise, general cleanliness problem, safety and security. The steps used to handle complaints were evaluated according to the following adapted steps (Hennig-Thurau *et al.*, 2004; Lee and Hu, 2004; Liao, 2007; Tianshu Zheng *et al.*, 2009; Zheng *et al.*, 2009; Einwiller and Steilen, 2015;Kooyman, 2016); thank customers for pointing out the problem to correct it, apologize for the problem, show empathy with the customers, tell the customers why it happened, make an effort to investigate and solve the problem, tell them what will be done to correct it so it won't happen again, thank them again for allowing being able to improve service to the guest and other guests and finally, invite the guest back to experience service again.

Results and discussion
Online survey
The demographic data of the respondents

Table1. The demographic profile of the respondents (n=96)

	No.	Percent
Gender		
Male	74	77
Female	22	23
Age		
18-25	18	18.8
26-35	40	41.6
36- 45	22	23
46-55	10	10.4
Over 55	6	6.2
Education Level		
Secondary	13	13.5
College	55	57.2
University	31	32.3
Travel Type		
Families	56	58.3
Couples	28	29.2
Solo	12	12.5

The results in Table 1 revealed that the majority of the respondents were male (77%), whereas, twenty two of the participants were female (23%). This low participation of the female complainants support previous research (Cornwell et. al., 1991 and Huang et. al.,

1996) that female complains less male. In terms of age, forty of the respondents (41.6%) were aged 26-35, followed by respondents aged 36-45 (23%) and 18-25 (18.8%). The least percent of the respondents were more than 46 years (16.6%). In terms of education, more than half of the respondents have college (57.2%), followed be university (32.3%) and thirteen respondents have secondary education (13.5%). The results in table 1 also revealed that more than half of the participants have visited the investigated hotels with their families (58.3%), 29.2% of the respondents were couples and low percent (12.5%) visited Egypt individually. The high participation of customers than others support prior studies that demographic factors such as education level, age and social status effect on the customers complaint behavior. Younger, well- educated and customers with families or others have a higher possibility to express their emotions, experiences and feelings of dissatisfaction about service failure and complain more regularly (Heung and lam, 2003; Lam and Tang, 2003).

Table2. The customers' satisfaction with aspects of handling complain process

Statements	Mean	Five-Points Likert Scale (Freq.)				
		1	2	3	4	5
1. Overall, I am satisfied with the process of handling my complaint.	4.0	4	9	6	45	32
2. The hotel gave a promise to solve my complaint and keep it.	4.0	7	6	5	47	31
3. It was easy to register my complaint with the hotel website/ social media.	2.2	11	43	16	20	6
4. The hotel accepted and understood my complaint very well.	4.1	5	4	5	40	42
5. I got an acknowledgement of my complaint within 2 days.	4.1	6	3	7	40	40
6. The hotel had dealt with my complaint within one week.	3.5	7	13	17	40	19
7. The hotel explained of what occurred or mistakes have been made.	3.5	6	14	18	44	14
8. The hotel described the action taken to ensure it won't occur again.	3.2	8	20	18	42	8
9. It has taken more than one contact between me and the hotel to deal with my complaint.	3.5	7	17	8	48	16
10. The hotel requested additional information in order to investigate and take action.	3.5	7	15	16	44	14
11. The person who handled my complaint was experienced and helpful.	3.5	7	15	14	45	15
12. The contact person was authorized to handle my complaint satisfactorily.	3.5	8	16	13	38	21
13. The person replying apologized for unsatisfactory level of service and products.	3.6	7	12	14	42	21
14. The hotel kept me well updated, aware and posted of the development of my complaint.	3.8	5	7	9	54	21
15. The person replying handled my compliant politely and friendly.	3.6	7	11	14	48	16
16. The contact person took my viewpoints and show empathy to my annoyance.	3.4	9	14	24	34	15
17. The hotel response was a customized reply.	3.2	11	16	23	38	8
18. The person replying fully understood the point I was	3.6	6	14	16	41	19

making.					
19. As a result of my complaint, I got desirable outcomes that I was expecting.	3.5	6	13	19	42	16
20. The hotel contact me again to make sure that complain had been solved correctly and agreeably	3.5	9	9	22	38	18

"1= strongly agree, 2= Agree, 3= Neutral, 4= Disagree, 5= Strongly disagree"

The results in table 2 pointed out that seventy seven of the respondents (80.2%) were not satisfied with the aspects of handling e-complain process that adapted by the investigated hotels, whereas small proportion of the customers (13.6%) was satisfied. These findings declared that the small- sized hotels were not succeeding to exploit the opportunities of complaints to; solve problems, mistakes and service failure, build a concrete relationships and turn unsatisfied customers to satisfaction one. Unfortunately, neglecting customer complaints lead to product development failure and low level of satisfying customers, destroy the image of the hotel, customer escapes to competitors, weak corporate earnings, lack of loyalty and unwillingness to purchase again. A similar results have been reported by Estelami (2000), Andreassen (2001), Grainer (2003), Ang and Buttle (2012) and Satmetrix (2015) that there is a high level of customers' dissatisfaction with the handling complaints policy and procedures. According to table 2, more than half of the complainants (65.2%) found it was easy to register my complaint with the hotel website/ social media. This means that the process of handling complaints in the investigated hotels was easily accessible and visible to the complainants and the hotels published all required information about how and where to mad a complaint. Although, it is very important to designate specific online space for making an electronic complaint, but also complaints have to be handled effectively. After receiving of each complaint, the majority of the studied hotels (80.4%) did not acknowledge the complainants via websites or social media within 2 days of receiving complaints and did not keep them well updated, aware and posted of the development of their complaints for seventy five the customers (78.2%). Additionally, more than half of the respondents (61.5%) disagreed that the hotels had deal with their complaints within one week of complaints receipt. In addition, the majority of customers (85.6%) also assured that the explored hotels did not accept and understand their complaints very well. Multiple regression analysis showed that the speed of responding and solving complaints had an impact on customers' satisfaction. Results showed that the speed was statistically significant at a significance level of .05. R^2 for the analysis was .21, which means that responding and solving complaints speedily accounted for 21% of variation in customers' satisfaction. These results agree with what was reported by Burke *et al.* (2000) and Schoefer and Ennew (2004) that the late of complaints settlement will make the customers become more vocal, unsatisfied and annoyed and on the contrary, notifying customers of receiving complaints, keeping them informed of progress, will increase customers' satisfaction.

Focusing on the solution was a vital step in solving complains after listening, apologizing and empathizing. The customers had to know that the hotel views or explanations of what happened, there could be misunderstanding or lack of information and it needs to be cleared. The hotels also had to give a great concern to customers' feedback and explain the action taken to make customers feel valued. Regarding this step, the results showed that the studied hotels did not; keep the promise they gave to solve complaints for the majority of respondents (81.3%), provide an explanation of what occurred or mistakes have been made for fifty nine of the respondents (60.4%) and describe the action taken to ensure it won't occur again for more than half of respondents (52.1%). The findings also pointed out that the surveyed hotels did not make more than one contact with 66.7% of the respondents to deal with their complaints, did not request additional information from 60.4% of the customers and used

standardized response for just less than half of the customers (47.9%). This means that the small sized hotels did not make the required effort for investigating and collecting all relevant information surrounding the complaints to make the picture clear and determine the suitable taken action. Multiple regression analysis showed that the hotels' online effort had an impact on customers' satisfaction. Results showed that the online effort was statistically significant at a significance level of .05. R2 for the analysis was .11, which means these competencies and skills accounted for 11% of variation in customers' satisfaction. This result was consistent with Holloway and Beatty (2003) that the company's online efforts effect on customers' dissatisfaction.

Regarding the customers' satisfaction with the contact person, it was confirmed that the complainants stated that the person who handled complaints was not; experienced and helpful (62.5%), authorized to handle complaints satisfactorily (61.4%) and politely and friendly (66.7%). The complainants added that the person replying did not; apologize for unsatisfactory level of service and products (65.7%), fully understand the point was making (62.5%) and take customer viewpoints or show empathy to his/her annoyance (51%). It is obvious that the quality of contact persons in the surveyed hotels effect on the customers' satisfaction with the handling complaint process, as they were not; skilled, knowledgably, trained to handle complaints properly and they did not also show empathy, responsiveness, courtesy or good interpersonal skills when contact customers. Multiple regression analysis was used to examine if the quality of contact person had an impact on customers satisfaction. Results showed that the human resource quality is statistically significant at a significance level of .05. R2 for the analysis was .32, which means these competencies and skills accounted for 32% of variation in customers' satisfaction. These results are consistent with earlier researches conducted by Thøgersen et al., (2003), Egan (2008) and O'Fallon and Rutherford (2011) that the abilities and competencies of the responsible team for handling e-complaints can make or break customers' dissatisfaction. Skilled, qualified and efficiently trained human resource achieve clients' satisfaction within the complaint resolution and the complaint process.

The hotels had to communicate and follow up customers to make sure they were satisfied with the action taken and if not they had to provide alternative action or decision. The results related to this step indicated that more than half of respondents (60.3%) did not get desirable outcomes that they were expecting and the surveyed hotels did not contact more than half of the customers (58.4%) again to make sure that complain had been solved correctly and agreeably. Multiple regression analysis showed that communicating and following up customers had an impact on customers' satisfaction. Results showed that the following up is statistically significant at a significance level of .05. R2 for the analysis was .17, which means these competencies and skills accounted for 17% of variation in customers' satisfaction. Similar study conducted by Einwiller, & Steilen. (2015), founded the follow up to see if customer is satisfied with the way of handling his complaint, would be a vital steps in effective process.

Content analysis
The results of content analysis in Table 3 showed that the general managers were the person who responsible for replying the customers' complaints in the investigated hotels. The results also revealed that the general managers provided feedback for only 10 complaints, which means that they ignored or reply to about 95% of the complaints. This was consistent with previous research conducted by Rezab (2011) that 95% of comments on Facebook pages were un-answered by brands. This is considered a very low percent of customer service. The managers did not follow up and respond quickly to customers, this result is kept with others research (Estelami, 2000; Grainer, 2003; Ang and Buttle, 2012; Satmetrix), that the majority

of the companies ignore of the customers' complaints via social media channels. Based on the analysis, it had been found that the most important reasons for customers' e- complaints were; low service quality (22.6%), unskilled or unknowledgeable employee (18.6%), complaints related to guestroom (12.6%), monetary problem (9.5%), impolite contact person (9%), general cleanliness problem (8%), lack of sympathy to requests (7.5%), failure to keep promise (5.5%), unacceptable additional fees (5%) and the slightest reason was noise (1.5%). These findings are supporting past research by Özer *et al.* (2013) that low service quality was the most reason for complaining and the noise was the least cause. The analysis showed an interesting result that the mangers ignored the complaints related to low food and beverage service quality, impolite contact person, unacceptable additional fees and noise; although some of these complaints resolution cannot be costly to the hotel and easy to be handled. In relation to the speed of responding and feedback to the customers about their complaints, the analysis showed that the half of the complaints were responded in one week, three complaints in more than one month and only two complaints within two days.

Concerning the responded complaints, the general managers thanked all the customers (n=10) for their comments and complaints. The next step was apologizing, it was provided for nine of the complainers (90%). Only four mangers start with thanking then apologizing. Although, it is necessary to apologize to the customer with explicit words, but this should happen after thanking him. Starting with apologizing to the customers, may encourage them to take a superior position. But starting to thank them will encourage a friendly dialogue. The mangers showed empathy to six of the customers, they used statements such as; "I *understand the frustration….*", " *I cannot imagine how frustrated you can be*", " *I agree with you this is very bad*", " *This is not up to our standards*", "*You have every right to be angry*" and "*we are saddened and feel responsible for the discomfort*". The mangers explained to five of the customers the reasons of what happened and why some of these problems were outside of their will and powers. Of the five complaints, two of the complaints were related to overpricing of outsourcing services such as tour guiding, one related to the regulations and security issues that approved by the state and two were related to rooms design and views.

The mangers also told six the customers what has been done to correct it so it never happen again. The actions included changing some of the outsourcing provides and they now depended only on trusted suppliers, the managers indicted that they currently review each room cleanliness on a daily basis. They added that the cleanliness of the surrounding area is not the hotel responsibility but they coordinate with the local authority to keep it clean regularly. The mangers added that they cancel the reservations for the rooms with bad and unacceptable view and they are studying to use them in other alternative purposes. One of the main finding of the analysis that the managers replied to seven customers in customized responses, as they reviewed, evaluate and determine required action of each complaint separately. On the other hand, one manger replied to three of the customers' complaints in a standardized response regardless of the type and nature of the complaint. The standardized reply was:

> *Thank you for your comments following your recent stay at **X** Hotel. Please accept my sincere apology that your short stay was not up to your expectations. There is certainly no excuse for the disappointing standards which you encountered, and I would like to assure you that action has already been taken as a result of your comments. I would appreciate if you provide a cellular number where i can contact you to get to know more details concerning your stay. or should you wish, you can contact me on my email.* (Case codes no., C8, C9, C10)

The analysis of the complaints declared that only one mangers offer compensation for inconvenience accommodations in the form of a free night stay and complimentary airport pickup. Another finding of the content analysis that only four mangers asked for more

information and personal contact of the customer (cellular number) to get more details related to the complaint. Only five of the mangers thanked customers again for allowing being able to improve service, assured the guest that as a result of their assistance will institute a change, policy, idea that will prevent this from happening again and invited the guest back to experience service again.

Table3 . Complaints' types and strategies of handling complaints

Type of complaint	Not Responded	Responded	Steps of handling complaints					
			Thank	Apologize	Empathize	Explain	Effort	Action
impolite contact person	18	-	-	-	-	-	-	-
Unskilled or unknowledgeable employee	34	3	3	3	-	-	3	-
monetary problem	16	3	3	3	3	3	-	3
ambiguous advertising	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-
low service quality	45	-	-	-	-	-	-	-
failure to keep promise	10	1	1	1	1	-	1	-
unacceptable additional fees	10	-	-	-	-	-	-	-
lack of sympathy to requests	15	-	-	-	-	-	-	-
complaints related to guestroom	23	2	2	2	2	2	-	2
Noise	2	-	-	-	-	-	-	-
General cleanliness problem	16	1	-	1	-	-	-	1
Total	188	10	9	10	6	5	4	6

Conclusion and recommendations

Today's there are increase in customers' complaints via social media. Although, complaint based research stated that handling e-complaints effectively have many positive consequences, there is a little concern and awareness for this importance among many premises. Moreover, these companies did not provide feedback for complaints and did not monitor replies via social media. Earlier studies showed that there is no difference for the Middle East region. Even though, the importance of managing e-complaints, there is a limited prior research in the hospitality industry in Egypt. So, the current paper focused on the strategies used to handle customers' e-complaints by the small sized hotels. The findings had highlighted that low quality of food and beverage service was the most common reason for online complaints. Unskilled and unknowledgeable staff was the second reason for complaining, while complaints related to guestroom was the third reason. The results of the customers' views in the questioner have been compared to the results from the content analysis of complaints from the hotels websites and accounts of TripAdvisor.

Some consistent results have been found; the majority of the respondents were not satisfied about the aspects of handling complaints process implemented by the investigated hotels via social media, this may be due to that hotels ignore the majority of customers' complaints and did not provide any feedback of their problems. Regarding, the ease of making a complaint, the respondents agreed that it was easily accessible and visible to complain and the hotels published all required information about how and where to mad a complaint. Additionally, the studied hotels did not acknowledge the complainants via websites or social media within 2 days of receiving complaints did not keep them well updated, aware and posted of the development of their complaints the hotels and did not deal with their complaints within one week of complaints receipt. The results also showed that the small sized hotels did not make the required effort for investigating and collecting all relevant information surrounding the complaints to make the picture clear and determine the suitable taken action. Moreover, the problem of contact person quality in the surveyed hotels effect on the customers' dissatisfaction with the handling complaint process, as they were unskilled, unknowledgeable, untrained to handle complaints properly and they did not also show empathy, responsiveness, courtesy or good interpersonal skills when contact customers. The hotels did not communicate and follow up customers to make sure they are satisfied with the action taken or if not they have to provide alternative action or decision.

The current study has some certain limitations. First, this study focused only on small-sized hotels and specific area (Cairo). So, another area may be studied for future research. Secondly, this study considers only analysis of complaints on hotel websites and TripAdvisor, whether the results would be the same in other hotels categories, e.g. four and five star hotels. Another limitation in this research is using a non-probability convenience sample. This was due to the fact that not all of the small-sized have a website or TripAdvisor account. The sample could be enlarged throught analysis complaints via other social media platforms such as, Twitter and Facebook.

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