5-2013

USING DIALOGIC PRINCIPLES ON FACEBOOK: HOW THE ACCOMMODATION SECTOR IS COMMUNICATING WITH ITS' CONSUMERS

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ABSTRACT

This thesis examines the extent to which the accommodation sector uses social media, specifically Facebook, to communicate dialogically with its consumers. Using Kent and Taylor’s (1998) five principles of dialogic communication, a content analysis of 34 different hotels’ Facebook pages were reviewed. Twenty-four posts and comments on each organizations’ Facebook page were examined over a 12 month span to determine if dialogic communication was occurring between the organization and its consumers. The study asked two questions. How is the accommodation sector of the hospitality industry employing the principles of dialogic communication through their Facebook posts? Is there is a relationship between market class and likeliness to use the dialogic principles within Facebook posts?

The study found that the accommodation sector employed the principles of dialogic communication in 97.9% of the Facebook posts. The results showed frequent occurrences of three of the dialogic principles. These three principles, dialogic loop, conservation of visitors and usefulness of information appeared in over 50% of total posts analyzed. The dialogic principle, generation of return visitors was the only principle to occur in less than 50% of the posts (29.3%). Only 2.1% of posts did not use any of the dialogic principles, with the mean falling at 2.29 principles used. Two statistically significant relationships were discussed between the market class and their likelihood to use the principles of dialogic communication within Facebook posts.

KEYWORDS: Facebook, Social Media, Dialogic Communication, Hospitality Industry, Tourism, Hotels, Accommodation Sector
DEDICATION

I would first like to dedicate this thesis to my grandma, who has always been very encouraging and supportive throughout the years. I would also like to dedicate this thesis to my mom, dad, sisters, and friend Angela who have listened to my frustrations and helped me get through the last two years.
ACKNOWLEDGMENTS

I would like to acknowledge the dedication of my advisor, Darren Linvill. Thanks for motivating me and guiding me throughout the writing process. I really appreciate Darren going above and beyond what is expected of an advisor to help me successfully complete my thesis. There were many instances where I felt unsure of something, that Darren was able to teach me and help me more forward. It was great to have an advisor that was easy to talk to, helpful and encouraging. Also, thank you to the rest of my committee, Brenden Kendall and Bill Norman for being the critical eyes looking forward. Thanks to all three for serving on my committee, giving me advice and countless editing! Also thanks to my entire cohort, Brandon Boatwright, Colleen Dungey, Dongni Wang, Lauren Rauchwater, Maddie Blair, and Sarah Arbogast! They really have been the best of friends and coworkers! Thanks to the entire Communication department for the great experience and abundance of knowledge.
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CHAPTER ONE
INTRODUCTION

Very little research has been conducted that links the fields of communication and tourism. Although, communication is inherent in tourism, there are few theories that combine the two. There is a need for more communication research in tourism, as tourism relies heavily on communication technologies and theories. Many consumers are finding information about travel destinations and tourism through communication technologies like the Internet, mobile devices, and social media. Tourism depends on communication to export their ideas and services to consumers in the form of public relations or marketing. Tourism experts need to understand communication and communication theories to better market and communicate with their consumers.

Although there is not a plethora of scholarly research pertaining to communication and tourism, some communication theories have been used to explain phenomena within tourism. Within the hospitality sector, traditional communication theories have been used to describe phenomena such as cross-cultural interactions (FitzGerald, 1998), organizational communication practices (Brownell, 1992, Erstad, 1997), discourse (Jaworski & Pritchard, 2005), and gender roles (Brownell, 1994, 2001). Communication has also been part of the research on information communication technology (ICT), (Buhalis & O’Connor, 2006), marketing communication (Powers, 1997), electronic word-of-mouth (Litvin, Goldsmith & Pan, 2008), media and communication (Klancnik, 2006) and e-tourism (Buhalis, 2003) within the tourism industry.
Jaworski and Pritchard (2005) published a book that collected tourism case studies that use communication theories. They analyzed types of discourse used in tourism, such as the usefulness of the postcard. Discourse and communication is as important to a tourist scholar as to a communication scholar. Jaworski and Pritchard (2005) said, “Certainly, there has been little dialogue between scholars who primarily study discourse and communication, and those whose primary focus is tourism” (p. 1). I find it interesting that more has not been done that connects the two fields. So, this research aims to lessen the gap between tourism and communication studies by conducting research that examines mediated communication as it is used by organizations and consumers in the hospitality industry.

Tasci and Gartner (2007) state that destination images affect the actions and decisions of tourists before and on vacation. Destination images, rather found organically, through friends, advertising, the internet or other manners directly affect the consumers behavior at any point of the planning and decision making process. Gartner (1993) describes these ways that images can be formed. In what he calls overt induced I agents, forms of advertising are used to create certain images in consumers minds. There are many aspects that go into tourism marketing, but many are centered around creating a destination image for the consumer. How image is communicated to consumers and used to build relationships is at the utmost importance to this study. This study seeks to find out if hotel brands are using Facebook mainly as a way to create a product image or if it is used to build relationships and dialogue with consumers.
Currently, communication theorists have begun examining how communication theories, such as the dialogic theory, take place within computer-mediated platforms (Anderson, Baxter & Cissna, 2004). To this date there is not a large body of knowledge that examines dialogic theories and technologies like social media websites specifically. Very few scholars have researched the area, but it is growing. Dialogic theories and social media website such as Facebook and Twitter as they are used in different industries is an understudied area.

Computer-mediated communication is examined through information communication technologies (ICTs) such as the internet and mobile phones, which are being used by consumers to share and find information (Go & van’t Klooster, 2006). They are talking to each other and to companies online. A part of ICTs is the Web 2.0 which includes social networks (SN), social media (SM) and virtual communities (Buhalis & Law, 2008). With the growing usage of social media, there is a need to critically look at how social media and the Internet are affecting dialogic communication between organizations and consumers.

Today, social networks have the same amount of influence on consumers as television does and more influence on consumers than newspapers do (Amis, 2007). So, where do consumers stand as of now when searching for travel options on the web? Samiljan (2012) sums up travelers behaviors well, “And now for many travelers, social media has become an invaluable tool for virtually every part of planning and taking a trip: they find inspiration on Pinterest, hunt down deals on Twitter, get restaurant tips on Foursquare, share photos on Facebook” (p.12). The research on social media and travel
plans (see Figure 1 or Appendix A) has shown that 70% of U.S. travelers update their Facebook status while on vacation (Bennett, 2012).
Figure 1. Online Travel Statistics Infographic (Bennett, 2012).
Thirty-three percent of people have changed their hotel based on information from social media (Bennett, 2012). Whereas, 50% of people have even changed their original travel plans (Bennett, 2012). Lastly, 76% of vacationers post photos in their social network after a vacation. This shows the importance of social networking websites and peer opinions during several stages of the travel experience. Other popular uses of social media are e-complaints. Tripadvisor.com and other review websites house many e-complaints from guests reliving their bad experiences at a location to others (Xiang & Gretzal, 2010). Geotagging has also become a recent popular activity. Which is where social media or applications allow people to tag their location and tell others where they are.

Social networking sites, within social media, create the opportunity for consumers and organizations to engage in conversation. Customers are talking about companies through these channels, but are the companies listening and responding? One of the main questions that arises in the conversation around social media is, can social media even be considered dialogic, or does it only facilitate one-way communication? Although, much research has been conducted discussing if social media is valuable to public relations rather than how it can be used. After close examination of the literature, no studies have found Facebook or social media to be especially dialogic in nature. This research looks specifically at the mediated conversations between guests of hotels and the organizations themselves, as they communicate with each other online.

This study will first examine the literature and research surrounding the topic areas. The literature review will discuss how communication and tourism currently coincide, followed by a brief review of what social media is. Next, research about
dialogic communication as a theory will be summarized. Lastly, the literature review will distinguish how dialogic communication has been used or found within social media today. Specific studies that researched how Facebook has been examined with dialogic theories will be the final part of the literature review. The study will then discuss the methods and research questions used to study the hotels’ Facebook pages. The study will conclude with the research findings, the results of these findings and a discussion. Limitations of this type of research will also be determined and future areas of research will be suggested.
CHAPTER TWO
LITERATURE REVIEW

*Accommodation sector and communication technologies*

The accommodation sector, which is part of the greater hospitality and tourism industry, has been known to trail behind in terms of technology adoption and innovation. In the past, hotels and resorts adopted communication technologies slower than most industries and could be considered “laggards” to some degree (Namasivayam, Enz, & Siguaw, 2000). When 4,250 U.S. hotels were examined it was found that 84% of them had low to medium degrees of communication technology use such as Internet bookings and in-room Internet (Namasivayam, Enz, & Siguaw, 2000). It is speculated that the specific market class the hotel falls into may also affect its’ adoption of technologies. Upscale and franchised hotels may be more likely to adopt technologies faster than budget or independent hotels. (Kelmer, Feingold, Mason, & Wagner, 1999). How the hospitality industry adopts communication technology is directly related with how it will use these technologies. It could be postulated that if an organization has low or medium rates of adoption it may take them longer to use mainstream technologies.

In the last decade tourism has started to catch up and is becoming one of the fastest growing areas on the Internet. According to Pew Research in 2003, the number of people who made travel purchases or made hotel reservations online increased by 87%, which made travel related activities the fastest growing activities online (Madden & Rainie). A more recent Pew Research study found that 65% of Generation Y members used the Internet to book travel and all other generations were around 69% (Jones & Fox,
More recently in 2011, eMarketer found that 61% of all Internet users, or 117.6 million people, have made some sort of travel reservations or search online (eMarketer).

The diffusion of information communication technologies (ICT) such as the Internet, mobile phones and Wifi have led to an ‘information revolution’ for consumers which has added to the fast growth (Castells, 2001). Consumers today are said to be more informed and experienced when it comes to making decisions (Spann & Tellis, 2006). The development of the Internet made it much easier for consumers to search and locate information about a destination online. To find information about a certain destination or place consumers turn to places like Google to aid in the search. Along with Google and other search engines, social media is becoming a key player in the travel information search. Information communication technologies, allow for information to be distributed globally (Go, & van’t Klooster, 2006). ICTs are extremely important to the tourism industry as they aid the consumer in finding information that was once hidden or found only through traditional ways of information finding (print material). Buhalis and O’Connor (2006) may have said it best, when pinpointing the importance of technology in communicating with consumers, “ICTs will provide the ‘info-structure’ for the entire industry…” (p. 209). One of the greatest “info-structures” is Web 2.0. Which is the name for the Internet that has evolved from an information source, to a place of interactivity, user-generated content, and virtual communities (Milano, Baggio & Pitattelli, 2011).

Buhalis (2003) discusses the change in the direction of communication as, “The line of communication is no longer limited to producer-to-consumer, but can be consumer-to-consumer, and consumer-to-producer, as well as many-to-one, one-to-many,
one-to-one, or many-to-many” (p. 3). Travelers in particular are more likely to talk about
experiences in a destination online. Which also can create problems for destination
marketing organizations. The change from solely content viewers, to also content creators
is described as the Internets evolution from, “a business-to-consumer marketing media to
one where peer-to-peer generation and sharing of data are the norm” (O’Connor, 2008, p. 1.)
This is also known as user-generated content, where the user creates information
rather than an organization. Social networking websites, and social media fall at the heart
of this turn into the Web 2.0, because they allow the consumer to both find information
and give information to others about a destination. Consumers rely not only on the
organization to provide information but also on other users. O’Connor (2008) studied
TripAdvisor.com, a widely known travel review website with user-generated content.
One hundred hotels were analyzed and found that on average each hotel had 75 consumer
reviews. Out of all the reviews analyzed (500) it was found that 0.4% included a response
from the actual organization. It is becoming ever so important for organizations to learn
how, and what to, respond to in online social platforms.

Hays, Page, & Buhalis (2012) conducted a content analysis of seven tourism
boards’ Facebook and Twitter pages. It found the interactivity of posts to be very low.
Although, Facebook was three times more likely to have interaction than Twitter.
Interactivity was defined as the organization, “directly posing a question or requesting
feedback, content, or input from the audience” (Hays, Page, & Buhalis, 2012, p. 14).
Facebook was found to be easier for customers to view others comments as all the replies
show up on the same page, unlike Twitter in which one must follow the users who
comment. The gap is becoming wider as organizations struggle to learn how to deal with more informed, talkative consumers.

**Social media**

Mediated communication is most often referred to as computer mediated communication or CMC. Which can be defined as “the process by which people create, exchange, and perceive information using networked telecommunications systems that facilitate encoding, transmitting, and decoding messages” (Romiszowski & Mason, 1996, p. 398). The definition of CMC is quite similar to the definition used to explain communication, but adds the component of ‘networked telecommunications’. CMC has become the widely accepted term to describe the communication exchanges that occur through the computer. Email, instant messaging, comments on blogs, and many others are all examples of CMC.

Social media is often mentioned as one of the channels through which interactive communication (or CMC) occurs through the Internet. Social media is defined as, “a group of Internet based applications that exist on the Web 2.0 platform and enable the Internet users from all over the world to interact, communicate, and share ideas, content, thoughts, experiences, perspectives, information, and relationships” (Chan & Guillet, 2011, p. 350). Social media is different but similar to social networking sites (SNS). SNS can be defined as web-based services that allow individuals to create a public profile, create a list of users whom they connect with and view their connections within the site (Boyd & Ellison, 2007). Social networks are websites that are within social media, comparable to channels within a TV. Examples of social networking sites that are
utilized by tourists are Facebook, Twitter, Blogster, and travbuddy along with others. An important function of SNS is the comment function. Most of the SNSs allow friends or connections to post comments to another site. This is a form of CMC that allows interaction to occur between customers and organizations.

In a brief history of social networks by Boyd and Ellison (2007) they stated, the first SNS was created in 1997 with sixdegrees.com, which was popular until 2000. The website was used to let people send messages to each other, but failed when there was nothing else for users to do after sending messages. Facebook and Twitter are now the largest social networking sites used. The Facebook official newsroom (Facebook, 2012) states that as of October 4th 2012 Facebook had 1 billion active users. Twitter is estimated at having around 200 million (Twitter, 2012). On Twitter’s official page (Twitter, 2012) the website states that it can be used to increase CRM, connect with an “engaged audience”, and connect businesses with customers in real-time.

One of the issues that arises in the conversation around social media is the question: Can social media even be considered dialogic, or does it only facilitate one-way communication? Taylor and Kent (2010) argue it is important to learn how to use social media in public relations. The effectiveness of social media to be used to communicate dialogically is under studied. Although, much research has been conducted discussing if social media is valuable to public relations rather than how it can be used. After close examination of the literature no studies have found Facebook or social media to be especially dialogic in nature. Taylor and Kent (2010) stated “…when the actual effectiveness of social media is scrutinized and their use in public relations held up for
critique, little evidence exists that social media are effective tools for relationship building between organizations and publics” (p. 207). Recently, several studies have been conducted but do not show how social media can be effective in relationship building, or how we can use it to create a dialogue.

Literature says that conducting dialogic communication with publics is a form of building relationships (Kent & Taylor, 2002). A great example of how social media is being used to build relationships with publics and facilitate two-way communication is within the healthcare industry. Hawn (2012) describes how doctors can use social media to create happier patients and high quality of care. Social media has allowed for “richer engagement and deeper doctor-patient relationships” (Hawn, 2012, p. 9). This relationship building is called customer relationship management. There is a body of literature growing about social customer relationship arrangement that analyzes how social media plays into an organization’s relationship building (Baird & Parasnis, 2011).

Smith (2009) discusses how listening to customers should be included in the business model. He calls this the listening economy, in which listening to what customers are saying will be at the utmost importance for customer relations and other areas of business. Smith (2009) suggests that if organizations do not listen to the things said through social media that the companies will get left behind. This is also important in building relationships, because organizations must also listen to the customer to respond.

**Dialogic communication**

Interpersonal communication usually involves conversations between people, in a dialogic manner. Conversations occur when there is a person communicating and a
person responding to the communication received. So, if communication is part of a conversation or dialogue than what characteristics make communication dialogic? This is the question many scholars in the field are continuing to develop an answer to. Kent and Taylor (1998) define dialogic communication as “any negotiated exchange of ideas and opinions” (p. 325). The first person to develop this theory was Martin Buber a theorist in the early 20th century who is often know as the father of dialogue. Kent and Taylor (2002) give a summary of Buber’s philosophy written in the book I and Thou (1970). Kent and Taylor stated (2002):

Buber suggested that dialogue involves an effort to recognize the value of the other—to see him/her as an end and not merely as a means to achieving a desired goal. Buber suggested that individuals should view others not as objects—the “I You,” but as equals—the “I Thou.” Buber’s work is based on reciprocity, mutuality, involvement, and openness. Buber viewed communication as a way to appreciate the other person’s views, as ones’ own. He suggested that humans engage in conversations to gain an understanding of the other (Buber, 1971). The common saying, “we agree to disagree” demonstrates what Buber’s theory strives to make sense of. Which is the understanding of what is actually being said within an agreement or disagreement from the other whom the conversation is with.

Kent and Taylor (1998) describe Buber’s (1971) dialogic communication theory, “For a dialogic relationship to exist, parties must view communicating with each other as the goal of a relationship” (p. 324). This communication should not be a means to an end,
but should be an end in itself. Buber viewed communication as a process in which the people involved share a relationship of openness and respect with each other (Buber, 1970, Kent & Taylor, 1998). As dialogue and conversation is important to an organization’s public relations, it is also important to an organization’s customer relationship management. “What dialogue does is change the nature of the organization-public relationship by placing emphasis on the relationship” (Kent and Taylor, 2002, p. 4).

Dialogic communication is never fixed, it is an ever-changing development in which one part depends on another, but one does not predict the other (Anderson, Baxter, Cissna, 2004). A dialogue is a two-way communication, which is different than a one-way communication, like an advertisement that does not require a response. Dialogue is both asynchronous and synchronous, meaning it can occur at the same time or at different times. For example, comments on a blog might happen instantaneously or hours apart, making the dialogue either asynchronous or synchronous.

Kent and Taylor (2002) discuss the role of dialogue in public relations practices. They suggest five tenets of dialogic communication within the public relations theory of dialogue. The first tenet is mutuality, which is the connection between the organization and the public. The next tenet is propinquity, which is the amount and timing of communication by an organization to its publics. The third tenet is empathy, or the organizations supportiveness of the publics’ interests. The fourth tenet is risk, which is the organizations will to communication with the publics at the publics’ discretion. The last tenet is commitment, which is the extent to which an organization is under approval
Kent and Taylor (1998) also proposed five principles for successfully integrating dialogic public relations on the Internet. The first principle is the dialogic loop, which is the ability of publics to ask questions of the organization and allows the organization to respond. Websites inherently allow others to comment due to their formats. Twitter and Facebook also allow for customers to comment of the wall of the page, which would also allow for the organization to respond. Included in the principle is the need to have trained staff members that can and do respond to these comments. The most important part of this principle is the dialogic loop in that when a customer communicates, someone from the organizations responses (Kent & Taylor, 1998). This principle is not fulfilled if someone from the organization does not respond. Many times a websites format makes it easier for a response to be avoided. Even though it is an indirect type of commenting, in that it does not go first hand to a person of authority, the comments still need to be responded to by someone.

The second principle is the usefulness of information (Kent & Taylor, 1998). Organizations should post materials that are important and useful to the customers. If customers have information about an organization it makes it easier for them to engage in dialogue because they are more informed. The customers also need to feel that this information is valuable. Simply posting comments on Facebook or Twitter is not enough for customers to feel that the information given is important. The information provided must be a way for customers to answer questions or explore their curiosities (Kent & Taylor, 1998).
Principle three is the generation of return visits. To build dialogic relationship websites need to be interesting, and interactive with updated information, so customers will want to visit the website again. Interactive websites include things like questions, and forums. There are many things an organization can do to encourage customers to come back to their website including, “FAQs, easily downloadable or mailed information, technical or specialized information that can be requested by regular mail…” (Kent & Taylor, 1998, p. 329).

The fourth principle is the ease of the interface. The websites should be easy to use and contain a formatted organization. Facebook and Twitter offer uniformity, in that all pages are structurally the same. This should make the websites easy to navigate if the user has used similar sites before. Websites ability to display its organizational image is one way to create a dialogue. The image should be consistent throughout all marketing efforts including the website pages. Lastly, the fifth principle is the rule of conservation of the visitor (Kent & Taylor, 1998). This means not displaying advertisements or links to other websites that will distract the customer. The website should not allow customers to easily navigate away from their own website. This is important because creating dialogue should be the goal of the communication interaction, and not just an end (Kent & Taylor, 1998).

_**Dialogic communication within social media**_

The five principles of dialogic communication as described by Kent and Taylor (1998) have been researched and tested within social media. Examining social media through a dialogic lens helps practitioners better communicate using theory in a place that
is questioned as to its dialogic capabilities. Looking at social media dialogically will help create an understanding of communication as it occurs in a different platform. As social media is growing, there is a need to study and understand how communication occurs within this realm. Dialogic communication within social media has been foundational for studies on various topics such as environmental issues (Seltzer & Mitrook, 2007), nonprofit organizations (Waters & Jamal, 2011) political candidates (Sweetser & Lariscy, 2008) among others. Each of these studies has used similar methodologies and has found some common results.

One of the earliest studies of social media and dialogic communication examined the dialogic potential in weblogs. Seltzer and Mitrook (2007) used a content analysis to study 50 environmental weblogs. They used Kent and Taylor’s (1998) five principles of dialogic communication to determine whether weblogs were more dialogic in nature than websites. Weblogs were found to use many of the five dialogic principles more often than websites. The authors suggested that weblogs might be more useful in building online relationships with consumers than an organization’s website like Kent and Taylor (1998) had originally studied.

A later study by Taylor and Kent (2010) expounded upon websites and found that social networking sites (i.e. Facebook, or Twitter) can be used for dialogue and building relationships. Although, Waters and Jamal (2011) found that nonprofit organizations did not use Twitter (a social networking site) to build relationships. Most often the nonprofits used Twitter as a one-way method of communicating with its publics. Waters and Jamal utilized the traditional model of public relations created by Grunig and Hunt (1984). The
traditional model of public relations had four parts: press agentry, public information, two-way asymmetry, and two-way symmetry. Dialogic communication is a two-way symmetrical interaction; this is where a conversation happens between an organization and its consumers that results in a mutual understanding between the two. This study used a content analysis of 27 nonprofits’ Twitter pages. A total of 773 tweets were coded. It was found that the companies used asymmetrical communication such as updates and announcements, more often than symmetrical conversations with consumers. The organizations analyzed used Twitter to reply to individuals using the @ symbol in 25% of the tweets, but only with an average of 1-5 users. Although Twitter has potential to help build relationships and facilitate two-way communication, it seems that the nonprofit sector has not fully utilized this social networking site to its greatest extend.

In 2010, Rybalko and Seltzer found similar results as Waters and Jamal (2011) when they researched if Fortune 500 companies were using Twitter dialogically. Only 170 Fortune 500 companies were found to have active Twitter accounts. Out of these 170 companies, 93 where chosen to analyze and 930 tweets were coded. Kent and Taylor’s (1998) principles of dialogic communication, originally used for websites, were modified to fit the context of social media. This modification has been used in more recent studies of dialogic communication and social media (Linvill, McGee, & Hicks, 2012). Interestingly, this study found Fortune 500 companies to employ the dialogic loop as a dialogic feature the most frequently, and usefulness of information the least. 61% of the Fortune 500 company’s Twitter pages were determined to be “dialogic” in nature. These companies tried to keep users engaged on the Twitter page. The three types of activities
that were found to facilitate dialogic communication where: organizations responses to 
posts, posing a question to consumers and posting “newsworthy” information.

Rybalko and Seltzer (2010) stated that Kent and Taylor’s (1998) principles of 
dialogic communication maybe outdated or no longer a good tool to evaluate dialogic 
features on Twitter or other social networking sites. It is somewhat unfair to compare this 
study to other studies using these dialogic principles, because Rybalko and Seltzer used a 
slightly different set of criteria to evaluate dialogic communication. Nonetheless, they 
still determined that Twitter was being under utilized as a tool to create a dialogue with 
consumers.

Linvill, McGee, and Hicks (2012) also discovered that colleges and universities 
do not use Twitter to conduct dialogic communication. Employing a content analysis of 
113 liberal arts colleges and national universities, 1130 tweets were analyzed. Each tweet 
was coded based on Kent and Taylor’s (1998) five principles of dialogic communication. 
Linvill, McGee, and Hicks operationalized Kent and Taylor’s (1998) five principles of 
dialogic communication, as they were modified to fit social networking sites by Rybalko 
and Seltzer (2010). About 84% of the coded tweets contained the principle of useful 
information, and 55.7% of tweets followed the generation of visitor’s principle. Only 
29.5% of tweets contained a dialogic loop, meaning that Twitter was very seldom used to 
enable dialogue. It was discovered that national universities used Twitter to a greater 
extent than liberal arts colleges, which means that the type of organization also effects 
how the social networking sites are utilized.
**Dialogic communication and Facebook**

As with other social networking sites, Facebook has only minimally been studied using dialogic communication. A study by Sweetser and Lariscy (2008) concluded that political candidates in the 2006 midterm election did not use Facebook in a two-way symmetrical manner. The authors assumed that a Facebook page is a dialogic feature itself and therefore analyzed the actual comments on the wall of the page. Using a content analysis, 5,735 wall comments where coded on 87 Senate and House candidates’ Facebook pages. From the number of comments on the Facebook pages, it was determined that voters were engaging in activities that begged for a dialogue with the candidate. Most of the voters that wrote on the walls of the candidates could be classified as having a type of parasocial relationship with the candidate. A important finding in this study was the fact that many of the comments made on the wall were mostly positive and supportive. Overall, it was found that candidates whom used Facebook were perceived to be on friendly terms with the pages fans, and voters had greater connections among themselves. Although candidates rarely participated in the conversations on their Facebook pages, the candidates were still seen as facilitating dialogic communication just by having a Facebook page.

This type of social presence discovered in Sweetser and Lariscy (2008) was also measured in a recent masters thesis. Luca (2011) considered *Fortune 500* companies’ social media presence as a factor of dialogic communication. The study also used a content analysis, which operationalized Kent and Taylor’s (1998) principles of dialogic communication. 42% percent of companies were determined to have a social media
presence, which means that a majority of companies did not have a presence. The companies with a Facebook page did not show strong intent to use a dialogic loop. Fans response to a company’s top post was less than 5%. Most companies had negative response rates. 38.1% of companies did not respond to fans at all. So, the thesis research concluded that some Fortune 500 companies did have a social media presence, but it was not dialogic in nature.

Bortree and Seltzer’s (2009) research on environmental advocacy groups’ Facebook pages is one of the best examples that include the elements this thesis explores. One element is looking specifically within Facebook at dialogic communication as it occurs. This study, unlike others, also looked at dialogic outcomes. Two dialogic outcomes where determined and tested: on-site posts by both organizations and users, and the link between the organizations Facebook page and their website. The research content analyzed 50 Facebook profiles using Kent and Taylor’s (1998) dialogic principles. These principles were again modified to become more suitable for social networking sites. A new principle was also added, which was organization engagement. With these principles, Bortree and Seltzer (2009) created six outcomes of dialogic communication. Again, it was found that advocacy groups are not using Facebook to its greatest extend in employing dialogic features to build relationships with consumers. Dialogic outcomes were found to correlate with three of the dialogic principles. For example the principle of generation of return visits correlated with the outcome users response to others. The organization engagement principle was most significantly linked to all six of the outcomes. The findings suggest that using the dialogic strategies may result in positive
outcomes such as increasing the number of fans and interactions.

Research questions

Based on the literature review the following research questions will be examined:

RQ1: How is the accommodation sector of the hospitality industry employing the principles of dialogic communication through their Facebook posts?

RQ2: Is there is a relationship between the market class and likeliness to use the dialogic principles within Facebook posts.
CHAPTER THREE

METHOD

Approach

This thesis explores dialogic communication as it is used by the accommodation sector through a content analysis of U.S. based hotels' Facebook pages. The dialogic principles created by Kent and Taylor (1998) and its modifications by Bortree and Seltzer (2009), and Rybalko and Setlzer (2010) are the guidelines used to determine if the Facebook pages are dialogic in nature. The five principles by Kent and Taylor (1998) are the 1) usefulness of information, 2) generation of return visits, 3) intuitiveness of interface, 4) conservation of visitors, and 5) dialogic loop. These five principles where originally intended for examining websites. Bortree and Seltzer (2009), and Rybalko and Setlzer (2010) expanded these five principles to be more useful for social networking sites. The researcher has further modified and added criteria to these principles to fit the spectrum of social media.

Kerlinger and Lee (2000) stated that a content analysis is used to quantify data into categories. This content analysis examines U.S. based hotels’ Facebook pages by categorizing data into four of the principles of dialogic communication as either present or not (Kent & Taylor, 1998). The coding sheet in Appendix B was divided into four principles: usefulness of information, conservation of visitors, generation of return visits, and dialogic loop. The fifth dialogic principle, ease of interface was eliminated from this research because Facebook pages are consistent in their design. Bortree and Seltzer (2009), Rybalko and Seltzer (2010) and Linvill, McGee, and Hicks (2012) also excluded
the ease of interface principle in their studies. There are some items that can be modified on the pages but for the most part the layout and design of the pages are limited to small modifications. The parts that can be changed by the organization are the profile picture, cover photo, application tabs, the about and basic info sections, photos, and the timeline (wall). Many of the items that can be changed are a part of the general layout or design of the page and all pages generally have the same feel.

The posts and comments on the Facebook pages timeline (wall) are the objects of analysis. The Facebook page is very different than the individual posts on the pages (see Appendix C for definitions). The Facebook page is more modifiable than the posts. Although, posts can vary greatly, the format is generally the same. A post or status can contain text, pictures, links, or videos and has a like, comment and share button. This study is choosing to only examine posts and the comments received on these posts, as the page does not allow for the completion of a dialogic loop. Fans cannot comment on the page itself, only the wall or posts. The examples of the other principles can be found on both the page and the posts. Therefore, to best examine all four principles the posts are being used.

For each hotel chain used in this study an excel document was created to put copies of the text from the posts examined (see appendix D for URL’s). In this manner, if a post could not be found at a later time it would be saved in a document for further analysis. The Facebook timeline page format facilitated the research process. On the right side of each page the year can be clicked on with each month that can be viewed separately. This helped in the coding and selection of the posts to analyze.
Sample

The sample hotel chains were chosen from Consumer Report’s 2012 list of best-rated hotel chains in the U.S. (Consumer Report Magazine, 2012). The list of 44 hotel chains (see Table 1) is categorized by price and amenities offered, which classifies each hotel as either, luxury, upscale, moderate or budget. The hotel chains were rated based on 22,481 Consumer Report reader’s experiences at over 34,352 hotels within these 44 hotel chains from January 2010 to June 2011 (Consumer Report Magazine, 2012). This list contained 44 chain hotels such as: Ritz-Carlton (luxury), Westin (luxury), Harrah’s (upscale), Walt Disney Resorts (upscale), Wingate by Wyndham (moderate), Drury Inn and Suites (moderate), Microtel Inn and Suites by Wyndham (budget), and Red Roof Inn (budget).
Table 1. 44 Best Rating Hotel Chains in the U.S.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Luxury (8)</th>
<th>Upscale (9)</th>
<th>Moderate (11)</th>
<th>Budget (6)</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Ritz-Carlton</td>
<td>Harrah’s</td>
<td>Wingate by Wyndham</td>
<td>Microtel Inn &amp; Suites by Wyndham</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Westin</td>
<td>Walt Disney Resorts</td>
<td>Drury Inn &amp; Suites</td>
<td>Red Roof Inn</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Embassy Suites Hotels</td>
<td>Residence Inn by Marriott</td>
<td>Hampton Inn &amp; Suites by Hilton</td>
<td>Super 8</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Hyatt</td>
<td>SpringHill Suites</td>
<td>Fairfield Inn &amp; Suites by Marriott</td>
<td>Days Inn</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Marriott</td>
<td>Hilton Garden Inn</td>
<td>Country Inn &amp; Suites by Carlson</td>
<td>Motel 6</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Hilton</td>
<td>Homewood Suites</td>
<td>Comfort Suites</td>
<td>Econo Lodge</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>DoubleTree by Hilton</td>
<td>Hyatt Place</td>
<td>Holiday Inn Express</td>
<td>Americas Best Value Inn</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Sheraton</td>
<td>Courtyard by Marriott</td>
<td>Sleep Inn</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Wyndham Resorts</td>
<td></td>
<td>La Quinta Inn &amp; Suites</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Crowne Plaza Hotels &amp; Resorts</td>
<td></td>
<td>AmericInn</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Radisson</td>
<td></td>
<td>Best Western</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Wyndham Hotels</td>
<td></td>
<td>Ramada Worldwide</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>Holiday Inn</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>Clarion</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>Comfort Inn</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>Quality</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Baymont Inn &amp; Suites</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

(Consumer Report Magazine, 2012) *Highlighted hotels were not included in the study.
The hotel chain’s brand Facebook pages were chosen because they offered the best example of the communication used by the company as a whole. The individual hotel properties may have been smaller in size with fewer specialized public relations or marketing employees to manage the Facebook pages. The separate hotel properties would have been too individualized to make generalizations about the hotel brand collectively as each property is different and unique.

Using this list of 44 hotel chains, each hotel chain was searched for using Facebook’s search feature. Each of the results determined if the hotel chain had a Facebook page (see appendix D for URL’s). If the hotel chain did not show up in the Facebook search engine then each hotel was inserted into Google’s search engine. From these results, hotel chain’s websites were viewed to look for a link to a Facebook page. All but ten hotel chains had an active brand Facebook page and met the criteria for inclusion in this study. The Hampton Inn and Harrah’s hotel chains only had individual property’s Facebook pages, so they were excluded. Walt Disney Resorts did not actively post on the hotel’s Facebook page. Lastly, Wyndham Hotels and Wyndham Resorts had a combined Facebook page.

The other six that did not have a brand page were a part of Choice Hotels. Choice Hotels does have a Facebook page but it was left out of the study, as it is a holding corporation for many brands. Other hotels in the sample are part of a holding corporation (such as Baymont Inn and Suites, which is a part of the Wyndham holding corporation) but these chains had their own Facebook pages independent of the holding corporation. Therefore, if the study had used the holding corporation itself like Choice Hotels the
study would needed to have done so for all hotel brands. This left out ten hotel chains of the sample for a total of 34 hotel chains with Facebook pages that were analyzed.

From these 34 Facebook pages, each page was visited to determine if the page was active. For the purposes of this study, an active page is any page that had at least two updates per month from January 1st 2012 to January 1st 2013. Each of the 34 chains had an active page. Out of the 34 hotel chains two posts per month were randomly selected over a twelve-month time period starting January 1st, 2012 until January 1st 2013. Some months the posts were changes made to the page (or updates to site) and did not count for this study. This left some hotels with less than 24 total posts selected. This equaled to a total of 761 posts. To randomly select the posts, the posts for each month in the 12 months were counted for each of the 34 pages. The number of posts per month was put in a random number generator, randomizer.org, and two numbers were generated between one and the total number of posts for a given month. For example, if the page had 20 posts in one-month two numbers between one and twenty were randomly selected using the randomizer. The two posts that chronologically matched these two randomly selected numbers were then included in the study.

Criteria for each dialogic principle

This study employed modifications made by Bortree and Seltzer (2009) as well as Rybalko and Setlzer (2010) to Kent and Taylor’s (1998) five principles of dialogic communication to be applicable with social networking sites. Examples of the criterion for each principle are described in the following sections. Tables are provided of the criteria for each principle below and in appendix B.
RQ1 asks: How is the accommodation sector of the hospitality industry employing the principles of dialogic communication through their Facebook posts? To answer RQ1 each of the 34 hotel chains Facebook pages were analyzed. The randomly selected timeline (wall) posts were analyzed for the four principles, as present or not.

RQ2 asks: Is there is a relationship between the market class and likeliness to use the dialogic principles within Facebook posts. To answer RQ2 a cross tabulation was conducted using Chi Square. Market class was measured between “1” and “4”, 1 being luxury and 4 being budget. Each dialogic principle was a dependent variable.

*Criteria used for the ease of interface principle*

Like similar studies, (Bortree & Seltzer, 2009, Rybalko & Seltzer, 2010 and Linvill, McGee, & Hicks, 2012), this principle was eliminated from the analysis because many social media tools are designed with ease of interface and consistency in mind, and this includes Facebook. The user can change things like profile pictures, cover photos and edit information on the page. Overall, the interface and navigation is the same on each page and post. This principle is inherently present in every Facebook page in this study.

*Criteria used for the usefulness of information principle*

The principle of usefulness of information is meant to provide information to the consumers that will help them answer their questions and make them more informed. Some features that are used to promote useful information are links to outside pages of related information like travel information. Other useful information would be, providing company information in the posts, contact information, videos and photos (Rybalko & Seltzer 2010, Luca, 2010). Information about products, services, amenities and additional
items the hotel chain offers is also included in usefulness (Kent & Taylor, 1998). Below are the examples of the criteria used.

*Table 2. Examples of Criteria for the Usefulness of Information Principle*

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Criteria</th>
<th>Example</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1A. Links to outside sources</td>
<td>Anyone have a fun and unique weekend getaway planned this year?- Kevin <a href="https://www.travelandleisure.com">https://www.travelandleisure.com</a></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2A. Photos</td>
<td><img src="image1.png" alt="Image" /> <img src="image2.png" alt="Image" /> <img src="image3.png" alt="Image" /> <img src="image4.png" alt="Image" /></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3A. Providing company information</td>
<td>In January 1957 we opened the ____ hotel, our very first hotel. We like to think of ourselves as the coolest 56-year-old on Facebook.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>4A. Providing contact information</td>
<td>Call our customer service line at 1800-helpnow.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>5A. Information on products or services offered</td>
<td>Our locations offer FREE continental breakfast including coffee, tee and an assortment of baked goods.</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

*Criteria used for the conservation of visitors principle*

The conservation of visitor’s principle is meant to make consumers stay on the page for as long as possible and should result in an action or sale (room booking) (Taylor
et al., 2001). Posting statuses and photos regularly on the pages will keep visitors on the page as they have more to look at (Rybalko & Seltzer 2010). Regularly means updated once a week or several times a month. Links to the organizations other social media pages, blogs or websites will keep visitors on the page for longer. It will also give visitors the opportunity to view more pages, letting them spend longer amounts of time with the organization. When the organization asks their visitors to “like” a post or another page they are verifying that the visitors enjoy the material. If the audience “likes” a post on the page it is likely they will view other postings, spending more time on the page. Below are examples of the criteria used.

*Table 3. Examples of Criteria for Conservation of Visitors Principle*

| 1B. Asking the audience to like a post | Click LIKE if you want to be here for Thanksgiving |
| 2B. Regular posts to the page | Updated at least once a week or multiple times a month |
| 3B. Links to organization's other social media pages or website | Our newest blog post is up! Click here www.blog.com |

*Criteria used for the generation of return visits principle*

The generation of return visits principle utilizes interactive ways to encourage the audience to want to return to the page. The generation of return visits principle over time and repeated visits by the audience will help build a relationship with them (Taylor et al., 2001). There are several things on Facebook that can lead to return visits. First, creating contests or challenges for visitors to participant in encourages them to return to the page.
for results. The use of book now or check availability links and promotions or discounts will encourage return visits. Lastly, asking visitors to share a post or a photo will prompt them to go back to the page to view, and encourage other people to go to the page to view the post. Examples are shown below.

Table 4. Examples of Criteria used for the Generation of Return Visitors Principle

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>1C. Contests</th>
<th>You only have until midnight to upload a photo of yourself enjoying a cinnamon roll to enter to win a Super Destination Vacation of your choice.</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>2C. Book now links</td>
<td>Click here to book your vacation now: <a href="http://www.hotel.com">www.hotel.com</a></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3C. Promotions or discounts</td>
<td>Easter Weekend 2 Day Sale!! Bring the kids and fill their baskets with seashells!</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>4C. Asking the audience to share a post</td>
<td>Hoping to give away a vacation! Share this post with friends!</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Criteria used for the dialogic loop principle

This principle is meant to measure the communication between the organization and its’ consumers. The Facebook page must have a two-way symmetry to be considered fully dialogic (Taylor et al. 2001). A company needs to respond to fans questions, complaints and comments as well as provide material for fans to respond to. “Liking” a consumers comment is considered a response from the organization. As this signifies the organization is acknowledging the consumers response, even if subtly. Providing the opportunity for visitors to respond to questions, or comments is ideal. Luca (2010) said it
is important to, “measure both the company’s response to fans and the response of fans to the company” (pp. 31). This will show the communication between the consumers and the organization and explain the dialogic loop. Examples are shown below.

*Table 5. Examples of Criteria for the Dialogic Loop*

<p>| | |</p>
<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th></th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1D. Providing an opportunity for the audience to respond</td>
<td>How do you wish to spend the first week of 2013?</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2D. Responding to a question</td>
<td>“Planning a trip down for Easter. Do you have any specials?” “Hi, yes we do check out our website <a href="http://www.hotels.com%E2%80%9D">www.hotels.com”</a></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3D. Responding to a complaint</td>
<td>“I am having issues with customer service at this hotel. No one seems to care to help.” “Thanks for your feedback please contact our customer service at…”</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>4D. Responding to or &quot;liking a comment&quot;</td>
<td>“Huge thanks to the hotel staff for the great experience” “No problem, our pleasure!”</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

*Coding procedures*

Intercoder reliability is crucial in analyzing data generated through a process of content analysis. Multiple researchers were trained to find reliability of coding within the content. According to Lombard, Synder-Duch and Bracken (2010), data cannot be considered valid unless intercoder reliability is used properly. Lombard et al. (2010)
suggests making or using an already existent index, and having multiple researchers tests its reliability. Using the code sheet shown in Appendix B two researchers coded 120 sample posts. Each coder was knowledgeable about social media and the subject area. These coders determined if each dialogic principle was present or not present for each of the 120 sample posts and if a principle was considered present the coders recorded the reasons for this evaluation with a 1, or 0 if not present. In cases were there was disagreement, the coders discussed their decision until consensus was reached. The coders also discussed if there were categories missing from the code sheet that needed to be added or changed. An intercoder reliability of .87 was found using Cohen’s Kappa. The remaining 641 posts were split into two groups of 321 and 320 posts respectively and one coder evaluated each group.
CHAPTER FOUR

RESULTS

The purpose of this study was to examine the dialogic principles set forth by Kent and Taylor (1998) as they are employed on Facebook by the accommodation sector. This study examined 34 hotel chain’s Facebook pages through a content analysis. Each of the 34 hotels were analyzed according to the four dialogic principles: usefulness of information, conservation of visitors, generation of visitors, and dialogic loop. Around 24 posts from each hotel chain were randomly selected for analysis. Some hotel chains had less than 24 posts collected because some months did not have at least 2 posts. The posts were not mutually exclusive, more than one dialogic principle could be found in each post. There were different numbers of hotel chains in each category of market class, which made each market class have a different number of total posts. Therefore, the averages were used to determine the frequency of the dialogic principles among market classes. The luxury class had a total number of 178 posts collected from 8 hotel chains. The upscale class had a total number of 208 posts collected from 9 hotel chains. The moderate class had a total number of 239 posts collected from 11 hotel chains. Lastly, the budget class had a total number of 136 posts collected from 6 hotel chains.

RQ1 was: How is the accommodation sector of the hospitality industry employing the principles of dialogic communication through their Facebook posts? To answer this research question the percentages of each dialogic principle employed was found by adding the total number of posts that each dialogic principle was present in and dividing it by total number of posts. Figure 2 below shows the frequency that each dialogic
principle occurred throughout all the posts collected. Usefulness of information occurred the most often, 81.7%, out of the four principles. The dialogic loop occurred the second most often at 67.4%. The next most frequent was the conservation of visitors with 50.2%. The least frequent occurring was the generation of visitors, which appeared in 29.3% of the posts.

![Percent of dialogic principles used in total posts](image)

**Figure 2. Percent of Dialogic Principles Used in Total Posts**

The frequency of each criterion within a principle is demonstrated below in Figure 3. Figure 3 shows the frequency of all criteria within the total number of posts.
The top criteria used were providing an opportunity for the audience to respond at 46.6%, including links to organization’s other social media pages at 48.3%, and the use of photos and videos at 65.2%.

There was an emergent finding that yielded interesting information, which is the number of principles used in posts. Since, the posts were not mutually exclusive it is important to know what percent of the posts met at least one dialogic principle (see Figure 4 below). Kent and Taylor (1998) do not say that each principle is required for something to be dialogic, but that these are the principles, or guidelines, that should be used to create dialogic communication. 16.2% of all posts used at least one dialogic principle. 42.4% of posts used two dialogic principles, and 29.6% of posts used three principles. Only 9.7% of posts used all four principles. This means there were 97.9% of
posts that validity included at least one dialogic principle. Meaning only 2.1% of all posts did not include any dialogic principles. The average number of principles used in a single post was 2.29.

![Number of principles used per post](image)

**Figure 4. Number of Principles Used per Post.**

To further answer RQ1 (How is the accommodation sector of the hospitality industry employing the principles of dialogic communication through their Facebook posts?) the frequencies of the criteria of each dialogic principle that were demonstrated in the posts, were examined. The percents that each criteria occurred within a principle are listed in Figure 5.
Next, research question one looked at the use of the criteria within each principle. The first dialogic principle is the usefulness of information. The criteria looked for on the Facebook posts were photos, videos, links to other websites, providing contact information, and company info and product and services offered. Examples of each criterion of these are shown in Appendix B. Total frequencies for the usefulness of information (see Figure 6) of all the hotels together showed that photos and videos were most commonly used at 65.2%. Products and services were mentioned the second most at 24.6%. Company info appeared in 18.7 percent of the posts, links to outside sources

![Criteria Appearing as a Percentage within each Principle](image)

*Figure 5. Criteria Appearing as a Percentage within each Principle.*
appeared in 15.8 percent of the posts. Lastly, contact information such as emails, and phone numbers appeared the least at only 4.3 %.

![Percentage of criteria used in Usefulness of Information](image)

**Figure 6. Percentage of Criteria used in Usefulness of Information.**

The second dialogic principle is the conservation of visitors. The criteria was shown within the Facebook posts by regular posts to the page, asking the fans to “like” a post, and providing links to the organizations own website or other social media pages. Examples of each criterion are shown in Appendix B. Figure 7 below, shows that links to the organizations own website or other social media pages appeared more (48.3 %) than asking the fans to “like” a post (5.3%).
The third dialogic principle is the generation of return visitors. The criteria were shown within the Facebook posts by asking fans to “share” the post, running promotions or discounts, book now links, and contests. Examples of each criterion are shown in Appendix B. Figure 8 below shows the contests occurred the most often on the Facebook pages (14.8%). Promotions and discounts appeared the second most often at 10.6%. Book now links appeared in 3.7% of the posts. Lastly, asking the fans to “share” a post appeared the least out of any category in the study with only 2.4%.
The fourth dialogic principle is the dialogic loop. The criteria were demonstrated within the Facebook posts by providing the fans the opportunity to respond, and then by the organization responding to comments, complaints, and questions. Examples of each criterion are shown in Appendix B. Figure 9, shown below, illustrates the dialogic loop. The organizations provided an opportunity for the fans to respond the most frequently (46.6%). To complete the dialogic loop the organizations responded to fans, 39.2% were responses to comments, 12% were responses to questions, and 7.9% were responses to complaints.
RQ2 asked: Is there a relationship between the market class and likeliness to use the dialogic principles within Facebook posts. To answer RQ2 a cross tabulation was completed using Chi Square. The analysis showed two significant relationships worth discussing: one between the market class and the usefulness of information and another with generation of return visitors. The first relationship was as the market class went up (budget to luxury) the usefulness of information also went up (see Figure 6). The budget hotels used the criteria for the usefulness of information in 71.3% of all posts. Next, the moderate hotels used the criteria in 77.4% of posts criteria, the upscale hotels used the criteria in 83.2 of all posts and finally, the luxury hotels used the criteria in 93.8% of the posts. The second relationship was as the market class went up the generation of return visits went down (Table 7). Budget hotels used the generation of return visitors in 49.3% of posts, moderate hotels used the criteria in 34.3% of posts, upscale used the criteria in 19.2%, and luxury used the criteria the least amount in 19.1% of posts.

Figure 9. Percentages of Criteria Used in the Dialogic Loop.
Table 6. Crosstab for Usefulness of Information

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CHAPTER FIVE
DISCUSSION

The accommodation sector of the hospitality and tourism industry is a service-oriented field, which relies heavily on building relationships with consumers. Hotel chains need to have strong relationships with their consumers or they do not have any business; the power is in the hands of the consumer. If a consumer is unhappy with an experience at a hotel they may not come again. Hotels are selling more than just a room; they are selling experiences to the consumers. Every interaction that occurs between the organization and the consumer is part of the experience. Much of the experience now is starting with interacting with the hotel online (see Appendix A). Thus, the accommodation sector has motivation and reasons to be dialogic. Each of the dialogic principles is valuable to the hotels to create relationships and obtain loyal customers, which in turn equals more revenue.

This thesis examined 34 Facebook pages of hotel chains and measured the frequency of four of Kent and Taylor’s (1998) five dialogic principles within the Facebook posts. There were several important findings and many interesting insights that came out of the research. The two research questions were answered adequately along with some other general findings.

It seems likely that this study shows more use of the dialogic principles compared to previous research because it examined the accommodation sector, not because it examined a certain platform. The previous research that has been conducted across the different platforms such as Facebook, Twitter and websites, has shown a general trend of
low use of *all* the dialogic principles. Previously, the usefulness of information principle has been used more frequently, but the dialogic loop has not. For example, Linvill, McGee and Hicks (2010) found only 29.6% of tweets to use the dialogic loop, but 83.5% to contain usefulness of information. Previous research on Facebook has shown low frequency of dialogic communication. Luca (2011) examined Fortune 500 companies and found the dialogic loop to be low around 5% and the other principles did not report high frequencies. Bortree and Seltzer (2009) examined advocacy groups on Facebook and found the average number of features of usefulness of information to be three and the average number of conservation of visitors was one. Currently, the only study to look at percentages of the dialogic principles appearing in the same way this study did was Linvill, Hicks and McGee (2010). This was the only study that measured the presence of dialogic communication in the same manner, with no other variables like this research. The findings were somewhat similar. Linvill, Hicks and McGee (2010) found usefulness of information in 83.5 of tweets, generation of return visitors in 55.7%, conservation of visitors in 52.2%, and dialogic loop in 29.6%.

The first research question showed how the dialogic principles were used. The first research question was: How is the accommodation sector of the hospitality industry employing the principles of dialogic communication through their Facebook posts? To answer this question each post was examined to determine if the dialogic principles were present. The results showed high occurrences of three of the dialogic principles. The dialogic principle, generation of return visitors, was the only principle to occur in less
than 50% of the posts (29.3%). The other three of the four dialogic principles appeared in over 50% of total posts analyzed.

Usefulness of information was seen in 81.7% of all the posts. This was due to the high number of pictures that the Facebook pages posted. Many of the pictures used showed the hotel amenities, hotel locations, type of rooms, and guests at the establishment. These all tell the viewers information about the hotel and brand itself. Many of the hotel chains had properties in scenic locations. The pictures they posted were very aesthetically pleasing. People like to see visuals of what the hotel will look like where they will be staying. Hotels often posted about the products or services that they provide, which informs the guest about what the brand has to offer. Posting about updated fitness centers and large blue pools, entice the consumers to want to visit the location. Although, the posts did not provide company info or contact information frequently. This may be due to the fact that this information can be found on other areas of the Facebook page, rather than the posts themselves.

The conservation of visitors was seen in 50.2% of all the posts. Many of the hotel chains linked back to their own social media pages such as blogs, YouTube, Twitter or Instagram. The hotel chains also provided links to their own websites and booking engines often. Facebook does not have the capacity to store information like reservations. For the hotels to obtain the consumers information they would need to post a link to their website or booking engine which connects to their internal database. Linking to other pages or social media pages also keeps the audience from going to other sites. If a
Facebook page has a link to Pinterest it might interest the audience to go to the site, making their time spent with the organization last longer periods of time.

Asking Facebook fans to “like” a post did not occur often (5.3%). Instead of asking fans to “like” a post, most hotels posted things that fans would “like” without having to be told to do so. For example, by posting a picture of a sunset over their pool deck people will tend to like this naturally. The third dialogic principle, the generation of return visitors showed the least frequency. What did occur often were contests (14.8% of all posts) on the pages. Many hotel brands used different types of contests like trivia, and giveaways to interact and engage with the fans. The types of contests seen on the pages varied greatly across the board. The contests were designed to draw the fans back to the page for results. When hotels run contests frequently it keeps the audience more engaged and keeps them interested. The audience will return to the page to see who won, or what the answer was to a trivia questions. Running contests are a gimmick to keep fans coming back.

Many of the Facebook pages also used promotions and discounts like “click here within the next hour to receive 10% off a nights stay”, or “this weeks special is buy two nights get one free”. Promotions and discounts made up 10.6% of total posts. People like good deals and ways to save money. If saving money or receiving discounts means going to Facebook to retrieve or redeem them, consumers will return to the pages to find them. Book now links and asking the fans to “share” a post occurred less than 5% of the time. Book now links were often found at different locations on the pages.
The last dialogic principle, the dialogic loop occurred in 67.4% of all posts. This is a high number compared to studies conducted in the past. Linvill, McGee and Hicks (2010) found 29.6% of universities and colleges tweets to contain the dialogic loop. Bortree and Seltzer (2009) found no features of dialogic loop in environmental advocacy groups. Seltzer and Mitrook (2007) found 60% of environmental weblogs to contain “responsiveness”. Luca (2010) found 9.5% to have more than 2 responses and 33.3% of responses from Fortune 500 companies had only 5% response from fans. In this study, almost half (46.6%) of the total posts the organization gave the fans an opportunity to respond either by asking questions, or posting trivia questions. The organizations responded to 59.1% of all questions, comments, and complaints. The organization “liking” a comment also counted as responding to the audience because it showed they acknowledged the person. It seems logical that the dialogic loop would be high within hotel chains. Hotel chains should be concerned with building a relationship with consumers so the consumers will frequent their hotel. Asking the audience questions is a way to make them feel involved. When the hotel chain responds to a consumer it makes them feel a personal relationship with the hotel. It is like having a conversation with a friend. When consumers have a complaint, or a question if they feel a closeness with a hotel or they feel like the hotel will respond, then they will post on the Facebook page. Many times when people complain it is because they feel that no one else will listen or respond, so they post on Facebook for a response because they know that page is updated frequently. The hotel chains response to comments and questions demonstrates that they
provide customer service. This is important because hotels are part of the service industry.

RQ2 was: Is there is a relationship between the market class and likeliness to use the dialogic principles within Facebook posts. To answer this question a cross tabulations was configured using Chi Square. The were 2 relationships that were statistically significant between market class and likeliness to use Facebook dialogically. The generation of visitors (DP 3) and the usefulness of information (DP 1) showed strong correlations with hotel’s market class and extent of dialogic usage.

The first relationship that was statistically significant was within the the first dialogic principle, the usefulness of information. As the quality of the hotel went up the usefulness of information went up also. Usefulness of information was seen in 94% of posts in luxury hotels, and 83% of upscale hotels. Whereas, moderate hotel chains used DP 1 77%, and budget hotels 71%. This showed that the luxury and upscale hotels were creating more informational posts, than posts such as contests and promotions. Many of the upscale and luxury hotels provided information and pictures of their locations and amenities. Lower quality hotel chains cannot post beautiful pictures of numerous pools and expensive food because they do not have these things. Usually the higher the quality of hotel the large the properties of the locations. This means that these hotels have more amenities to give information about. If a hotel is simply a room, a pool, parking lot, and breakfast than there is less information that the consumer needs to know about the property. If a hotel has 10 pools, multiple hotels at one property, different restaurants, spas etc. they will need to provide the guests will more information. Although, all
qualities of hotels contained the usefulness of information in at least 50% of posts. This is important for the consumers who may be turning to social media pages to seek out information to further their hotel destination decisions. No matter the hotel quality there will always be general information that guests will need like what kind of rooms offered, food options, recreational activities and others. Gartner (1993) discussed building the destination image or product image. Depending on how the company builds and displays their brand will alter the information or the amount of information needed to give to the audience. When creating a brand or destination image, information about the place and product are needed to successfully communicate the intended message to the audience.

The next relationship that was found to be statistically significant was within the third dialogic principle, the generation of return visitors, which was the least used principle among the four. RQ2 asked: Is there a relationship between market class and likeliness to use the dialogic principles within Facebook posts. The results found there was an inverse relationship between quality of hotel and percent of posts containing DP 3. As the quality of the hotel decreased the occurrence of DP 3 in the posts increased. 49% of budget hotels and 34% of moderate hotel’s posts were used to generate return visitors. Whereas, only 19% of upscale and luxury hotel’s posts were used in the same manner. This may be due to the frequency of contests that the lower quality hotels used to draw in their audience. This inverse relationship could be due to the fact that the higher quality hotels have photos of amenities to display more often than the lower quality hotels. Many of the lower quality hotels are cheaper in room rates and most of the time they are not as luxurious as those of higher quality. Therefore, these type of hotels need
to turn to something that will keep the fans entertained and coming back to the page.
Lower quality hotels probably have fewer resources to allocate to extensive marketing or promotions. Utilizing free resources such as Facebook to run special discounts saves them money on printing costs. Higher quality hotels did have more information provided in their posts, which may have effected this relationship. Because of our sampling method, it is hard to predict the reason for this relationship. We didn’t sample the occurrences of the dialogic principles on a percentage basis of total posts. These relationships did not occur as a percent of total posts just the total of our sample.

Limitations

First, the newness of social media and the study of it as a communication subject is a limitation. There is limited scholarly research surrounding the topic and especially as it pertains to dialogic communication. The study of social media, its usages, and its communication values are a growing, popular trend currently. In years to come this limitation might decrease, but right now it still is limiting in that there are few studies to build upon and expand. Currently, there is a lack of theory created to explain the phenomena of social media as a communication medium. This is why many scholars are turning to existing theories and molding them to fit with a social media realm. Dialogic communication and Kent and Taylor’s (1998) five principles are a good vehicle to use to discuss the phenomena, but not ideal. The original theory is used for a whole page or website, and not individual posts or social networking websites. So while it is a good lens it is not ideal, and future research needs to address this.
One limitation of this study was that it took a consistent sample from each month rather than the same percentage from each market class. This made some comparisons difficult. For example, it is hard to compare number or frequencies of posts when each market class had a different number of total posts. One can’t say a hotel brand has fewer contests, if they have less total posts. Therefore, percentages had to be used rather than number of total posts. Another limitation of this study was the number of posts collected each month from each hotel. This sample of posting, two posts per month for twelve months for each hotel, gave a great general, random sample of the hotel’s usage. For a more in-depth look it would have been beneficial to look at more posts per month. This would have given the study a larger sample to look more in-depth over a year period. It would have also made the total number of posts per market class more equal.

A minor limitation of this study was the study the sample was chosen from. The sample was chosen from a list of best hotels. With this type of list it could be assumed that if the hotel chain ranked as one of the “best” that they would also have the resources to create affective social media pages. This is not to say that just because they are rated a “best” that the hotel will definitely have more resources for social media, but it could be a factor that skews the sample used slightly. About 57% of the market consists of branded hotels like Marriott International (Sealover, 2010). The other half of the market consists of independently owned small to medium enterprises. The original study says, “Four companies, Hilton, Marriott, Sheraton, and Wyndham, operate more than half of the hotel brands in the ratings” (Consumer Report, 2012). While these four brands make up a large part of the market they do not represent more than half. The sample does not include
Choice hotels, which is a branded company that makes up a fair amount of the market share. It also excludes many of the Starwood hotels, another major player in the market (Sealover, 2010).

This study also chose to exclude individual properties. This limits the kind of data collected as corporate/brand pages may be used in a different manner than individual pages. The brand Facebook pages were chosen to represent individual properties as a whole. Individual properties may be closer to customers than their over-arching Facebook pages.

**Future research**

There are many other avenues to expand and build upon for future studies. First, as mention in the limitations section, it would be interesting to see how individual properties Facebook pages vary from the corporate/brand Facebook pages. The posts on individual pages may lead to more direct communication with guests of that location. Another aspect that could be examined is the Facebook page as a whole. Looking at every aspect of the Facebook pages rather than just posts would yield differences in communication style. On the opposite spectrum a study could be done just on the post’s comments and the dialogue that occurs there. This study examines the organizations communication to the consumer and the consumer’s response, but it does not examine dialogue between consumers.

A bigger sample of posts per month and more hotels would yield more information. Varying the sample size and type could add to future research. Also adding non-branded hotels to the sample would be interesting. This study excludes bed and
breakfast, lodges, and many smaller privately owned and run hotels. Adding these types of hotels in the future will tell more about a wider variety of hotel types and how they use the dialogic principles.

Lastly, a mixed methods study could be conducted in the future to gain insight from each party involved in the dialogue. Interviews would add qualitative data for both organizations process in communication and consumers process in receiving and responding. It would be interesting to define motives for communicating and creating dialogue via social media. Future research could also look specifically at the types of communication happening such as complaints, comments, or questions and how both the organization and consumer respond.

Of course, it would be useful to compare the findings of this study to other forms of dialogic platforms such as Twitter, and websites (like Kent and Taylor’s (1998) original study). Each platform would yield a different perspective of the dialogic process on all ends of receiving and sending. Many other current studies have compared dialogic principles between an organization’s Facebook and Twitter pages, and while this is useful, the scope of this study was not that encompassing.

The future areas for research in this area are plentiful and exciting. The newness of this field of research will hopefully expand and broaden knowledge in the coming years. The dialogic principles created by Kent and Taylor (1998) will need to continue to develop and change as websites become more obsolete as a dialogic platform and other types increase. Hopefully, this study will be used as a step to examine dialogic
communication more broadly across organization types such as the entertainment sector, retail sector, and countless other areas.
CHAPTER SIX
CONCLUSION

This thesis examined the extent to which the accommodation sector uses Facebook to communicate dialogically with its consumers. Using four of Kent and Taylor’s (1998) five principles of dialogic communication, the study found that dialogic communication was present. 97.9% of posts had at least one dialogic principle used, with a mean of 2.29 principles used. Only 2.1% (N=16) of all 761 posts did not use any dialogic principles. RQ1 was: How is the accommodation sector of the hospitality industry employing the principles of dialogic communication through their Facebook posts? The results showed high percentages for three of the dialogic principles. The dialogic principle, generation of return visitors was the only principle to occur in less than half the posts (29.3%). The other three principles appeared in over half of total posts analyzed. The dialogic loop was considerably higher than previous studies conducted at 67.4%.

RQ2 was: Is there a relationship between the market class and likeliness to use the dialogic principles within Facebook posts. There were statistically significant findings among the quality of hotels. The results showed that as the quality of hotel went down the use of the generation of return visitors went up. The second statistically significant finding was as the quality of the hotel went up the usefulness of information went up as well. Among all market classes there was a consistent use of the dialogic loop.

The findings of this research can be used to conduct future research in the field of Communication Studies and Tourism Studies. As dialogic communication was originally
intended for use in examining websites, there is much need to expand upon the research to social networking sites and how they can be used dialogically. Social networking websites offer a great variety of ways to use the five dialogic principles set forth by Kent and Taylor (1998). Although, it has been argued that social networking sites are not inherently dialogic, as in they are not designed to create relationship building conversations. More importantly, they have not been used to create dialogue that builds relationships with their consumers (Kent and Taylor 2010). This study has shown that social networking sites can successfully be used for dialogic communication.

Another important finding of this study is that all of the pages examined did have a social media presence on Facebook that was active. Many previous studies that have used Twitter and even Facebook have found low rates of actual active pages among the sample (Luca 2011, Linvill, McGee & Hicks 2010). It can be concluded that the accommodation sector is using Facebook dialogically, not simply as another means of one-way communication with the consumers. This can be concluded mainly because of the high frequencies of the dialogic loop in the posts. In 67.4% of all the posts the organization was either giving the opportunity to consumers to respond, or responding themselves. In completing the dialogic loop the organizations were actively building relationships with consumers, not just conducting one-way communication. On this particular platform and in this industry the dialogic principles are being used most of the time. In the future it will be interesting to see how many other companies follow the accommodation sector and use social media as a way to build relationships, and communicate directly with their consumers.
References


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eMarketer. (2011). Travel Industry’s Online Sales Rebound. eMarketer.com


APPENDICES
Appendix A

Online travel industry infographic
Appendix B

Thesis code sheet

Examples of each criterion

Market class:
1. Luxury
2. Upscale
3. Moderate
4. Budget

1A. Usefulness of information:

1A. Links to outside sources

Anyone have a fun and unique weekend getaway planned this year? – Kevin http://www.travelandleisure.com/weekend-getaways/las-vegas-nevada/nevas-

2A. Photos

3A. Providing company info

In January 1957 we opened the [Hotel, our very first hotel. We like to think of ourselves as the coolest 56-year-old on Facebook.

4A. Providing contact information
5A. Information on products or services offered

Locations offer FREE SuperStart® continental breakfast including coffee, tea, juice, milk, cereal and an assortment of baked goods. Includes properties in the U.S. and Canada only. Properties may offer more breakfast selections in addition to those listed.

2B. Conservation of visitors:

1B. Asking the audience to “like” a post

Click LIKE if you want to be here for Thanksgiving

2B. Regular posts to the page

3B. Links to organizations other social media pages or website

Our newest blog post is up! What interesting people have you met in your travels? – Kevin
http://\\\\\\|

3C. Generation of return visits

1C. Contests

You only have until midnight to upload a photo of yourself enjoying a cinnamon roll to enter to win a Super Destination Vacation of your choice for you and a friend!

2C. Book now link

3C. Promotions or discounts

EASTER WEEKEND 2 DAY SALE! Bring the kids and fill their baskets with seashells instead of eggs!
4C. Asking the audience to share a post

Hoping to give away a FREE Spring Vacation! Share our page with at least one friend and we can do THIS! Ready, set, go!

4D. Dialogic Loop

1D. Providing an opportunity for the audience to respond

How do you wish you were spending the first day of 2013? Your body could probably use a few recovery hours at the spa. Consider that hangover a distant memory.

2D. Responding to a question

Planning a trip to come down Sept 21–23 for my daughter’s 7th birthday... This will be the first time we've stayed with you guys... Anything special happening?

3D. Responding to a complaint

I am having a problem with [redacted] tonight... Let's see how this is handled. Great customer service? or will they maintain because THEIR phone lines are not working nor is their email that I must pay for a stay that I can not get ahold of them to cancel (hotel phone STILL not working) try it! 1-843-448-1048 More later on every page soon...

4D. Responding to or “liking” a comment

Huge thanks to Charlie working late and helping this Road Warrior feel at home!! :)

[Comment: \[\text{something good}\] A huge thanks to YOU for sharing]
Appendix C

Facebook glossary of terms

Friend: Friends are people you connect and share with on Facebook.

Like: Clicking Like is a way to give positive feedback and connect with things you care about.

Link: You can share a link from the web on Facebook.

News Feed: Your news feed is the ongoing list of updates on your home page that shows you what's new with the friends and pages you follow.

Page: Pages allow businesses, brands, and celebrities to connect with people on Facebook. Admins can post information and news feed updates to people who like their pages.

Places: You can share where you are with your friends by checking into places. You can also find friends nearby.

Profile: On Facebook, your profile is your timeline.

Timeline: Your timeline is your collection of the photos, stories, and experiences that tell your story.

Wall: Your Wall is the space on your profile where you and friends can post and share.

** Fan (Janssen, 2012): A user who likes a particular Facebook page. Users who Like a page are able to receive updates from that page's administrator through status updates, posted content and event invitations.

Status: A feature that allows users to post and share a small amount of content on their profile, on their friends' walls and in Facebook news feeds.


Appendix D

Hotel chain’s Facebook page url’s

2. Hyatt Place: https://www.facebook.com/HyattPlace?ref=ts&fref=ts
11. Marriott: https://www.facebook.com/Marriott
15. Hilton Garden Inn: https://www.facebook.com/HiltonGardenInn
17. Wyndham Resorts: https://www.facebook.com/WyndhamHotels
20. Wyndham Hotel: https://www.facebook.com/WyndhamHotels
*26. Comfort Suites: NO BRAND PAGE
27. Holiday Inn Express:
https://www.facebook.com/holidayinnexpress?rf=108212839200090
*28. Sleep Inn: NO BRAND PAGE
29. La Quinta Inn: https://www.facebook.com/laquinta?ref=ts&fref=ts
30. AmericInn: https://www.facebook.com/americinn?sid=0.5035281829196087
31. Best Western: https://www.facebook.com/BestWestern?ref=ts&fref=ts
*33. Comfort Inn: NO BRAND PAGE
*35. Quality: NO BRAND PAGE
*36. Clarion: NO BRAND PAGE
42. Motel 6: https://www.facebook.com/motel6?ref=ts&fref=ts
44. America Best Value Inn:
https://www.facebook.com/AmericasBestValueInn1?ref=ts&fref=ts