

“I Would Never Take My Pet to Someone I Didn’t Trust ... My Pet’s Health Is My Health”: A Cross-Cultural Analysis of Evaluative Language in English and Italian Reviews of Veterinary Clinics

Nicoletta Simi¹ & Gianmarco Vignozzi¹

¹ University of Pisa, Italy

Correspondence: Gianmarco Vignozzi, University of Pisa, Italy.

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Abstract

This study examines the linguistic and cultural characteristics of positive online reviews left by pet owners for veterinary clinics, with a comparative focus on English and Italian reviews. As pets increasingly become integral family members, online feedback has a significant impact on pet owners’ choices of veterinary services. Using a self-compiled corpus, this analysis employs corpus-assisted tools to explore how reviewers in each language articulate their experiences, expectations, and emotions, identifying thematic differences. English reviews prioritize interpersonal attributes such as kindness and empathy, frequently anthropomorphizing pets as “family members” or “babies”. Conversely, Italian reviews emphasize professionalism and technical competence, often commending staff expertise and attentiveness. The findings reveal cross-cultural distinctions in satisfaction expression, with English reviews highlighting emotional bonds and Italian reviews focusing on professional efficacy. These insights may inform strategies for veterinary clinics to better align communication with clients’ cultural expectations in various markets.

Keywords: corpus-linguistics, intercultural pragmatics, reviews

1. Introduction

In our highly connected society, it has become routine for consumers to consult online feedback from previous clients before purchasing new products or services. Such feedback offers a sense of confidence and reassurance, suggesting that decisions are grounded in shared experiences rather than random choice.

Consequently, online reviews have evolved into what we might consider a taken-for-granted, “naturalised genre of communication” (Barton & Lee, 2013, p. 2) that everyone who surfaces the internet is likely to encounter on a daily basis. In fact, studies suggest that online reviews make up a significant proportion of user-generated content published online daily, with estimates from a decade ago indicating they comprised 2-4% of searchable internet materials (Egbert, Biber, & Davies, 2015), a percentage likely to have increased since. Moreover, surveys have highlighted the influence of online reviews on consumer behavior. For example, Forbes (2019) reported that 90% of American adults research products and services online and value the transparency that reviews provide before making a purchase decision. Of those, 58% choose to post comments or reviews online afterwards, fueling this electronic word-of-mouth mechanism. More recently, the same publication (Forbes, 2022) reported that 60% of customers rely specifically on Google reviews, i.e., feedback accessible to anyone through Google’s search engine or Google Maps, before consulting other types of reviews. This increasing reliance on online feedback has contributed to transforming traditional one-way business communication, previously controlled and administered solely by marketers, into a multi-dimensional, two-way, and predominantly peer-to-peer exchange. In this paradigm, consumers act as “prosumers”, influencing prospective clients’ decisions with their online opinions (Berthon, Pitt, & Campbell, 2008; Vásquez, 2014).

The growing significance of online reviews is reflected in the expanding body of research dedicated to them. Within discourse analysis, numerous studies have explored the prototypical morphosyntactic, pragmatic, and genre features of both positive and negative online reviews across various domains. These include examinations of reviews of movies and tv series (De Jong & Burgers, 2013; Taboada, 2011; Vásquez, 2014), consumer products (Altun, 2019; Nikitina & Furuaka, 2023; Vásquez, 2014, 2017; Virtanen, 2017), legal services (Vignozzi, 2023), and, notably, tourism-related activities such as restaurants (Chik & Vásquez, 2017, 2021; Napolitano, 2018) and

accommodations (Bridges & Vásquez, 2018; Cappelli, 2013; Cenni & Goethals, 2020; Cenni & Vásquez, 2023; Cenni & Goethals, 2017, 2020; Fina, 2011; Vásquez, 2011, 2014; Vásquez & Cenni, 2024 among many). Despite extensive research in this area, studies concentrating on the linguistic aspects of online reviews related to medical care are relatively scarce compared to the high volume of reviews that healthcare services receive daily. The most comprehensive study analyzing the language of healthcare reviews to date was conducted by Baker, Brookes and Evans (2019), examining patient feedback on healthcare services provided by the United Kingdom's National Health Service (NHS). However, this book-length empirical study does not consider reviews posted on platforms like *Google*, *Yelp*, or *TrustPilot*; instead, it focuses solely on feedback posted directly to the NHS website, where reviews are far less numerous. For example, as of January 15, 2024, the London Royal Hospital has received 95 reviews on the NHS website, compared to 1,243 reviews on Google (Note 1).

Against this backdrop, this paper investigates what we believe to be a previously unexplored domain within the study of online reviews and health-related communication. Specifically, it focuses on reviews that pet owners leave for veterinary clinics after entrusting them with their pets' treatment. The decision to concentrate on reviews of veterinary clinics, i.e., on healthcare for pets, is closely linked to the increasing importance that domestic pets hold in our lives. Indeed, as our understanding of companionship and the human-animal bond evolves, pets are assuming an increasingly central role in our families and daily experiences, with their health becoming a critical concern (Oosthuizen et al., 2023). Furthermore, unlike state hospitals, which, in many European nations, provide care and services to citizens through a welfare system, veterinary clinics operate as purely commercial entities where pet owners act as paying clients with the option to choose among different providers. The treatment choices they make for their pets may therefore be influenced by the feedback they read online. As a result, a strong and positive online reputation, built through reviews, has become essential for veterinary clinics to attract new clients and retain existing ones in the competitive landscape of veterinary care.

With this study on veterinary clinic feedback, we aim to explore the distinctive linguistic traits and cultural specificities in pet owners' expressions of expectations, experiences, perceptions, and emotions in positive online reviews: those that businesses seek to improve their appeal online. By analyzing positive reviews, we seek to identify key patterns and insights that can help veterinary clinics better understand their clients' needs and preferences. This understanding can inform targeted strategies for enhancing customer satisfaction, fostering stronger client relationships, and ultimately boosting the clinics' online reputation and attractiveness to potential customers. More specifically, this analysis adopts a cross-cultural perspective by comparing English and Italian reviews to determine whether the two distinct lingua-cultures differ in how they express praise. This comparison aims to reveal whether cultural adjustments might benefit clinic staff in enhancing client satisfaction based on cultural backgrounds. In light of this, the research questions that drive our research are:

- 1) What aspects most typically characterize positive reviews of veterinary clinics?
- 2) Who or what is the focus of the praise?
- 3) How is the emotional bond between pet and owner expressed?

Finally, the overarching question that guides all the phases of this research is:

- 4) What cultural differences can be found between English and Italian reviews?

The paper is organized as follows: Section 2 describes how the corpus used for the analysis was collected and compiled ad hoc to carry out this study, and outlines the methodological approaches that were followed, along with the tools employed for the analysis. Section 3 contains the analysis and is divided into two parts: the first presents the corpus-driven analysis of English and Italian positive reviews, while the second presents the corpus-based analysis of the construction of positive evaluation and the pet-owner emotional bond. Finally, Section 4 offers concluding reflections and attempts to provide answers to the above-mentioned research questions.

2. Materials and Methods

The main corpora compiled for this study consist of two representative samples of positive Google reviews of veterinary clinics in the United Kingdom and in Italy, collected according to strict sampling criteria. To focus exclusively on highly positive reviews, indicating completely satisfactory experiences, we gathered only 5-star reviews based on Google's 1-to-5 rating scale. To ensure the corpora were as representative as possible of the genre in both countries, we collected all the 5-star Google reviews in the three most populated cities in the United Kingdom (London, Birmingham and Manchester) and Italy (Rome, Naples and Milan) posted in 2022 and 2023. Following the same criteria, we also collected two additional corpora, one in English and one in Italian, consisting of 1-star reviews (i.e., those describing negative experiences) to serve as a benchmark for the quantitative analysis (Note 2).

The English positive reviews corpus (hereafter *PosReviewsEn*) contains 38,960 reviews. According to Sketch Engine (Kilgarriff et al., 2014), the main corpus software used for this study, it includes a total of 1,139,511 word tokens across 19,530 types. The corresponding negative reviews reference corpus (*NegReviewsEn*) contains 4,452 reviews, totaling 438,162 tokens and 12,758 types. As for the Italian corpus, the positive reviews corpus (*PosReviewsIt*) consists of 15,246 reviews and includes 367,501 tokens and 17,040 types. The negative reviews benchmark corpus (*NegReviewsIt*) features 1,675 reviews for a total of 156,930 tokens and 13,775 types. Based on the sizes of the aforementioned corpora, a preliminary observation is that English reviews of veterinary clinics, both positive and negative, outnumber the Italian counterparts, suggesting that the genre is more established in the UK. This may reflect a cultural tendency toward more active online engagement and review-sharing behavior among English-speaking clients, as also noted in Vignozzi's (2023) study on law firm reviews. Furthermore, positive reviews of veterinary clinics are generally more frequent than negative ones (38,960 versus 4,452 for the English corpora and 15,246 versus 1,675 for the Italian corpora). This trend may suggest that clients of veterinary clinics in both lingua-cultures are more inclined to share positive experiences than negative ones.

From a methodological standpoint, this study falls under the broad category of corpus-assisted discourse studies (CADS) (cf. Partington, Duguid, & Taylor, 2013 for an introduction). This approach combines inductive corpus-driven exploration with in-depth corpus-based analysis. The corpus-driven analysis integrated different operations and corpus software. The preliminary lexical complexity measures were calculated using WordSmith Tools 8.00 software (Scott, 2022). Specifically, we calculated and compared values for average sentence length, standardized type-token ratio (i.e., the percentage of different words in a corpus) and lexical density (i.e., the percentage of content-carrying words in a corpus) between English and Italian positive reviews. We then employed the corpus software Wmatrix6 (Rayson, 2008), which includes a multilingual semantic tagger capable of performing automatic semantic analysis in multiple languages, including French, Italian, and Spanish. The tagger automatically assigns a semantic category (or tag) to each word or phrase in the corpus based on the UCREL Semantic Analysis System, a lexicon that maps words to semantic fields such as "emotion", "education". After tagging, Wmatrix6 provides statistical summaries of the frequency and distribution of semantic categories within the corpus and highlights key semantic domains in the focus corpus compared to a chosen reference corpus, allowing researchers to identify dominant themes or patterns. For this study, we calculated key semantic domains for *PosReviewsEn* compared to *NegReviewsEn* and for *PosReviewsIt* compared to *NegReviewsIt*. Using corpora of negative reviews as benchmarks, rather than general reference corpora, allowed us to identify semantic domains pivotal to positive reviews, as these are rarely found in negative ones. Therefore, these domains represent the defining characteristics of the genre examined in this research.

The corpus-based analysis was conducted using the Sketch Engine corpus software and focused on the construction of positive evaluations and the pet-owner emotional bond. To study positive evaluations, we concentrated on prototypical indicators, specifically adjectives, which frequently emerged from the corpus-driven analysis of semantic domains. Adjectives were retrieved through the Sketch Engine word list function and were manually evaluated to identify those expressing evaluation based on Hunston & Thompson's (2000) criterion, which defines evaluation as the means through which speakers (or writers) express attitudes (e.g., "wonderful"), judgment (e.g., "unreliable"), and feelings (e.g., "angry"). The selected evaluative adjectives then underwent further phraseological analysis to observe frequent co-occurring patterns, using Sketch Engine's collocation extraction tool (with a three-word window before and after the node word), supplemented by careful manual concordance reading to identify their referents across both lingua-cultures. Finally, nouns commonly used in English and Italian to refer to domestic animals were examined using Sketch Engine's concordancer and analyzed in detail with the collocation extraction tool.

Cross-cultural comparisons in this study draw heavily on the insights provided by House and Kádár (2012), who explore intercultural and cross-cultural communication and pragmatics. Their research provides valuable perspectives on how politeness strategies, social norms, and interactional behaviors vary across different cultures. By examining these variations, House and Kádár facilitate a deeper understanding of how cultural norms shape communication practices, providing a framework for analyzing linguistic and behavioral patterns across different lingua-cultures.

3. A Cross-Cultural Analysis of English and Italian Positive Reviews of Veterinary Clinics

3.1 Corpus-Driven Considerations: Exploratory Lexical Measures and Key Semantic Domains

To initiate the analysis of positive online reviews of veterinary clinics using an inductive approach, three complexity measures, i.e., average sentence length, standardized type/token ratio and lexical density, were calculated for both the English and the Italian corpora. Table 1 summarizes the findings obtained from WordSmith

tools.

Table 1. Lexical complexity measures in *PosReviewsEn* and *PosReviewsIt*

	<i>PosReviewsEn</i>	<i>PosReviewsIt</i>
Average sentence length	15.89	11.04
Standardized type/token ratio	50.71%	45.02%
Lexical density	65.21%	61.34%

Examining the average sentence length, we observe that English reviews have an average of 15.89 words per sentence, while Italian reviews average 11.04 words per sentence. This difference may suggest that English reviews tend to use longer and potentially more complex sentences compared to Italian reviews. This trend is further confirmed by the standardized type-token ratio: 50.71% for *PosReviewsEn* and 45.02% for *PosReviewsIt*. Although both values fall within the range typically associated with spoken and unplanned corpora (which rarely exceed 55%; cf. Vignozzi, 2019), the higher ratio in the English corpus hints at a more varied vocabulary, indicating a more elaborate style in English reviews. Finally, the percentage of content words, (i.e., nouns, verbs, adjectives, and adverbs), which contribute to a richer and more descriptive language, is higher in *PosReviewsEn* (65.21% vs. 61.34%), reinforcing the impression that English reviewers tend to be more creative and detailed in their descriptions than their Italian counterparts.

Following these preliminary considerations and to continue the analysis inductively, the software Wmatrix6 was used to extract key semantic domains characterizing English and Italian positive reviews, with the negative reviews corpora for each language serving as reference benchmarks. Table 2 presents the ten (Note 3) most statistically relevant domains in both lingua-cultures, ranked according to their LogLikelihood (LL) scores. For each key semantic domain, the keywords constituting the domain are also provided, along with their raw frequencies.

Table 2. Key semantic domains in *PosReviewsEn* and in *PosReviewsIt*

Rank	Key semantic domain <i>PosReviewsEn</i>	LL score	Lexical items	Key semantic domain <i>PosReviewsIt</i>	LL score	Lexical items (Note 4)
1	A5.1 Evaluation: Good	1912.55	great (1,241); good (896); excellent (452); fantastic (378); well (310); brilliant (304); best (236); wonderful (214); super (66); fabulous (36); superb (35); positive (28); fab (27); perfect (27); fine (19); top-notch (14); get better (10); 5-star (9); reliable (9); marvellous (8); decent (7); trustworthy (7); nicely (4); satisfactory (3); magnificent (1)	A5.1 Evaluation: Good	1435.54	ottimo* (347); super (272); bravissimo* (160); top (139); migliore (134); benissimo (121); eccellente (82); perfetto* (57); eccellenza (32)
2	A13.3 Degree: Boosters	1868.77	very (2,624); so (720); really (637); highly (407); extremely (119); more (116); much (85); a lot (25); incredibly (23); such a (21); seriously (21); particularly (19); by far (15); ever so (12); anywhere else (9); strongly (6); wonderfully (5); greatly (4); desperately (3); immensely (3); deeply (2); enormously (1)	I3.2 Professional	1434.57	professionale* (858); professionalità (448)

3	S1.2.4 Polite	1745.66	thank you (198); polite (169); thanks (156); grateful (86); courteous (16); thankful (9); gratitude (6); compliment (6); well mannered (4)	X9.1 Able: Intelligent	1201.91	competente (750); competenza (320); capace* (60); esperto* (22); “capacità (19); efficienza (16); determinazione (6)
4	S1.2.1 Informal/friendly	1728.11	kind (1,555); welcoming (98); approachable (16)	O4.2 Judgment of appearance: Positive	1076.65	buono* (60); bello* (46); dolce (34); pulito* (33); dolcezza (31); pulizia (24); cortesia (22); splendido* (19); carino* (15); stupendo* (13); squisito* (11); aggiornato (7); carinissimo* (7); gradevole (6); delizioso (4); piacevole (4); spettacolare* (3); splendidamente (3); amabile (2)
5	S8 Helping	1372.03	helpful (1,024); care (576); helped (381); service (257); help (269); look(ed) after (137); take [good] care (87); support (70); supportive (54); helping (36); rescue (22); benefit (18); accommodating (9); comfort (7); assistance (6); assist (5); guidance (5); aid (4)	S1.2.1 Informal/friendly	985.39	amichevole (214); gentile (12); cordialissimo* (5)
6	O4.2 Judgment of appearance: Positive	1358.49	lovely (679); amazing (486); nice (162); beautiful (122); pleasant (78); clean (17); gorgeous (13);	N6 Frequency	550.36	sempre (970); volta (141); talvolta (8)
7	N5.1 Entire; maximum	1296.14	all (986); every (212); any (112); 100% (39); each (15); complete (7); entire (4)	X5.1 Attentive	484.78	attento* (272); attenzione (153)
8	N6 Frequency	845.37	always (1,043)	I3.1 Work and employment: Generally	446.06	lavoro* (254); personale (213); professionista* (184); volontario* (8); mestiere (8); receptionist (6)
9	S1.2 Personality traits	524.21	supportive (234); passionate (31)	Z1 Personal names	410.36	[wide range of Italian personal names] (616)
10	E2 Like	450.20	caring (458); loving (202); like (90); beloved (75); appreciate (51); adore (11); make fuss of (9); enjoy (8);	S5 Belonging to a group	360.57	staff (268); team (112); compagno* (23); insieme (14); associazione (13); gente (7); gruppo (4)

By comparing the two lists of key semantic domains, we can observe that four domains are shared between *PosReviewsEn* and *PosReviewsIt*, while six are unique to each language and culture. Among the common domains, “QA5.1 Evaluation: Good” stands out as the most significant in both. This domain encompasses key adjectives, nouns, and adverbs typically used to express praise (e.g., “great”, “good” and “excellent”). Interestingly, while the words constituting this domain are similar across both corpora, the English corpus shows a much broader range, with 25 distinct items compared to 9 in the Italian corpus. Another shared domain is “S1.2.1 Informal/Friendly”, which includes positive appraisals of behavior. Here, English and Italian differ in the adjectives used to express informality and friendliness: English reviews favor “kind”, whereas Italian reviews commonly use “amichevole”,

meaning “friendly”. This difference may reflect a cultural nuance, with English emphasizing politeness and respect and Italian leaning toward casual friendliness. The third shared semantic domain is “O4.2 Judgment of Appearance: Positive”, encompassing words that positively evaluate objects aesthetically. Italian reviews demonstrate a broader array of descriptive terms (18 items compared to 7 in English) while English includes fewer but more frequently reiterated items, such as the general appraisals “amazing” or “lovely”. This may suggest that Italian reviewers tend to use a wider variety of terms when assessing aesthetic aspects. The fourth shared semantic domain, “N6 Frequency”, is represented by the adverb “always” in English and its counterpart “sempre” in Italian, along with two other adverbs of frequency used less frequently. Examining the collocations of “always”, we find that it frequently occurs with positive adjectives like “friendly” and “helpful”, serving as an intensifier. Conversely, “sempre” serves a similar intensifying role but tends to collocate more frequently with “disponibile” (>“available”) and “professionale” (>“professional”). Consequently, while the semantic domain remains consistent across both languages, the specific attributes intensified differ significantly: English reviews accentuate interactional qualities, while Italian reviews prioritize work-related characteristics. This contrast highlights potential cultural distinctions in the emphasis on interpersonal attributes (in English) versus professional attributes (in Italian) in expressing frequency-related sentiments.

Moving on to the key domains exclusive to *PosReviewsEn*, one of the most significant is “A13.3 Degree: Boosters” (e.g., “very”, “so”, “really”), which includes adverbs that amplify the review’s positive tone, enhancing its assertiveness and engaging readers. These boosters convey the reviewer’s enthusiasm and conviction, potentially strengthening the review’s impact. Another distinctive English domain is “S1.2.4 Polite,” which includes formulaic expressions of gratitude, such as “thank you”, “thanks”, and “grateful” as well as adjectives like “polite” that commend staff courtesy. These expressions reflect the cultural emphasis on politeness and courteous interaction in English reviews (Vignozzi, 2023). Additionally, these expressions of politeness may contribute to creating a positive rapport between the reviewer and the reader, enhancing the overall tone and credibility of the review. “S8 Helping” is another defining domain of *PosReviewsEn*, encompassing words that emphasize helpfulness, cooperation, and staff support throughout the client experience. This domain highlights the special value English reviewers often place on the assistance clinic staff provide, often mentioning specific instances where staff exceeded expectations, building trust and satisfaction among clients. The domain “N5.1 Entire; maximum” includes words like “all” and “every”, often used to emphasize the completeness of a positive experience. These terms contribute to a sense of inclusivity and thoughtfulness in the reviewer’s assessment, reinforcing that every aspect of the interaction was positive. Therefore, using such generalizations may enhance the credibility and persuasiveness of reviewers’ feedback. The final two key semantic domains appearing in the top 10 for English reviews, “S1.2 Personality traits” and “E2 Like”, primarily consist of markers, predominantly adjectives, indicating positive qualities (e.g., “supportive”, “passionate”, “caring”, “loving”) of the clinic staff. Additionally, the domain “E2 Like”, with keywords like “caring” or “loving”, reflects the overall affinity and satisfaction experienced by reviewers, encapsulating their positive sentiments towards the clinic and its staff. Therefore, English reviews primarily emphasize interpersonal qualities, such as kindness, helpfulness, and the compassionate nature of staff members. Reviewers frequently highlight the supportive and friendly environment, often using intensifiers to convey enthusiasm and gratitude for the care provided to their pets.

For *PosReviewsIt*, several key semantic domains unique to the Italian corpus, such as “I3.2 Professional”, “X9.1 Able: Intelligent”, “X5.1 Attentive”, and “I3.1 Work and Employment: General”, include adjectives that positively evaluate the professional skills of veterinary staff. These adjectives, such as “professionale” (>“professional”), “competente” (>“competent”), and “attento” (>“attentive”), praise not only the veterinarians but also other clinic staff, including receptionists who are frequently mentioned. This attention to the entire clinic team is further reflected in the domain “S5 Belonging to a Group”, which underscores the importance of collective effort and collaboration within the clinic. By using words like “squadra” (>“team”) or “gruppo” (>“group”), Italian reviewers often praise teamwork and the cohesive commitment to providing exemplary care to pets. Another significant key domain in Italian reviews is “Z1 Personal names”, containing a wide range of Italian personal names. In most cases, these names are used to directly praise the veterinarian who assisted the pet. This personalized style adds a human touch, emphasizing individual contributions and recognizing specific staff members for their exceptional care. Hence, overall, the key semantic domains found in *PosReviewsIt* testify to the emphasis placed by Italian reviewers on professionalism, competence, attentiveness, and teamwork within veterinary clinics.

3.2 A Close-up on Evaluative Adjectives in Positive Reviews

As identified in Section 3.1, evaluative adjectives stand out as prominent markers in both English and Italian reviews, aligning with findings in previous studies on professional service reviews (Vignozzi, 2023). Table 3 shows the 10 most frequently used evaluative adjectives in *PosReviewsEn* and *PosReviewsIt*.

Table 3. Ten most frequent adjectives in *PosReviewsEn* and in *PosReviewsIt*

Rank	Adjective <i>PosReviewsEn</i>	Raw frequency	Relative frequency x 100,000	Adjective <i>PosReviewsIt</i>	Raw frequency	Relative frequency x 100,000
1	friendly	9,677	849.22	professionale	2,792	759.72
2	good	8,578	752.78	gentile	2,646	719.99
3	great	7,271	638.08	disponibile	2,410	655.78
4	helpful	6,292	552.17	bravo	2,390	650.34
5	lovely	4,391	385.34	competente	2,216	602.99
6	excellent	4,043	354.801	ottimo	1,468	399.45
7	happy	3,730	327.33	preparato	800	216.69
8	amazing	3,338	292.93	attento	695	189.12
9	caring	3,236	283.98	umano	648	176.33
10	professional	2,448	214.83	onesto	549	149.39

In *PosReviewsEn*, the most frequently occurring adjectives emphasize interpersonal traits, including terms like “friendly” (849.22), “good” (752.78), and “amazing” (292.93). In contrast, adjectives in *PosReviewsIt* predominantly appraise professional and work-related skills, with terms such as “professionale” (759.72) (>“professional”), “disponibile” (655.78) (>“helpful”) and “competente” (602.99) (>“competent”). The contrast in the focus of reviews between Britain and Italy highlights interesting cultural and linguistic trends. In *PosReviewsEn*, the adjective “friendly” emerges as the most frequently used descriptor in positive reviews. The prominence of “friendly” in this context suggests that British pet owners highly value the approachability and warmth of the clinic’s personnel, considering these attributes crucial to their overall experience.

This emphasis on interpersonal skills aligns with broader cultural patterns in the UK, where customer service and personal relationships are highly valued across various industries (House & Kádár, 2012). The British norms of politeness and social etiquette likely contribute to the expectation that veterinary clinic staff should be friendly and approachable, helping to make visits as stress-free as possible for both pets and their owners. In contrast, Italian reviews tend to prioritize professional skills, as evidenced by the frequent use of the adjective “professionale” (>“professional”), with less focus on interpersonal traits. This suggests a different set of priorities for Italian pet owners, who may view technical competence as the most essential part of veterinary care. Italian cultural values often emphasize expertise and professionalism, indicating that a veterinarian’s knowledge and effectiveness are regarded more highly than their interpersonal demeanor. The difference in these reviewing patterns can also be interpreted through linguistic preferences. British English has an extensive lexicon for describing social and interpersonal qualities (House & Kádár, 2012), which may explain why British reviewers more frequently highlight these aspects. In contrast, Italian language and culture tend to favour terms associated with competence, precision, and professional efficacy, reflecting a societal expectation that professionals, especially in medical fields, should be evaluated primarily on their ability to deliver results. These insights underscore how cultural values and linguistic nuances shape expressions of satisfaction across different countries.

We will now examine in greater detail the differences in how the most frequent evaluative adjectives are used in the two corpora, focusing specifically on their common collocates as identified using Sketch Engine’s collocation extraction tool. The collocates analysed include adjectives, adverbs, and nouns. Table 4 presents the most statistically significant collocates for the adjectives listed previously in Table 3.

Table 4. Frequency of collocates for the 10 most frequent adjectives, categorized by Part of Speech (PoS), in *PosReviewsEn* and *PosReviewsIt*

Rank	Adjective <i>PosReviewsEn</i>	Collocations <i>PosReviewsEn</i>			Adjective <i>PosReviewsIt</i>	Collocations <i>PosReviewsIt</i>		
		PoS (LogDice)				PoS (LogDice)		
		n	j	a		n	j	a
1	friendly	staff	helpful	very	professionale	Personale	Gentile	Molto (11.95)
		(12.43)	(12.04)	(11.91)		(10.04)	(11.74)	Sempre
		service	professional	always		Medico (9.27)	Competente	(10.05)
		(10.79)	(11.16)	(10.87)		Persona (9.26)	(10.97)	Estremamente
		vet	caring	really		Bravo (10.76)	(9.31)	
		(10.17)	(10.40)	(10.38)				
2	good	service	friendly	very	gentile	Personale	Disponibile	Molto (11.71)
		(10.90)	(9.62)	(11.11)		(11.23)	(11.92)	Sempre
		vet	helpful	really		Dottoressa	Professionale	(10.78)

		(10.83)	(9.09)	(10.12)		(10.02)	(11.70)	Davvero
		staff	lovely	always		Dottore (9.67)	Competente	(8.93)
		(9.91)	(8.50)	(9.92)			(11.70)	
3	great	service	friendly	always	disponibile	Personale	Competente	Sempre
		(11.69)	(10.32)	(10.09)		(10.06)	(11.23)	(12.17)
		staff	great (9.99)	very		Dottore (9.25)	Professionale	Soprattutto
		(10.86)	lovely	(9.75)		Dottoressa	(10.83)	(9.31)
		vet	(9.45)	really		(9.14)	Attento	Anche (9.23)
		(10.66)		(9.54)			(10.16)	
4	helpful	staff	friendly	very	bravo	Veterinario	Gentile	Molto (11.33)
		(11.33)	(12.03)	(11.78)		(10.54)	(10.74)	Davvero
		kind	caring	always		Dottore	Professionale	(9.85)
		(9.70)	(10.15)	(10.91)		(10.11)	(10.72)	Veramente
		vet	polite (9.82)	really		Dottoressa	Competente	(9.72)
		(9.33)		(10.56)		(9.95)	(10.44)	
5	lovely	staff	friendly	really	competente	Personale	Gentile	Molto (11.57)
		(11.44)	(10.06)	(9.84)		(10.88)	(11.69)	Sempre (9.75)
		people	caring	so (9.76)		Medico	Disponibile	Estremamente
		(10.70)	(9.90)	very		(10.53)	(11.23)	(9.59)
		place	helpful	(9.49)		Veterinario	Professionale	
		(9.74)	(9.75)			(10.23)	(10.94)	
6	excellent	service	friendly	always	ottimo	Professionista	Veterinario	molto (9.42)
		(11.93)	(9.72)	(9.71)		(10.59)	(11.26)	Grazie (9.32)
		care	caring	highly		Servizio	Ottimo (9.79)	Sempre (9.18)
		(10.68)	(9.29)	(9.27)		(10.59)	Professionale	
		staff	great (9.19)	very		Struttura	(9.66)	
		(10.13)		(9.17)		(10.40)		
7	happy	service	healthy	always	preparato	Personale	Gentile	Molto (11.00)
		(9.89)	(9.89)	(10.10)		(10.85)	(11.06)	Estremamente
		customer	calm (7.85)	very		Medico	Disponibile	(9.32)
		(8.20)	friendly	(10.03)		(10.26)	(10.72)	Soprattutto
		visit	(7.72)	so (9.37)		Professionista	Attento	(8.87)
		(8.16)				(9.89)	(10.17)	
8	amazing	staff	caring	absolutely	attento	Esigenza	Scrupoloso	Molto (10.25)
		(10.33)	(8.80)	(10.59)		(10.67)	(11.63)	Sempre (9.55)
		service	friendly	always		Personale	Premuroso	Estremamente
		(10.05)	(8.71)	(8.80)		(9.52)	(10.28)	(8.49)
		team	helpful	so (8.66)		Professionista	Disponibile	
		(9.88)	(8.33)			(9.24)	(10.18)	
9	caring	staff	professional	very	umano	Lato (9.68)	Professionale	Molto (9.62)
		(10.81)	(10.98)	(11.06)		Persona (9.28)	(10.10)	Soprattutto
		kind	friendly	so (10.30)		Livello (8.97)	Competente	(9.43)
		(10.73)	(10.53)	really			(9.58)	Anche (8.88)
		vet	helpful	(9.52)			Sensibile	
		(9.58)	(10.25)				(8.84)	
10	professional	service	friendly	very	onesto	Prezzo (11.88)	Competente	Molto (9.06)
		(10.06)	(11.16)	(11.02)		Costo (9.22)	(9.77)	Soprattutto
		staff	caring	extremely		Persona (8.99)	Bravo (9.64)	(8.93)
		(9.94)	(11.01)	(9.61)			Gentile (9.30)	Veramente
		vet	helpful	always				(8.64)
		(10.47)	(9.78)	(9.52)				

In *PosReviewsEn*, “friendly” is the most frequently used adjective in positive reviews is “friendly”. Its most common noun collocates are “staff”, “service”, and “vet”, indicating these as the objects of praise. The frequent pairing of “friendly” with “staff” and “service” reflect a cultural expectation that professionals, including veterinarians, should not only be technically skilled but also excel in providing a welcoming and supportive environment. This analysis of *PosReviewsEn* corpus suggests that British reviews are more likely to value and commend the “friendly” nature of interactions, emphasising the importance of interpersonal relations in the UK. In contrast, the Italian emphasis on professional skills indicates a cultural preference for evaluating technical expertise.

Additionally, degree adverbs such as “very” and “really” appear frequently, highlighting their role in intensifying positive evaluations. Other notable adjectives include “good”, which commonly co-occurs with “service” and “staff”, and “great”, which also frequently collocates with “staff”, “service”, and “vet”. This consistent pattern of noun collocations across the most frequent adjectives underscores recurring themes in positive evaluations, as illustrated in Figure 1 below.

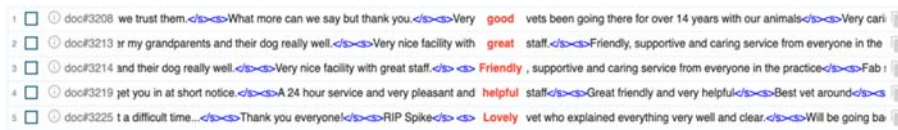


Figure 1. Sample collocations of evaluative adjectives in relation to their nouns indicating the object of praise in *PosReviewsEn*

Moreover, in *PosReviewsEn*, “professional” is the least common among the ten most frequent adjectives. The analysis also shows that “very” frequently functions as an intensifier (see Figure 2), enhancing the positive tone of all associated adjectives, except for “amazing” which is typically paired with non-gradable adjectives such as “absolutely” and “always”. Notably, most of the adjectives intensified by “very” relate to the interpersonal skills of the staff and veterinarians.



Figure 2. Sample collocations of the adverb “very” in *PosReviewsEn*

Adjectives like “caring”, “helpful”, “friendly”, “lovely”, and “calm” frequently appear alongside evaluative terms, underscoring the value placed on these traits in positive reviews. Figures 3 and 8 below illustrate these patterns, with the most frequent adjectives shown as nodes, in *PosReviewsEN* (Figure 3) and *PosReviewsIT* (Figure 8), and their frequencies indicated on the y-axis. Each node connects to its most common collocates, which include adjectives, adverbs, and nouns, displayed along the connecting lines with their frequency clearly marked. These graphs visually compare how different adjectives and their associated terms are used in English and Italian reviews of veterinary clinics, highlighting distinct linguistics patterns and cultural preferences in expressing satisfaction.

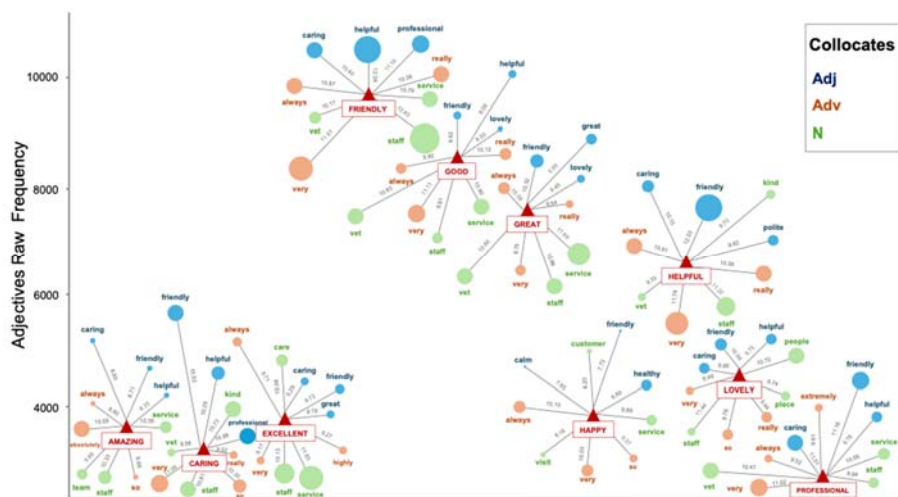


Figure 3. Most frequent adjectives with their most frequent collocates in *PosReviewsEn*

In *PosReviewsIt* (see Figure 8), notable differences in adjective usage appear compared to the English corpus. In this corpus, the most frequent adjective is “professionale” (>“professional”), primarily used to describe the doctor or the staff. Similarly, other common adjectives, such as “bravo” (>“skilled”), “competente” (>“competent”), “disponibile” (>“helpful”), “ottimo” (>“excellent”), and “preparato” (>“well-prepared”), also emphasise professional and work-related qualities (see Figure 4).

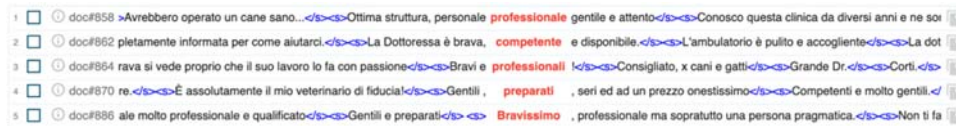


Figure 4. Sample collocations of adjectives referring to professional and work-related attributes in *PosReviewsIt*

Of particular interest is the presence of the adjective “onesto” (>“honest” or “fair”) among the top ten evaluative adjectives. This term is most frequently associated with the pricing of services, highlighting and unexpected focus on cost as object of praise. This suggests that Italian reviewers, more than their British counterparts, place additional emphasis on the pricing aspect of their clinic experience. Figure 5 below illustrates some examples of the occurrence of the word “prezzo” (>“price”) and its most common accompanying adjectives.

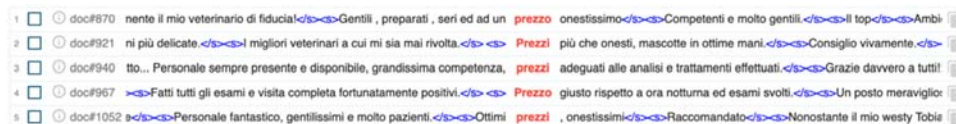


Figure 5. Sample collocations of the use of the word “prezzo” (>“price”) in *PosReviewsIt*

An additional observation, though not extensively analysed, indicates that English reviews tend to use the term “price” to highlight the invaluable nature of their pets’ well-being. For examples, reviewers often express sentiments like “you really can’t put a price on the life of your beloved pet”, underscoring the emotional significance over the monetary cost (see Figure 6).



Figure 6. Sample collocations of the use of the word “price” in *PosReviewsEn*

Beyond this observation, Italian reviews show a lower frequency of degree adverbs (e.g., “very”) and a higher frequency of non-gradable adverbs that emphasize consistency (e.g., “always”, “extremely”, “really”). This suggests that Italian reviewers are more likely to highlight the reliability of the service rather than its intensity.



Figure 7. Sample collocations of the use of degree adverbs in *PosReviewsIt*

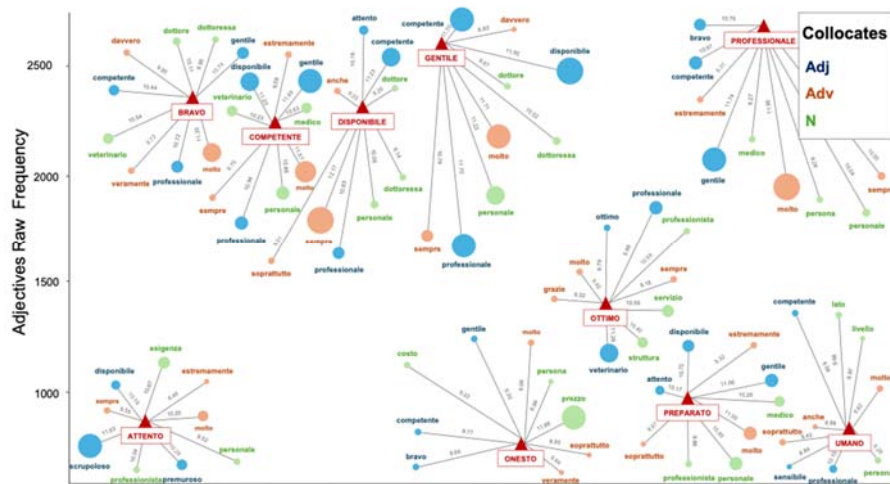


Figure 8. Most frequent adjectives with their most frequent collocates in *PosReviewsIt*

3.3 Human-pet Emotional Bond

British and Italian reviewers exhibit distinct approaches in evaluating the bond between pet owners and their pets, which is also reflected in their appraisal of clinic staff. British reviewers tend to emphasize staff manners, frequently commending their friendly and caring behavior. In contrast, Italian reviewers place greater importance on professionalism and competence, focusing on the staff’s expertise rather than their interpersonal qualities. These differing evaluative criteria correspond to two distinct emotional perspectives on the pet-owner relationship, which we further explored by analysing the linguistic expressions used to describe this bond in each language.

In English reviews, “pet” (586.1) is the most frequently used noun to refer to animals, often paired with words like “beloved” (18.9), “lovely” (7.5), “health” (8.6), and “well-being” (2.5). These collocates convey endearment and affection, indicating a strong emotional connection between owners and their pets (see Figure 9).



Figure 9. Sample collocations of the word “pet” in *PosReviewsEn*

A manual review of concordances in these English reviews reveals that expressions of attachment are particularly prominent in highly emotional contexts, such as when describing the painful experience of euthanizing a pet. This context underscores the depth of the emotional connection that British pet owners feel, especially during traumatic or distressing events, where terms like “beloved” and “well-being” reflect the owner’s concern for both the pet’s physical and emotional welfare.

In contrast, the Italian equivalent of “pet”, >“animale” (678.4), is most commonly associated with terms like “amore” (>“love”), “amante” (27.5, >“lover”), “benessere” (21.5, >“well-being”), and “salute” (12.8, >“health”). However, in Italian reviews, these terms often refer to the veterinarian’s affection for animals or dedication to their well-being rather than the pet-owner relationship itself. This distinction suggests that Italian reviewers focus more on assessing the veterinarian’s professional performance and commitment rather than recounting personal, emotional experiences with their pets. The emphasis is on the professional care provided by the veterinary staff, with reviewers acknowledging the vet’s compassion as part of their professional qualities other than as extension of the pet-owner bond (Figure 10).



Figure 10. Sample collocations of the word “animal*” (>“pet” in *PosReviewsIt*)

Additional differences appear in the metaphorical language used to describe pets. In English reviews, pets are frequently associated with babies, commonly referred to as “furry babies” (22.4), “baby girls” (2.8), or “baby boys” (1.5). This reflects a tendency to anthropomorphize animals, portraying them as cherished and vulnerable beings. Such terms of endearment often appear in reviews that describe particularly emotional experiences, highlighting the owners’ deep emotional bond with their pet. In these instances, pets are viewed not just as animals but as family members, with their care at the clinic seen as an extension of the owner’s love and responsibility, similar to caring for a child.



Figure 11. Sample collocations of the word “baby” in *PosReviewsEn*

In Italian reviews, however, the term “bambin*” (>“baby”) is rarely used (see Figure 12). When it does appear, it is typically connected to the term “pelos*” (1.4, >“furry”) rather than serving as a direct metaphor for the pet. This rarity suggests that Italian owners are less inclined to anthropomorphize their pets as British owners do. Although Italian pet owners clearly express affection, their language does not portray the pet as an extension of the human family to the same extent. Instead, the emotional bond is conveyed through a more practical and less sentimental way.



Figure 12. Sample collocations of the word “bambin*” (>“baby”) in *PosReviewsIt*

An interesting finding is the similar frequency of the terms “baby” (55.3) and “friend” (56.7) in British reviews (see Figures 11 and 13). Both terms are used almost equally, reflecting a dual perception among British pet owners, who view their pets both as vulnerable dependents and as companions. In contrast, Italians seldom use “bambin*” (4.1, >“baby”) but frequently refer to their pets as “amic*” (239.9, >“friend”) (see Figures 13 and 14 for some examples). This difference highlights a cultural difference: while British owners may see their pets as both children and friends, Italian owners primarily view them as companions. The preference for “friend” in Italian reviews suggests a bond based on loyalty and affection, with less of the parental connotation seen in the British context.

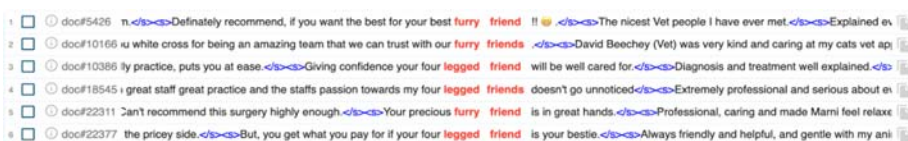


Figure 13. Sample collocations of the word “friend” in *PosReviewsEn*

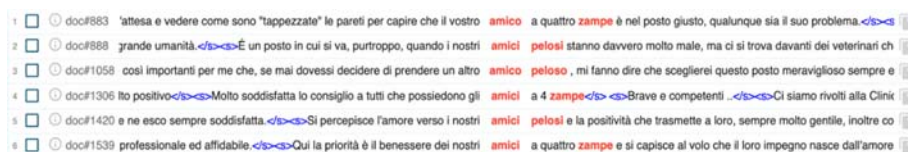


Figure 14. Sample collocations of the word “amic*” (> “friend”) in *PosReviewsIt*

In summary, these linguistic patterns indicate a strong emotional bond between British pet owners and their pets, reflected in the frequent use of affectionate and anthropomorphic terms like “baby” and “beloved”. British reviews are more likely to describe the emotional aspects of pet ownership, particularly in challenging moments such as euthanasia. In contrast, Italian reviews, though affectionate, focus more on the veterinarian’s professional qualities and their care for the animals, rather than on the personal, emotional connection between the owner and the pet. These findings suggest that cultural values shape not only the evaluation of veterinary staff but also how the expression of the emotional bond between owners and their pets.

Table 5 below summarizes the normalized frequencies of the primary nouns used to talk about the pets and their most frequent collocates in the two subcorpora.

Table 5. The most frequent nouns referring to pets and their most frequent collocates in *PosReviewsEn* and in *PosReviewsIt*

<i>PosReviewsEn</i>		<i>PosReviewsIt</i>	
PET (586.1)	Beloved (18.9)	ANIMALE (678.4)	Amante (27.5)
			>“Lover”
	Health (8.6)		Benessere (21.5)
			>“Well-being”
BABY (55.3)	lovely (7.5)	BAMBIN* (4.1)	Salute (12.8)
	well-being (2.5)		>“Health”
	Fur (22.4)		Pelos* (1.4)
	Girl (2.8)		>“Furry”
FRIEND (56.7)	Boy (1.5)	AMIC* (239.9)	Zampe (79.9)
	Furry (3.8)		>“Legs”
			Pelos* (40.8)
	Legged (0.9)		>“Furry”

4. Conclusions

The primary aim of this study was to examine an under-explored area within online reviews and health-related communication: the feedback that pet owners leave for veterinary clinics. By focusing on reviews of veterinary care, we aimed to address the growing significance of pets in modern families and the critical role that pet health plays in their owners’ lives. Since veterinary clinics operate as commercial entities, unlike state-funded healthcare services, pet owners, as paying clients, are influenced by online feedback when choosing a clinic. A positive online reputation, largely shaped by reviews, has become essential for veterinary clinics to thrive in a competitive market.

This research sought to identify the linguistic and cultural characteristics that define positive reviews of veterinary clinics, focusing on how English and Italian pet owners express their expectations, experiences, and emotions. Specifically, we aimed to uncover key patterns in expressions of praise and any cross-cultural differences in how the emotional bond between pet and owner is conveyed.

The comparative analysis of English and Italian reviews reveals both shared themes and distinct differences in client satisfaction. In both linguistic contexts, certain core semantic domains consistently emerged, reflecting shared values in veterinary care, with a common focus on praising the veterinary staff. However, deeper linguistic and cultural analysis reveals significant differences in how this praise is framed and the qualities most valued by clients.

In English reviews, there is a strong emphasis on interpersonal qualities such as kindness, empathy, and emotional support provided by the clinic staff, suggesting that English-speaking reviewers prioritize relational aspect of care. The frequent use of intensifiers such as “extremely” and “very” further amplifies the emotional tone of these reviews, underscoring the importance of compassionate interaction. Additionally, English reviewers often use attributive adjectives and nouns to express a deep emotional attachment to their pets, likening them to “babies” or

“family members”. This anthropomorphizing language highlights the strong emotional bond between owners and their animals, a prominent feature of English reviews.

In contrast, Italian reviews tend to emphasize professionalism and technical competence. Reviewers frequently highlight the expertise, skills, and efficiency of the veterinary staff, indicating a cultural preference for evaluating professional attributes over interpersonal qualities. This suggests that Italian clients are more likely to assess their clinic experiences based on the perceived competence of the staff rather than their interpersonal qualities. The use of personal names in Italian reviews serves to personalize praise but seems more indicative of respect for professional relationships than of an emotional bond. Notably, Italian reviews also emphasize fair pricing, suggesting that financial considerations play a more significant role for Italian clients compared to English-speaking counterparts.

Distinct patterns in adverb use further highlight these cultural differences. English reviews heavily use degree adverbs (e.g., “extremely”, “highly”) to intensify praise and express emotion, reinforcing a focus on the personal and emotional aspects of interaction. Italian reviews, however, favour frequency of non-gradable adverbs (e.g., “sempre” > “always”), reflecting an emphasis on consistent professional behavior rather than isolated acts of kindness or empathy. This linguistic distinction underscores the cultural value placed on reliability and routine competence in Italian veterinary care.

Regarding the emotional bond between pet owners and their animals notable cultural differences emerge. English reviews frequently depict pets as emotionally significant, often using anthropomorphic terms that imply a deep emotional connection. Metaphors comparing pets to “children” further illustrate this intense bond. In contrast, while Italian reviews also express affection, terms of endearment are more restrained and often center on the veterinarians’ professional role in caring for the animals. Pets are more commonly referred to as “friends”, indicating a bond characterized by loyalty and affection but with less emotional intensity than seen in English reviews.

The structure and length of reviews also reflect cultural preferences. English reviews tend to be longer and more detailed, often recounting specific events or interactions that personalize the experience. This narrative style suggests a greater emphasis on storytelling and individualization in evaluating services. In contrast, Italian reviews are typically shorter and more concise, focusing primarily on the clinic’s professionalism and competence rather than personal anecdotes. This preference for brevity and generalization may indicate a more transactional approach to service reviews in Italian culture, where expertise and reliability are prioritized over emotional engagement.

These findings suggest that cultural and linguistic factors significantly shape how clients express satisfaction with veterinary services. For clinics operating in both linguistic markets, these insights highlight the importance of tailoring communication and marketing strategies to align with cultural expectations. English-speaking clients may respond more positively to messaging that emphasizes empathy, compassion, and the emotional aspects of veterinary care, whereas Italian clients may prioritize messages that highlight competence, professionalism, and cost-effectiveness.

Future research could expand on these findings by exploring additional variables, such as age, geographic region, or urban versus rural settings, to see how these factors might further influence review patterns. Additionally, examining negative reviews could offer a more comprehensive understanding of cultural differences in client expectations and sources of dissatisfaction.

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Authors’ contributions

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Notes

Note 1. <https://www.nhs.uk/services/hospital/the-royal-london-hospital/R1H12/ratings-and-reviews> for NHS reviews and <https://g.co/kgs/qUtnWpS> for Google reviews, last accessed 17.01.2024.

Note 2. Google reviews were scraped automatically thanks to the help of a computer engineer.

Note 3. To facilitate the manual comparative analysis that follows, this study specifically focuses on the top ten most statistically significant domains, as identified by Wmatrix6, based on log-likelihood.

Note 4. For lexical items in Italian, the * indicates words that appear in different inflected forms (e.g., masculine, feminine).

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