

Business Response Completeness in Addressing Multiple Customer Complaints: A content analysis of restaurant and coffee shop responses in Jakarta

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Article history

Received:
07-10-2026

Accepted:
15-10-2026

Published:
28-10-2026

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Research Studies
Journal

Open Access

Abstract

Negative reviews often contain several issues simultaneously, yet business responses do not necessarily address every complaint raised by customers. This study examines complaint complexity, response completeness, and the relationship between the two in restaurants and coffee shops. A structured content analysis was conducted on 146 negative review-response pairs from 25 businesses across Jakarta's five administrative areas between January 2025 and June 2026. Complexity was measured by the number of complaint categories in each review and classified as one, two, or three or more complaints. Responses were classified as complete or partial/incomplete. Frequencies, proportions, cross-tabulations, and a chi-square test were used. The results show that 73.97% of the reviews contained at least two complaints. The proportion of partial responses increased from 10.53% for single complaints to 15.71% for two complaints and 23.68% for three or more complaints. However, the relationship between complaint complexity and response completeness was not statistically significant, $\chi^2(2) = 2.446, p = .294$. Generic responses occurred in 50.68% of the units, while a greater number of strategies and trust-recovery elements did not necessarily produce more complete coverage. This study proposes the complaint-response coverage gap to explain the discrepancy between the issues raised by customers and those substantively addressed by businesses. Businesses should adopt an issue-based response approach that acknowledges each complaint and communicates relevant follow-up actions.

Keywords: multiple complaints, response completeness, negative reviews, business communication, service recovery

INTRODUCTION

Online reviews have become a public space in which customers evaluate service experiences and businesses demonstrate how they handle service failures. For prospective customers, a negative review and the management response represent two sides of the same evidence: the review describes the problem, while the response reveals the organization's capacity to listen, explain, and improve. Studies in hospitality show that online reviews are associated with business performance and that management responses can influence subsequent customer evaluations (Xie et al., 2014; Wang & Chaudhry, 2018). In Indonesia, digital reviews also inform booking decisions and shape perceptions of service quality (Marie & Widodo, 2019; Supeno, 2018; Wiastuti & Kurnia, 2021).

Research on responses to negative reviews has progressed from asking whether businesses should respond to examining how responses should be constructed. The presence of a response can signal concern and mitigate the effect of a negative review (Rose & Blodgett, 2016). Response quality is also shaped by empathy, problem paraphrasing, speed, an accommodative tone, and the fit between the response strategy and the type of service failure (Min et al., 2015; Li et al., 2018; Salehi-Esfahani et al., 2023). Responses that communicate concern and trustworthiness help prospective customers infer that the organization takes the problem seriously (Sparks et al., 2016; Yhee et al., 2023).

A public response is not merely a conversation between a business and a reviewer. It is also read by a wider audience as evidence of service governance. Gu and Ye (2014) show that management responses can affect

customer satisfaction, while Piehler et al. (2019) emphasize the benefits of accommodative responses for prospective customers. From a service-justice perspective, apparently fair procedures, respectful interpersonal treatment, and social presence in the response also shape readers' evaluations (Olson & Ro, 2020). Response quality should therefore be understood as a combination of communication form, content relevance, and indications of follow-up action.

Most previous studies code response strategies at the level of the response as a whole, including apologies, expressions of gratitude, explanations, compensation, and promises of improvement. The Triple A typology—acknowledgment, account, and action—shows that responses can be evaluated in terms of recognition, explanation, and action (Sparks & Bradley, 2017). Genre analyses likewise identify recurring rhetorical patterns used by organizations when answering negative reviews (Ho, 2017; Thumvichit, 2019). Research on e-complaint tracking further emphasizes problem-solving strategies rather than linguistic politeness alone (Sahin et al., 2017).

However, measuring strategies at the level of the entire response may obscure an important issue. A low-rated review often contains more than one problem. A customer may complain about waiting time, staff behavior, food quality, cleanliness, and price incongruity in a single narrative. Text-mining research on hotel reviews shows that satisfaction and dissatisfaction emerge from several distinct experience attributes (Berezina et al., 2016). Analyses of one-star reviews also reveal diverse service failures that require different responses (Levy et al., 2013).

When a review contains several problems, a polite response with multiple elements is not necessarily complete. A business may apologize and promise to evaluate its service while addressing only the waiting time and ignoring staff behavior and cleanliness. This situation creates a complaint-response coverage gap: the distance between all problems raised by the customer and those substantively acknowledged or addressed in the response. This idea extends research on response strategies by shifting the unit of evaluation from “which elements are present in the response” to “which complaints are actually covered by the response.”

This distinction is also relevant to cyber public relations. A rapid but generic response may demonstrate organizational presence without showing that the complaint was actually read. Indonesian research has positioned customer responses and communication management on review platforms as part of digital public relations activity (Afifah & Yazid, 2015). At the same time, personalized, accommodative, and action-oriented responses are more likely to build trust than routine or defensive replies (Kapeš et al., 2022; Kumar & Maidullah, 2022).

An apology is important, but its effectiveness depends on its context and delivery. Wan et al. (2023) show that apologies in responses to negative reviews must be understood in relation to the nature of the problem and the content of the response. Similarly, Niu and Fan (2018) frame online review management as an organizational practice requiring problem recognition and an appropriate response. Thus, the number of strategies, a friendly tone, and completeness of coverage are related but distinct dimensions.

This study addresses this gap by analyzing negative review-response pairs from restaurants and coffee shops in Jakarta. It focuses on three aspects: the complexity of complaints within a review, response completeness across all complaints, and response characteristics at each level of complexity. The research questions are: (1) How is customer complaint complexity distributed? (2) How complete are business responses at each level of complexity? and (3) Is complaint complexity associated with response completeness? In practical terms, the study offers a simple basis for developing issue-based replies to multiple complaints.

METHODS

This study employed a descriptive quantitative design using structured content analysis. Content analysis was selected because it enables message content to be categorized systematically, transparently, and replicably (Krippendorff, 2018; Neuendorf, 2017). The category framework was specified before the final count and applied consistently to the same data units, in line with category-based coding principles in structured qualitative content analysis (Schreier, 2012).

The operational population consisted of negative online reviews and the corresponding official business responses. The sample comprised 146 review-response pairs from 25 restaurants and coffee shops across Jakarta's five administrative areas. The data covered January 2025 to June 2026. Reviews were limited to one- and two-star ratings and were included only when the business had posted a public response. One unit of analysis therefore consisted of one customer review paired with one official business response.

Complaints in each review were separated into distinct problem categories. Complaint complexity was determined by the number of categories present and then grouped into one complaint, two complaints, and three

or more complaints. This grouping preserved the distinction between single and multiple complaints while maintaining adequate cell sizes for cross-tabulation.

Response completeness was the principal variable. A response was coded as complete when it acknowledged or addressed every complaint category identified in the review. It was coded as partial/incomplete when it addressed only some categories or showed no substantive connection to the problems raised. Acknowledgment could take the form of paraphrasing, explanation, an issue-specific apology, or a relevant description of follow-up action.

Additional variables included generic response, concrete action, number of response strategies, and number of trust-recovery elements. A generic response was one that could be interchanged across reviews because it contained no clear reference to the customer's experience. Concrete action referred to a specific step, such as checking a transaction, evaluating a procedure, coaching staff, providing a replacement, or offering a resolution channel. Response strategies and trust elements were counted from the categories present in each response.

The data were analyzed using frequencies, percentages, means, and cross-tabulations. The association between complaint complexity and response completeness was tested using a chi-square test of independence, supplemented by Cramer's V. Because the study used the full available sample and some cells were limited in size, inferential results were interpreted alongside the descriptive pattern rather than as the sole basis for conclusions.

Procedural reliability was supported by operational definitions, decision rules, and consistency checks across variables in the analysis table. Customer identities were not reported. Although the data constituted public communication, results were presented in aggregate form to minimize the risk of identifying individuals or businesses.

RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

Most reviews in the sample contained more than one issue. Seventy reviews (47.95%) included two complaint categories, while 38 reviews (26.03%) included at least three. Overall, 73.97% of the reviews contained multiple complaints.

Table 1. Distribution of complaint complexity (N = 146)

Complaint complexity	n	%
1 complaint	38	26.03
2 complaints	70	47.95
≥3 complaints	38	26.03
Total	146	100.00

The proportion of partial/incomplete responses increased with complaint complexity. For single complaints, 4 of 38 responses (10.53%) were incomplete. This increased to 11 of 70 (15.71%) for two complaints and 9 of 38 (23.68%) for three or more complaints. Overall, 24 responses (16.44%) failed to cover all problems raised by the customer.

Table 2. Response completeness by complaint complexity

Complexity	Complete n (%)	Partial/incomplete n (%)	Total
1 complaint	34 (89.47)	4 (10.53)	38
2 complaints	59 (84.29)	11 (15.71)	70
≥3 complaints	29 (76.32)	9 (23.68)	38
Total	122 (83.56)	24 (16.44)	146

Response characteristics did not fully correspond to complexity. Generic responses occurred in 50.68% of all units and were most common in the two-complaint group (55.71%). The proportion of non-concrete actions

was relatively stable, ranging from 36.84% to 41.43%. The mean number of response strategies increased slightly from 3.03 for single complaints to 3.26 for both the two-complaint and the three-or-more-complaint groups. The mean number of trust-recovery elements also increased, but this quantitative increase did not eliminate partial coverage.

Table 3. Response characteristics by complaint complexity

Indicator	1 complaint	2 complaints	≥3 complaints	Total
Generic response, n (%)	18 (47.37)	39 (55.71)	17 (44.74)	74 (50.68)
Non-concrete action, n (%)	15 (39.47)	29 (41.43)	14 (36.84)	58 (39.73)
Mean number of strategies	3.03	3.26	3.26	—
Mean trust-recovery elements	3.34	3.50	3.68	—

The chi-square test found no statistically significant association between complaint complexity and response completeness, $\chi^2(2) = 2.446$, $p = .294$. Cramer's V of approximately .13 indicates a small association. Thus, the data do not provide sufficient inferential evidence that complexity category determines response completeness, although the descriptive pattern shows a rising proportion of partial responses as reviews become more complex.

Table 4. Association between complaint complexity and response completeness

Statistic	Value
Chi-square (χ^2)	2.446
Degrees of freedom	2
p	0.294
Cramer's V	0.13
Interpretation	Not significant; small association

The principal finding is the high prevalence of multiple complaints. Almost three-quarters of the reviews contained at least two problems. This confirms that a customer experience cannot always be reduced to a single failure category. As Berezina et al. (2016) demonstrate, dissatisfaction may emerge from several service attributes simultaneously; in low-rated reviews, this combination forms a narrative that must be read as a sequence of issues rather than one abstract complaint (Levy et al., 2013).

Descriptively, the risk of partial coverage increased as the number of complaints rose. However, the association was not statistically significant and its magnitude was small. Two points should be distinguished. First, the percentage pattern remains practically relevant because almost one in four responses in the most complex group did not cover all problems. Second, statistical uncertainty indicates that completeness is not determined by complaint count alone. Managerial capacity, internal procedures, failure type, and strategy selection may also matter. Salehi-Esfahani et al. (2023) similarly show that response effectiveness depends on the fit between strategy and failure type.

The complaint-response coverage gap helps explain why a response may appear appropriate while remaining incomplete. A response may contain gratitude, apology, empathy, explanation, and a promise, yet direct all these elements toward only one of several problems. Consequently, the number of strategies is not an adequate proxy for coverage. This finding extends the acknowledgment-account-action typology of Sparks and Bradley (2017): each element must not only be present but also mapped to the relevant issue.

The findings on generic responses reinforce this explanation. More than half of the responses were generic. Routine replies may be efficient, maintain a polite tone, and signal presence, but they do not necessarily prove that the customer's experience was understood. Genre analyses show that organizational responses tend to employ recurring rhetorical moves (Ho, 2017; Thumvichit, 2019). The problem is not repetition itself, but the point at which standardized form replaces acknowledgment of complaint details.

From a service-recovery perspective, relevant responses require a combination of empathy, paraphrasing, and action. Min et al. (2015) emphasize the influence of empathy and paraphrasing, while Sahin et al. (2017) position problem solving at the core of e-complaint management. The finding that 39.73% of responses did not mention concrete action suggests that the coverage gap can occur at two levels: a problem is not mentioned, or it is mentioned without a recognizable direction for resolution.

An apology does not automatically close the coverage gap. Wan et al. (2023) show that the function of an apology depends on its wording and context. When a single general apology follows a narrative containing four problems, readers may not know which problem has been acknowledged. Accommodative and personalized responses are more likely to enhance trust (Kapeš et al., 2022; Piehler et al., 2019), whereas defensive or mismatched responses can weaken this benefit (Li et al., 2018).

The findings are also connected to justice and trust. A response that explains follow-up procedures provides cues of procedural justice, while respectful, personalized language communicates interactional justice and social presence (Olson & Ro, 2020). Prospective customers infer organizational concern and trustworthiness from these cues (Sparks et al., 2016; Yhee et al., 2023). Completeness of coverage can therefore be understood as an initial condition: readers cannot readily assess the fairness of a resolution when some problems have not even been acknowledged.

In business communication practice, responses should be prepared through issue matching before publication. Managers can break a review into a list of problems and ensure that each receives at least one form of response: acknowledgment, explanation, action, or a request for further information. This approach can still produce concise replies. Simplicity does not mean genericity; a brief response can explicitly mention two or three issues and connect them to a relevant action.

This implication is especially important for restaurants and coffee shops because customer experience emerges from rapid interactions among products, processes, facilities, and staff. Indonesian studies show that digital reviews influence consumer decisions and shape the evaluation of service attributes (Marie & Widodo, 2019; Supeno, 2018; Wiastuti & Kurnia, 2021). As part of cyber public relations, responses also create a public record of how an organization listens to customers (Afifah & Yazid, 2015).

This study has several limitations. The data were limited to one- and two-star reviews that received responses and therefore do not represent unanswered reviews or other platforms. Grouping three or more complaints simplified variation in the upper tail of the distribution. The cross-sectional design also did not test effects on rating revisions, repeat visits, or reader evaluations. Future research could formally assess intercoder reliability, compare platforms and sectors, and use experiments to estimate the effect of issue-by-issue responses on trust and purchase intention. Such experiments are relevant because responses have been shown to influence prospective customer evaluations and purchasing intentions (Kumar & Maidullah, 2022; Rose & Blodgett, 2016).

CONCLUSION

Multiple complaints were the dominant form of negative review among the restaurants and coffee shops analyzed. In total, 73.97% of reviews contained at least two complaint categories. Partial/incomplete responses occurred in 16.44% of the units, increasing from 10.53% for single complaints to 23.68% for three or more complaints. Nevertheless, the association between complaint complexity and response completeness was not statistically significant and was small in magnitude.

These findings underline the distinction between the number of response elements and completeness of coverage. A response may contain several strategies and trust-recovery elements while still overlooking some problems. The complaint-response coverage gap is proposed to capture this discrepancy. In practice, businesses should adopt an issue-based approach by identifying all complaints, briefly acknowledging each issue, and communicating relevant follow-up action. This structure preserves simplicity without sacrificing precision or the customer's sense of being heard.

The findings should be generalized cautiously because the sample was limited by location, period, rating level, and the inclusion of only reviews with responses. Future research should extend the analysis across sectors and platforms, assess coverage quality in greater detail, and test whether complete responses generate stronger trust, purchase intentions, or relationship recovery.

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