



Customer experience in green star hotels: a content analysis of online complaints

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Abstract

The increasing global concern over environmental degradation has positioned sustainability as a central concept in both consumer expectations and corporate strategies. In parallel, the tourism industry has progressively integrated environmentally friendly practices into its operations. This study investigates electronic customer complaints regarding green-star certified lodging establishments in Denizli, Turkey, with the dual objective of identifying major areas of dissatisfaction and evaluating the extent to which sustainability-related issues are reflected in customer feedback. To this end, customer reviews posted on Tripadvisor.com concerning green-star hotels certified by the Ministry of Culture and Tourism were subjected to content analysis. The results indicate that the most prominent complaints pertain to staff attitudes and behaviors, food and beverage services, and the physical environment, particularly issues of cleanliness. Conversely, complaints explicitly related to sustainability were minimal, implying that guests prioritize service quality and operational performance over environmental initiatives when expressing dissatisfaction.

1. Introduction

In today's world, growing global concerns about environmental degradation are triggering a profound change at both individual and corporate levels, bringing the concept of sustainability to the forefront more than ever. These concerns have not only raised awareness but have also led to sustainability becoming a central element in all aspects of life, especially in our consumption habits. The number of consumers who prefer businesses that support sustainable production and environmentally friendly practices is rapidly increasing. This strong consumer trend has compelled businesses to adopt sustainable practices in order to remain competitive and develop future-oriented strategies.

This global wave of transformation is also deeply affecting the tourism sector. As tourism is inherently dependent on environmental resources, the adoption of sustainable practices plays an even more critical role here. Many tourism businesses are launching sustainable initiatives to reduce their environmental footprint and fulfill their social responsibilities. In this process, standards determined and accepted by various national and international organizations, along with compliance with these standards, are of great importance. Businesses that adhere to these standards not only strengthen their corporate image but also achieve significant gains in areas such as increasing their customer potential, saving on operational costs, and obtaining a long-term competitive advantage.

One of the most concrete indicators of sustainable tourism is eco-labels. These labels independently verify the environmental sensitivity and sustainability commitments of businesses. Many different eco-label applications exist, such as the Green Star, Blue Flag, Green Key, and Green Globe.

The Green Star certificate is an important document demonstrating the environmental sensitivity and sustainability commitments of hotel businesses. This label indicates that the establishments meet a series of strict environmental criteria, such as wastewater management, measurement and control of water and energy consumption, monitoring the amount of chemical waste, and raising environmental awareness (Özdipçiner et al., 2016). Therefore, possessing this label shows that a hotel has successfully implemented a range of environmental practices, including reducing energy and water consumption, improving waste management, using local products, and increasing overall environmental consciousness.

For businesses, the most effective and cost-efficient advertising tool is satisfied customers. Customer satisfaction is considered a strategic element that affects not only repeat purchase behavior but also the indirect promotion and reputation management of the business. Highly satisfied customers tend to share their experiences within their social circles, which can provide positive returns to the business both directly and indirectly (Fotis et al., 2012). Indeed, as stated by Kaya (2004), in line with the understanding "tell your friends about your satisfaction, tell us about your complaints," it is of great importance for businesses to go beyond effectively managing customer complaints and to address practices aimed at increasing satisfaction with a holistic approach, structuring the related processes systematically. Research shows that dissatisfied customers convey their negative experiences to at least ten different people, while satisfied customers share their positive experiences with only four to five people. Today, with electronic word-of-mouth (e-WOM), we can speak of an impact far exceeding these numbers. This situation clearly demonstrates the direct impact of complaint management and customer satisfaction on the reputation and growth of businesses. With the rise of the World Wide Web, it can also be said that the voice of the consumer is stronger than ever as many consumers use and disseminate more information.

Electronic word-of-mouth communication is accepted as a new and important concept in today's consumer behavior literature. Defined by Jean Harrison Walker (2001) as "non-commercial, informal, interpersonal communication between a sender and a receiver about a brand, product, company, or service," e-WOM refers to a form of communication where consumer interactions are concentrated on digital platforms. Complaints, on the other hand, offer significant opportunities for businesses to improve their services, inform consumers, and strengthen customer loyalty (Komunda & Oserankhoe, 2012). In this context, complaints should be regarded not as a problem by businesses, but as early warning signals that need to be handled with care. This is because complaints emerge as one of the simplest, most effective, and cost-advantaged methods of receiving meaningful and direct feedback from the customer. Accordingly, the strategy of being a complaint-friendly business holds critical importance in today's competitive conditions (Keskin, 2016). Complaints give businesses the opportunity to see themselves through the eyes of the customer.

Although the Green Star Certificate documents that hotels fulfill their environmental responsibilities, it has not been sufficiently clarified how customers perceive these practices and to what extent they are reflected in their experiences. The available resources in the national and international literature on the Green Star and consumer behavior include: Practices for environmental protection for tourism businesses and their effect on consumer preference (Kızılırmak, 2012; Berk & Celep, 2020; Kement, 2019; Taşer & Çelebi, 2022; Rahman et al., 2018; Mercedes et al., 2019), the effect of environmental practices on customer satisfaction (Berezan et al., 2014; Lee et al., 2010; Martinez et al., 2017), and evaluations of visitors to environmentally friendly facilities (Toprak et al., 2022; Pacheco et al., 2024; Olorunsola et al., 2024). However, in the existing literature, no study has been found that directly examines the degree of overlap between the Green Star certificate criteria and customer complaints. Particularly, recent studies such as Pacheco et al. (2024) and Olorunsola et al. (2024), despite examining online visitor reviews, do not present an analysis that directly accesses consumer complaints regarding green practices within these reviews. Toprak et al. (2022) stated that complaints related to the green star theme were limited. This situation shows that it remains uncertain which issues customers complain about more in certified hotels, how related these complaints are to

environmental sensitivity criteria, and what their effects are on customer satisfaction. These questions form the main problem of the current study.

Therefore, it can be stated that the degree of overlap between the certificate criteria and customer complaints is uncertain. What issues do customers complain about most in hotels that document their environmental friendliness? How many of these complaints are directly related to environmental sensitivity criteria? Furthermore, what kind of impact do these complaints have on customer satisfaction and the perception of sustainability? These questions constitute the fundamental problem of the study.

The main purpose of this research is to understand customers' perceptions of environmental sensitivity, their expectations, and the real impact of this label on the customer experience by examining customer e-complaints about Green Star certified accommodation establishments in detail. This analysis will provide valuable insights for hotel businesses in developing their sustainability strategies and will also help potential customers make informed choices.

2. Literature review

Technological developments have led to the use of natural resources as if they were infinite and have caused environmental pollution. The increased awareness of individuals has made them uncomfortable with this pollution, leading to a desire to leave a cleaner world for future generations. In line with this, individuals' responsibilities towards the environment have increased, and they have started to implement practices within this scope. One of these practices is preferring businesses that care about the environment. In their study examining the effect of environmental sensitivity on competitive power, Doğan & Ertaş (2018) stated that some businesses desire to obtain a Green Star certificate to be competitive and protect the environment.

The importance of the green concept in tourism has been understood, and social responsibility projects for the implementation of environmentally friendly activities in the sector have been developed. "Blue Flag, Green Key, Green Globe, Green Star are examples of these" (Taşer & Çelebi, 2022). To obtain the certificates in these projects, businesses are required to implement practices related to energy, water, waste, ecological activities, and environmental protection. Thus, the damage to the environment will be reduced, and the satisfaction of consumers who are careful about this issue will be ensured, making the business more preferable. Preferring businesses that support green and sustainability will have a positive impact on the environment, individuals, and businesses (Kızılırmak, 2012). In addition to these practices, the use of social media platforms and websites, which are important today, plays a significant role in both promotion and environmental awareness.

In a study on green-certified businesses, Mele et al. (2019) examined the factors affecting consumers' attitudes and preferences towards eco-labeled establishments. According to the research findings, it is seen that especially social media interactions create positive effects on consumer behavior, and this situation contributes to the branding process of hotels. In a study conducted on green hotels operating in Turkey, it was determined that the green attitude explained the visit intention by 55% and positively affected this intention. Furthermore, it was revealed that the green attitude also had positive effects on behavioral intentions such as recommending and willingness to pay more (Kement, 2019). The effects of environment-themed communication strategies conducted via social media on brand image and customer loyalty are also emphasized in many other studies (Lee et al., 2010; Berezan et al., 2014; Rahman et al., 2015).

Indeed, other studies have similarly revealed that the preference for environmentally friendly hotels is closely related to variables such as the level of environmental knowledge (Lee et al., 2010), perceived behavioral control (Kang et al., 2012), and social norms. Especially the fact that new generation consumers see sustainability practices not just as a choice but as an indicator of value creates a competitive advantage in the field of green hotel management (Martínez et al., 2017).

Eco-labels like the Green Star are known to have various benefits for businesses. Firstly, they directly contribute to reducing costs through environmentally friendly practices. For example, energy and water efficiency measures can provide significant operational savings in the long run. Secondly, these labels significantly strengthen the business's image and reputation. Today's consumers appreciate

and prefer businesses with a high sense of corporate social responsibility. Thirdly, eco-labels can function as a powerful marketing tool for potential customers with high environmental sensitivity (Özdipçiner et al., 2016). This audience prioritizes environmental factors when choosing destinations and accommodation for their holidays or business trips. At this point, customer comments about a hotel's environmental sensitivity can have a decisive impact on the choices of potential customers. Therefore, accommodation establishments with a green certificate not only reduce their environmental impact but also transform into businesses that gain the loyalty of environmentally conscious consumer segments and create long-term brand value. In this framework, environmental labeling, sustainability communication, and interaction strategies on digital platforms have become fundamental competitive elements in modern hotel management.

With the proliferation of the internet and social media, consumers have become content creators, while other individuals have become readers of this content (Tyrrell & Woods, 2004). Today, readers have the opportunity to access more detailed data about shared information by interacting directly with content creators. It is stated that with the development of technology, the use of internet-based sites has become widespread, and experiences from goods and services received are easily shared through mobile applications. Online customer reviews shared on social media and businesses' own websites have critical value for both consumers and businesses today. As Niu & Fan (2018) stated, these digital feedbacks enable businesses to quickly reach their customers and get instant feedback on their experiences. As Argan (2014) emphasized, reaching comments and complaints in a very short time and providing feedback offers a significant advantage for businesses in understanding their shortcomings and responding to customer demands. In addition, Karatepe (2006) draws attention to the response time to online complaints. According to Karatepe, complaints should be answered as quickly as possible. The response time is important for the customer. Accordingly, businesses should establish their complaint management procedures and act accordingly. Effective and timely complaint resolution processes are the key to increasing customer satisfaction and turning negative experiences into positive ones.

When the domestic and foreign literature on e-complaint management in the accommodation sector is examined, it is revealed that the absence of complaints does not mean perfect customer satisfaction or flawless service delivery. On the contrary, it is emphasized that dissatisfied customers often refrain from communicating their negative experiences to businesses, and this situation increases the importance of customer complaints. In this context, it is stated that customers who do not directly communicate their dissatisfaction to the business tend not to prefer the business again and may negatively affect the business's reputation by sharing their negative experiences with their circles (Heppell, 2006). The basis of relational marketing, one of the modern marketing methods, is to establish long-term relationships with existing customers and thus achieve high profitability goals. The cornerstone of relational marketing is the view that retaining existing customers is much less costly than acquiring new ones (Torres & Kline, 2006). The key to establishing good and sustainable relationships with existing customers is to focus on their needs and satisfy them; because customers do not forget the problems or dissatisfactions they encounter, even after years. Therefore, the necessity of giving importance to the thoughts of customers, which consist of their experiences with the service received, emerges.

It is stated in the literature that satisfied customers show a higher level of sensitivity to the marketing activities of the business; their tendency to ask questions decreases, and since they know the business more closely, they are willing to pay higher prices for the services offered (Walls et al., 2011; Berk & Celep, 2020; Tutar & Çamlıbel, 2022). On the other hand, it is stated that even customers whose expectations are met sometimes desire the business to realize its mistakes and carry out correction and development processes by making even small details a subject of complaint (Burucuoğlu, 2011). In this context, customer complaints can be evaluated as an important feedback mechanism for improving service quality. Therefore, businesses need to encourage their customers to provide complaints and feedback regarding their experiences. In a study conducted by Gökdelen et al. (2012), it was found that consumers' complaint experiences with a positive outcome with the company increased their motivation to report negative situations that might arise in the future.

It is emphasized in the literature that customer complaints not only contribute to the improvement of existing services but also allow for the discovery of new markets and the development of innovative product or service ideas (Jean Harrison-Walker, 2001). While customers express their complaints by communicating directly about products or services; in some cases, they share their complaints with other consumers through intermediary institutions such as consumer associations, media organizations, travel agencies, tour operators, or online platforms like TripAdvisor, HolidayCheck, and Şikayetvar. E-complaints are generally defined as online feedback that is enriched with supporting materials such as documents, photos, and videos, and contains direct address to the company or brand (Gürkan & Polat, 2014). In the study conducted by Ünal (2019), e-complaints made by hotel customers via the businesses' websites were examined, and it was found that female customers complained more about cleanliness and hygiene, while male customers complained more about pricing and payment processes. Dinçer & Alrawadieh (2017) stated that e-complaints about service quality, cleanliness, and the effectiveness of hotel facilities were in the majority. Similarly, Ali et al. (2024) indicated that there were more complaints about hotel facilities, food and beverage, and cleanliness.

Although most businesses aim for error-free production and flawless service, errors in production or service processes and customer complaints cannot be completely eliminated. At this point, the primary duty of businesses is to develop effective solutions by analyzing the negative situations encountered with a systematic approach and to evaluate these complaints as early warning signals. Regardless of the sector in which it operates, every business must accept that it can make production or service errors and establish a comprehensive and effective complaint management system by taking these errors into account (Şirzad & Turancı, 2019).

Customers exhibit complaint behavior and demand services that meet their expectations when they do not fully receive the return for factors such as the costs they pay for a product or service, the effort they show, the time they spend, and their experience. Businesses that offer fast and effective solutions to their customers' demands during the complaint processes achieve higher levels of satisfaction and loyalty compared to customers who do not complain (Özdipçiner, 2016). In today's highly competitive economic structure, businesses have to offer different and superior services to their customers to maintain or increase their market shares. In this context, the main priorities of market-oriented businesses are quality service delivery and effective management of after-sales services (Keskin, 2016).

The proper management of customer complaints, their consideration, the evaluation process, and informing the customer about this process emerge as an important issue. This is because the objective execution and conclusion of this process will create a sense of trust in the customer.

Among the most frequently encountered customer complaints in the service sector, disruptions in the reservation processes, unprofessional attitudes and behaviors of the staff, slow service delivery, insufficient information, and dissatisfaction with pricing policies come to the forefront (Yüksel & Kılınç, 2003). In addition, factors such as the lack of professional training of service employees, the heterogeneous nature of services, and the variability of service quality from customer to customer are also among the main causes of customer complaints (Kılıç & Ok, 2012). When customer complaints are evaluated in general, it is also understood that a significant portion of them are related to the personnel.

3. Method

2.1. Importance of the research

As individuals' responsibilities towards the environment increase, they act more sensitively in matters such as travel and shopping. One of these sensitivities is the interest and inclination towards environmentally friendly businesses (Martinez et al., 2017). It is clear that consumer behaviors are influenced by social media, and other consumer comments, likes, and complaints (Fotis et al., 2012; Aymankuy et al., 2013). In this context, it is important to reveal what the guest complaints about environmentally friendly businesses are. In a competitive environment, it is important for businesses

providing services in the same category to know both their own situation and the situation of their competitors in this regard.

2.2. Method of the research

This study was conducted using the content analysis technique, one of the qualitative research methods. Content analysis is a technique that aims to systematically analyze and interpret written or oral data under specific themes. In the study, online customer complaints about environmentally friendly accommodation facilities were examined, and these complaints were categorized and analyzed according to specific themes.

2.3. Research area and population

The population of the research consists of hotel businesses in the province of Denizli that have an "Environmentally Friendly Facility" certificate from the T.R. Ministry of Culture and Tourism. As of 2025, there are only two hotel establishments with this certificate in the province of Denizli. One of these hotels is a 5-star and the other is a 4-star hotel. To avoid disclosing the real identities of the hotels, they were coded as Hotel A and Hotel B, respectively, during the analysis process.

2.4. Data sources, collection and coding process

The data used in the research were obtained from the TripAdvisor.com website. This platform is a frequently used data source for analyzing consumer behavior thanks to its genuine reviews containing user experiences. Within the scope of the study, only reviews rated as "average," "poor," and "terrible" were considered. Thus, the focus was on users' expressions of dissatisfaction.

In this study, reviews between 01.07.2021 and 15.06.2025 were considered and analyzed. 01.07.2021 is the end date of pandemic-related restrictions in Turkey. Therefore, post-pandemic period reviews were taken into account. This time frame was determined to both access current customer complaints and to analyze recent trends. The data were obtained between 16.06-25.06 2025.

Customer complaints obtained from the TripAdvisor platform were manually compiled and pre-processed for content analysis. In this process, customer complaints within the determined date range were transferred to a Microsoft Excel file (in the order of review1, date of review, review text, customer score, and date of stay) and were first classified according to criteria of recurring expressions, thematic integrity, and meaningfulness. For validity and reliability, this study was conducted by two different researchers within the specified date range and then compared to reach its final form.

The analysis of the data was carried out manually on a Microsoft Excel file. During the coding process, each complaint statement was broken down into its meaningful units and classified under the following sample categories:

- Food and beverage services
- Service quality and personnel behavior
- Rooms
- The hotel in general
- Physical environment and cleanliness
- Reservation/price
- Hotel facilities
- Complaints related to sustainability/Green Star criteria

These categories and their sub-categories were determined and then converted into numerical data to obtain frequency distributions. Thus, a dual analysis based on both qualitative themes and quantitative comparisons was made.

All data used in the study were obtained from publicly available platforms. The names of the hotels and the identity information of the reviewers were kept confidential, ensuring data privacy and adherence to ethical principles.

4. Results

Within the scope of the research, it was determined that a total of 32 complaints were made on the Tripadvisor.com website, 21 for Hotel A and 11 for Hotel B, as shown in Table 1.

Table 1. Number of complaints made

	Hotel A	Hotel B	Total (n)
Average	11	7	18
Poor	2	1	3
Terrible	8	3	11
Total	21	11	32

As a result of analyzing these complaints given in Table 1, main themes were identified and shown in Table 2. In the process of determining the "Sustainability/Related to Green Star criteria" theme, special attention was paid to whether there were codes related to Green Star criteria such as wastewater management, measurement and control of water and energy consumption, monitoring of chemical waste, and raising environmental awareness.

Table 2. Main themes regarding complaints

	Number of complaints		Total(n)
	Hotel A	Hotel B	
F&B Services	29	17	46
Service Quality and Personnel Behavior	39	23	62
Rooms	25	19	44
The Hotel in General	18	15	33
Physical environment and cleanliness	27	18	45
Reservation/Price	13	14	27
Hotel facilities	19	7	26
Complaints related to sustainability/Green Star criteria	1	2	3
Total	171	115	286

According to this table, the main themes regarding complaints about environmentally friendly hotel establishments are; F&b services (46), Service quality and personnel behavior (62), Rooms (44), The hotel in general (33), Physical environment and cleanliness (45), Reservation/Price (27), Hotel facilities (26), Complaints related to sustainability/Green Star criteria (3). Looking at the number of complaints that emerged with the determined main themes, it is seen that the most complaints are in the "Service quality and personnel behavior (39+23)" theme. This is followed by the "food and beverage services (29+17)" and "physical environment and cleanliness (27+18)" themes. Complaints related to sustainability and Green Star criteria are almost non-existent (1+2).

The codes and frequencies related to the main theme of Food and beverage services are given in Table 3.

Table 3. Food and beverage services main theme

F&B Services	Hotel A/B
Food quality, taste, variety	9/6
Breakfast variety/freshness	7/5
Beverage service (price, quality)	5/4
Restaurant and bar staff attitude	4/2
Live music, entertainment	4/0
Total	29/17

Within the main theme of food and beverage services, Hotel A received more complaints than Hotel B (29/17). No complaints were identified regarding live music and entertainment at Hotel B.

- **Hotel A:** Although some reviews mentioned that the food was tasty, serious complaints were observed such as insufficient variety in the open buffet, the necessity of queuing, scarcity of main courses, and hot meals being cold. It was also stated among the complaints that the service staff was not helpful. The fact that tea and water were charged for was also frequently criticized by guests.
- **Hotel B:** Complaints about the mediocrity of the breakfast and the inadequacy and poor quality of the tea are noticeable. The lack of tea service during breakfast or it being served very late was frequently criticized. Complaints were also identified regarding the staleness of the products offered at breakfast. In general, there were complaints about the food being poor and the lack of variety due to similar products despite a visually diverse spread.

Some customer comments on this theme are given below:

"The food is delicious but the variety of main dishes is low, most of the desserts are similar to each other" Review 4, November 2023, Hotel A

"The food is very poor... There was no red meat on the menu." Review 10, April 2025, Hotel A.

"Good but a hair came out of the food" Review 2, December 2023, Hotel B

"Breakfast is mediocre. Not much variety." Review 6, July 2022, Hotel B

"Breakfast time is too short. Open buffet is insufficient" Review 4, November 2023, Hotel A

"As for the food, breakfast is okay, you won't go hungry" Review 20, July 2021, Hotel A

"We thought the breakfast wouldn't be very rich in content, but we didn't expect to get hardened chocolate and moldy tomatoes and peppers" Review 11, September 2021, Hotel B

The codes and frequencies related to the main theme of Service Quality and Personnel are given in Table 4.

Table 4. Service quality and personnel main theme

Service Quality and Personnel	Hotel A/B
Reception and welcome	8/6
Staff friendliness and respect	10/5
Approach to complaints	5/3
Staff helpfulness	7/4
Rude and disrespectful	9/5
Total	39/23

In general, in this category, Hotel A received more complaints than Hotel B (39/23).

- **Hotel A:** Descriptions of staff such as "rude," "disrespectful," "indifferent," and "surly" were frequently identified in the reviews. Serious negative comments were found, such as reception and F&B staff not helping guests, addressing them with dismissive expressions, and even getting into direct arguments. There were criticisms that their approach to complaints was inadequate and even indifferent.
- **Hotel B:** Issues and indifference related to reception and room service were noted. Although some employees were individually praised, it can be said that this situation has not become a corporate standard.

Some customer comments on this theme are given below:

"The reception was not friendly at first check-in. The F&B staff F..... was not friendly and was disrespectful" Review 3, November 2023, Hotel A

"The gala night organization was ruined by indifferent and surly staff" Review 9, December 2024, Hotel A

"For the honeymoon reservation I made, the receptionist's attitude of not even bothering to say welcome" Review 1, January 2024, Hotel B

"However, although I called the reception and told them the toilet flush was broken and constantly running water, the issue was not addressed." Review 7, June 2022, Hotel B

The codes and frequencies related to the main theme of Rooms are given in Table 5.

Table 5. Rooms main theme

Rooms	Otel A/B
Room cleanliness	8/7
Room spaciousness	4/3
Room equipment	5/4
Technical issues	5/4
Room readiness	3/1
Total	25/19

In this category, Hotel A received more complaints than Hotel B (25/19).

- **Hotel A:** The general cleanliness of the rooms was evaluated as "moderate" or "passable," and some reviews emphasized that the rooms were old and needed renovation. Stays that did not meet the expectation of a deluxe room were noteworthy. Complaints about problems with room amenities and insufficient cleanliness were prominent.
- **Hotel B:** Technical problems in the rooms (toilet flush malfunction, TV, refrigerator problems) are noteworthy. Also, the term "inadequate" was used regarding room cleanliness. Some guests also stated that the rooms in this hotel need to be renovated.

Some customer comments on this theme are given below:

"Although I stated I would arrive at the hotel early, my room was not ready, I waited for a room for 2 hours" Review 1, October 2023, Hotel A

". The rooms are okay but they are old now, a little renovation is necessary" Review 14, February 2022, Hotel A

"...cleanliness is so-so, even the room cleaning is done just for the sake of it" Review 15, December 2021, Hotel A

"...we stayed in a deluxe room but it has nothing to do with deluxe..." Review 20, July 2021, Hotel A

"...the rooms need a complete renovation" Review 20, July 2021, Hotel A

"...the TV in the room wasn't working, the hairdryer wasn't good" Review 3, October 2023, Hotel B

"Our refrigerator was not working." Review 5, July 2022, Hotel B

"The rooms are very old, everything is falling apart. The first room they gave us was unbearable due to the toilet smell." Review 10, September 2021, Hotel B

The codes and frequencies related to the main theme of The Hotel in General are given in Table 6.

Table 6. The hotel in general main theme

The Hotel in General	Hotel A/B
General business quality	7/6
Management related	5/4
Overall satisfaction	6/5
Total	18/15

This theme includes sub-categories related to general business quality, management complaints, and overall satisfaction. It can be said that the number of complaints for both hotels in this theme is close (18/15).

- **Hotel A:** Expressions such as the facility being worn out, having "lost its soul," and "lifelessness" are noticeable. Also, for guests who had stayed at the facility before, it was observed that their recent experiences had changed for the worse compared to the past.
- **Hotel B:** The worn-out condition of the hotel and lack of maintenance in some areas are noteworthy. The location advantage was found to be positive.

Some customer comments on this theme are given below:

"...even the staff didn't know which pool was closed" Review 5, August 2024, Hotel A

"We had come to this hotel before, but unfortunately, a careless staff that has let everything go, ordinary..." Review 15, December 2021, Hotel A

"...But a poorly managed hotel is never tolerable," Review 16, October 2021, Hotel A

"I have stayed at your hotel many times before and left satisfied, but this time the TV in the room wasn't working, the hairdryer wasn't good, the shower was leaking..." Review 3, October 2023, Hotel B

The codes and frequencies related to the main theme of Physical Environment and Cleanliness are given in Table 7.

Table 7. Physical environment and cleanliness main theme

Physical Environment and Cleanliness	Otel A/B
General area cleanliness	14/10
Pool-thermal facility cleanliness	7/3
Need for maintenance and renovation	6/5
Total	27/18

This theme includes sub-categories of general area cleanliness, pool-thermal facility cleanliness, and the need for maintenance and renovation. Hotel A received more complaints in this theme (27/18).

- **Hotel A:** Hygiene problems in common areas (uncollected garbage, dirty toilets) stand out as a serious issue. However, the level of cleanliness was evaluated as "passable." It was also seen that there were complaints about the dirtiness of the thermal pools, but it is thought that customers are unfamiliar with the concept of a thermal pool due to expressions in these complaints like "the water was cloudy" and "there was moss."
- **Hotel B:** Structural deteriorations in bathrooms and general areas were criticized.

Some customer comments on this theme are given below:

"...general areas, toilets, etc. were dirty" Review 1, October 2023, Hotel A

"...this is a thermal hotel, the pools are very small..." Review 6, December 2024, Hotel A

"Pool, hygiene zero. There is a 50m2 difference between the pool in the pictures and the real one. They have shrunk the pool" Review 16, October 2021, Hotel A

"...not a thermal pool, the water is not filtered and not cleaned, it's mossy" Review 21, July 2021, Hotel A

"The worst weekend I've ever had" Review 19, October 2021, Hotel A

"...there are cracks in the sinks, problems with lighting, showers, and windows. They need to be renovated." Review 4, November 2022, Hotel B

"...Room and bed cleanliness was not bad but I can't say the bathroom was very clean" Review 11, September 2021, Hotel B

The codes and frequencies related to the main theme of Reservation/Price are given in Table 8.

Table 8. Reservation/Price main theme

Reservation/Price	Otel A/B
Reservation issues	3/5
Price/performance balance	4/4
Additional charges (breakfast, pool, etc.)	5/3
Cancellations/changes	1/2
Total	13/14

Although the number of complaints for both hotels in this theme seems equal, it is seen that Hotel B received more complaints than Hotel A for the first time in this category with one more complaint (13/14).

- **Hotel A:** It was stated that the price was high for the quality of service. The high cost of extras, and the fact that tea and water were charged for, were also frequently complained about.
- **Hotel B:** The price-performance balance was questioned, with some guests stating that the service was inadequate for the price. The reservation process caused confusion for some guests (number of people, extra fee).

Some customer comments on this theme are given below:

"Although I stated I would arrive at the hotel early, my room was not ready" Review 1, October 2023, Hotel A

"We stayed for 1 night. The price is high" Review 5, July 2022, Hotel A

"The fact that even water is charged for, and tea after dinner is charged for is interesting..." Review 4, November 2023, Hotel A

"...they shouldn't begrudge their guests tea at dinner, making that chargeable too..." Review 6, December 2024, Hotel A

"When we went to the hotel, they said we made the reservation for 1 person and asked us to pay an extra 70 TL" Review 9, June 2023, Hotel B

The codes and frequencies related to the main theme of **Hotel Facilities** are given in Table 9.

Table 9. Hotel facilities main theme

Hotel Facilities	Hotel A/B
Pool, Turkish bath, etc.	8/4
Children's playgrounds	2/1
Recreation areas	5/2
live music/events emerged	4/0
Total	19/7

In this theme, the number of complaints for Hotel A appears to be quite high compared to Hotel B (19/7). In this main theme, sub-categories such as pool-Turkish bath, children's playgrounds, recreation areas, and live music/events emerged.

- **Hotel A:** Numerous criticisms regarding physical facilities were identified, such as the inadequacy and small size of thermal pools, insufficient playgrounds for children, and the lack of a relaxation area for wearing bathrobes.
- **Hotel B:** It was stated that there were limited facilities due to its boutique hotel structure. Deficiencies such as the lack of room service were negatively evaluated by some guests.

Some customer comments on this theme are given below:

"...the main thermal pool and jacuzzi were closed..." Review 5, August 2024, Hotel A

"...the pools are very small and crowded..." Review 6, December 2024, Hotel A

".... In the place called the children's playground inside, there is only a slide, the things seen in the photos are not there. You have to spend time there The lack of a place for children..." Review 14, February 2022, Hotel A

The codes and frequencies related to the main theme of Sustainability/Green Star are given in Table 10.

Table 10. Sustainability/Green star main theme

Sustainability/Green Star	Otel A/B
Water leak	1/2
Malfunction	1/1
Total	2/3

No explicit critical perspective regarding sustainability and the Green Star certification was identified in the reviews. However, the mention of a toilet flush malfunction and that this was not fixed until morning emerges as the most significant complaint Hotel B received regarding environmental sensitivity. In addition, it is seen that malfunctions in lighting, shower, and windows were also mentioned.

Some customer comments on this theme are given below:

"There are cracks in the sinks, and malfunctions in the lighting, showers, and windows in the rooms." Review 4, November 2022, Hotel B

"...although I said the toilet flush was broken and constantly running water, the issue was not addressed." Review 7, June 2022, Hotel B.

5. Discussion and Conclusions

This study aimed to examine e-complaints about hotel establishments with an environmentally friendly facility certificate in the province of Denizli, to reveal how customers evaluate these hotel establishments, what they complain about the most, and furthermore, how many of the complaints are related to the Green Star criteria. A total of 32 negative reviews (complaints) were collected from Tripadvisor.com, and these were categorized within eight main themes for an in-depth analysis.

The research findings, in parallel with the literature, have clearly shown that service quality and personnel behavior play a critical role in customer satisfaction. With a total of 62 complaints, this theme was the most frequently expressed source of dissatisfaction. Yüksel & Kılınç (2003) also stated in their work that personnel behavior is one of the most common complaints. Guests are significantly disturbed by the indifference of the staff, rude attitudes, dismissive approaches to complaints, and a general lack of friendliness. Similarly, as demonstrated by Walls et al. (2011), the attitudes and behaviors exhibited by employees during service delivery play a fundamental role in the formation of guest satisfaction. This is because guests' perceptions of service are largely shaped

by their interactions with employees. This situation shows that beyond environmental commitments like the Green Star label, the human factor and quality service delivery are still the most decisive elements in the guest experience. As Karatepe (2006) stated, providing quick and effective feedback to complaints increases customer satisfaction, and these findings emphasize that hotel businesses must fundamentally focus on personnel training and motivation. Therefore, hotels should establish mechanisms for quick and effective responses to complaints and train their staff regarding these processes. Complaint management processes should be regularly reviewed, and improvements aimed at increasing customer satisfaction should be made.

After personnel behavior, the themes of food and beverage services (46) and physical environment and cleanliness (45) came to the fore. In food and beverage services, issues with food quality, variety, freshness, and beverage service were raised, while serious hygiene violations, such as the complaint of moldy products detected at Hotel B, reveal how sensitive this issue is. In the physical environment, the cleanliness and lack of maintenance of common areas, pools, and thermal facilities were cited as significant problems. This situation is consistent with the studies of Dinçer & Alrawadieh (2017), Keskin (2016), and Ali et al. (2024). In all three of these studies, service quality and cleanliness stand out as the most intense complaints. As Keskin (2016) emphasized, quality service delivery and effective management of after-sales services are top priorities for market-oriented businesses, and these findings suggest that hotels need to raise their standards in these areas.

One of the most striking findings of the study is that the theme of "Complaints related to sustainability/Green Star criteria" was almost non-existent (total of 3 complaints). These complaints generally focused on technical malfunctions with indirect environmental impacts, such as water leakage (toilet flush malfunction) and general facility malfunctions (lighting, windows). This situation suggests either that guests do not have sufficient information about the Green Star certificate and its criteria, or that they do not perceive these issues as direct subjects of complaint. These results are similar to the work of Pacheco et al. (2024) on eco-labeled hotel customer reviews, where customer reviews and complaints did not contain data related to the eco-label. Although the studies of Gomez & Garay (2019) and Kement (2019) reveal positive consumer attitudes towards eco-labeled businesses, this study suggests that the habit of customers directly expressing sustainability elements in the context of complaints has not yet become widespread. Hotel establishments, beyond complying with Green Star criteria, should continuously update and improve environmental practices such as water and energy efficiency and waste management. In this process, customer feedback should be systematically monitored and integrated into sustainability strategies. Activities to raise customer awareness about sustainability should be implemented.

The findings from the Denizli case reinforce the necessity for businesses to view complaints as "early warning signals" and to establish an effective complaint management system. Considering the direct impact of e-complaints and negative reviews (e-WOM) on the business's reputation (Heppell, 2006; Jean Harrison-Walker, 2001), it is of great importance to meticulously evaluate this feedback. The fact that the vast majority of the complaints identified in the study focus on basic operational areas, especially personnel behavior, has shown that the guest experience must be handled with a holistic approach, beyond certifications like the Green Star. Sustainable hotel management should not only reduce environmental impacts but also maintain high standards at every stage of guest satisfaction. The research findings support the views of Karatepe (2006) and Argan (2014), who emphasize the importance of quick and effective responses in complaint management. Indeed, indifference to customer complaints was reflected in customer complaints. For practitioners, these findings highlight the importance of aligning environmental initiatives with basic service expectations. Since customer complaints are predominantly related to basic service failures, eco-certified hotels should not overlook operational excellence on their path to achieving sustainability goals. Customer reviews on digital platforms like TripAdvisor should be carefully monitored, and negative experiences should be managed quickly to establish positive customer relationships. Sustainability and environmentally friendly practices should be effectively communicated to consumers through social media. This way, consumer awareness regarding sustainability can also be increased.

In conclusion, Green Star certified hotels need to meet customer expectations completely by investing in basic service quality, personnel training, and effective complaint management processes,

in addition to their environmental commitments. It is also important for hotels to adopt a proactive sustainability communication strategy for guests to become more conscious about sustainability and to voice their expectations regarding these criteria. This integrated approach will contribute to both achieving environmental goals and creating long-term customer loyalty and brand value.

Limitations and directions for future research

This study has some limitations. The first is that it considers only Turkish complaints on the Tripadvisor.com site for environmentally friendly accommodation establishments in the province of Denizli. In future studies, comparative research can be conducted on different language groups. Besides, the fact that only two hotels in the city have this certificate is another limitation. New studies with a larger sample covering Turkey in general can be conducted. In addition, participants' gender, age, and similar characteristics were not considered during the analysis. New studies that take these differences into account can be conducted. Furthermore, more satisfactory results can be obtained with a mixed-method study that reaches hotel customers through a survey technique in addition to online reviews.

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