

How engaged are you with your hotel room?

A qualitative analysis of electronic word-of-mouth on the hospitality industry

Student Name: Ina Hajdari

Student Number: 502100

Supervisor: dr. A.C. Uribe Sandoval

Media and Business

Erasmus School of History, Culture and Communication
Erasmus University Rotterdam

Master's Thesis

June 2019

How engaged are you with your hotel room?

A qualitative analysis of electronic word-of-mouth in the hospitality industry

ABSTRACT

As internet technologies and social media grow continuously, our lives become more dependent and integrated on them. The purpose of this thesis is to examine the online behavior of hospitality guests, before, during and after their stay at an accommodation property. Through a mixed qualitative approach, user generated content available on the online travel agency *Booking.com*, and on *Instagram's* platform, is analyzed. Then, the findings are compared with the discussions from the two focus groups held by the researcher. The main research methods that were combined were: frequency analysis, sentiment analysis, visual and thematic analysis. Previous research on the field of hospitality and tourism industry show that both traditional and electronic word of mouth can be proved very helpful for service providers and for prospective customers. Results of the current study reveal that indeed, when it comes to hospitality industry and short-stay accommodation services, reviews from previous customers found on specialized websites, are of significant importance. Due to uncertainty of unknown service and quality prior to consumption, and the high risk that is involved in the reservation process, negative comments are much more taken into consideration than the positive ones. Moreover, although social media might be a source of inspiration, the information that is provided is not as trustworthy, while pictures on the platform might be misleading. In any case, as it was discussed on the focus groups, whether the information is negative or positive, or derived from a personal social media account or a specialized online review website, it should be evaluated taking into consideration differences on demographics and cultures.

KEYWORDS: *e-WOM, Social Media, Online Reviews, Hospitality Industry*

Contents

ABSTRACT.....	2
1 Introduction.....	4
1.1 The role of the digital voices in the Hospitality Industry.....	6
1.1.1 <i>Booking.com</i>	7
1.1.2 <i>Instagram</i>	8
1.1.3 <i>Location of the Research: Rotterdam</i>	8
1.2 Relevance of the study.....	9
2 THEORETICAL FRAMEWORK	11
2.1 User Generated Content: Credibility Issues and Trustworthiness	11
2.2 Influences of UGC in the Hospitality Sector	12
2.3 Expectancy – Disconfirmation Theory.....	13
2.3.1 <i>Satisfaction and Positive e-WOM</i>	14
2.3.2 <i>Disconfirmation and Negative e-WOM</i>	15
2.4 Uses and Gratifications Theory	16
2.4.1 <i>Uses and Gratifications of Online Review Websites</i>	17
2.4.2 <i>Uses and Gratifications of Social Media</i>	18
2.4.3 <i>Performativity on Social Media</i>	19
3 METHODOLOGY	20
3.1 Research Approach.....	20
3.2 Data Collection	21
3.3 Data Analysis	23
3.3.1 <i>Corpus Statistics and Topic Modelling</i>	24
3.3.2 <i>Visual Analysis of Instagram Photos</i>	24
3.3.3 <i>Sentiment Analysis</i>	25
3.3.4 <i>Focus Groups</i>	26
4 FINDINGS.....	27
4.1 Content Analysis.....	27
4.1.1 <i>Content Analysis of Online Reviews from Booking.com</i>	27
4.1.2 <i>Content Analysis of Instagram Posts</i>	32
4.2 Sentiment Analysis	40
4.2.1 <i>Sentiment of Online Reviews from Booking.com</i>	40
4.2.2 <i>Sentiment of Instagram Captions</i>	43
4.3 Focus Groups Analysis	45
4.3.1 <i>Online Behavior prior to Booking.com</i>	45
4.3.2 <i>Online behavior post-trip and willingness to share their own experiences</i>	48
5 CONCLUSION	50
5.1 Discussion	50
5.2 Limitations and Suggestions for Future Research	53
6 REFERENCES.....	55
7 APPENDICES.....	65
7.1 Appendix 1. Focus groups Topics	65
7.2 Appendix 2: Visual Analysis of Instagram Pictures.....	69
7.3 Appendix 3: Thematic Analysis of focus groups.....	70

1 Introduction

We live in an era where the internet plays a major role in our everyday life, and in the way we interact with each other and do business (Hennig-Thurau, et al., 2010). An increasing number of industries, nowadays, are facing changes due to the evolution of the internet and social media. Social media, being a very large part of the Web 2.0, can be described as “a group of Internet-based facilities that allow the creation and exchange of user-generated content” (Kaplan & Haenlein, 2010). To be more precise, the term Web 2.0 here implies the technological advancements which helped social media rise and reinforced a collaborative and participatory culture. User generated content (UGC) entails different types of publicly available media content made by media users themselves. This content is usually creative but not in a professional sense, and it is publicized on a social networking website or mobile app (Kaplan & Haenlein, 2010).

Social media and networking websites have evolved completely over the last years, transforming entirely the business sector and consumers’ behavior as well (Aral, Dellarocas, & Godes, 2013). Notably, the internet has given its users the ability to communicate through new platforms which can further empower both providers and consumers by sharing online information and opinions (Litvin, Goldsmith, & Pan, 2008). Consumers make purchase decisions about products and services based on the online opinion of other people (Assimakopoulos et al., 2015). This is especially relevant for some intangible goods because they cannot be evaluated prior to their consumption, as they need some sort of experience (Lewis & Chambers, 2000). Thus, interpersonal influence and word-of-mouth is of great importance for those who are seeking more information on intangible goods or services.

Travel and hospitality industry is a great example of an intangible good which is constantly influenced by the usage of Web 2.0 services. In fact, people have always been reaching others when they wanted to organize a trip, usually by seeking recommendations and advice from family and friends or by contacting the nearest professional travel agency. Nevertheless, with the development of the Information and Communication Technologies (ICTs), travelers now use travel related websites and social media platforms throughout the whole travelling process: before (pre-travel), during and after the trip (post-travel) (Fotis, Buhalis, & Rossides, 2012).

Before the trip, people use social media to find inspiration for their future travel plans, recommendations from people that have visited a particular destination, hotel or point of interest, and generally to seek information which will help them organize their trip (Fotis,

Buhalis, & Rossides, 2012). Furthermore, tourists these days appear to be very much dependent on their mobile phones even when they are on holidays; they perceive their mobile phone as a “travel buddy” and thus, they use it constantly not only to keep in touch with their contacts, but also to document their travel adventures (Lalicic & Weismayer, 2018). Finally, after the trip, travelers use ICTs and social media to share their experiences and engage into storytelling practices which can take various forms such as online reviews, blog posts, photos and videos that are shared on social media platforms (Sotiriadis, 2017).

Apart from social media platforms, there are also third-party websites where people can express their opinion and share their adventures with the online community. Several websites, such as Booking.com, Tripadvisor.com, Yelp, etc., have made their appearance in order to facilitate the travel procedure and create online travel communities. The main function of these websites is to provide customers with all the available information for travel related products and services. The provided information is either being delivered by the official stakeholders or by the travelers themselves and serves as a form of electronic word of mouth (e-WOM).

Keeping the above in mind, the purpose of this thesis is to examine the available travel related content both on third party websites and social media platforms, in order to identify what hotel guests choose to share online after their stay in a hotel, what is the sentiment of this content and what platforms are being used for which reasons. More specifically, the research question that will be answered throughout the paper is *“How does the hotel experience of the guests affect the creation of electronic word-of-mouth (e-WOM) in online environments, after their stay?”*.

To give an answer to this question, the research was divided into two parts and consisted of mixed methodologies and datasets. First, online reviews and user generated content comprised by both text and pictures were parsed from two platforms: Booking.com, which primarily serves as an online platform which mediates the reservation procedures between hotels and guests, and Instagram, which is a photo-sharing social media app. After the analysis of the above, in order to see if the trends from the findings are confirmed and to further observe the online behavior of the tourists, two independent focus groups were held.

To better understand and answer the posed research question, there were several sub-questions that arose from the topic, which will be explained later in the research. These are:

1. What aspects of the hotel properties are mostly being discussed on ***online reviews*** and what on ***social media platforms***?
2. Are people more prone to share online a positive or a negative hotel experience?

3. Which *social media platforms* do hotel guests prefer to share their *post-travel experiences* and for what reasons?
4. What are the differences between user-generated content posted on personal social media accounts and those posted on third party websites (e.g. Instagram and Booking.com)?

1.1 The role of the digital voices in the Hospitality Industry

The rapid growth of the Internet and social media applications has been proved very helpful for e-commerce, as it has empowered a vast amount of user generated content and online reviews which helps in boosting sales of products and services. More specifically, the travel and hospitality industry has benefited from Web 2.0 services as travelers visit and trust travel - related online communities while searching for reviews and online recommendations prior to making their purchase decisions (Ye, Law, Gu, & Chen, 2011). Online reviews and user-generated content affect significantly the sales of consumer products, while they are extremely influential when it comes to experience goods, due to unknown quality before their consumption (Ye, Law, Gu, & Chen, 2011).

The notion of word of mouth (WOM) has been broadly discussed throughout the years by many scholars. Traditionally, WOM is defined as the face to face communication among consumers about products and services (Carl, 2006). More explicitly, this communication is informal, and consists of details about goods and services, such as information about their usage and characteristics (Westbrook, 1989). According to Litvin et al. (2008), the main attribute of WOM communication is the fact that the message is being spread by an independent mediator. This means that stakeholder's interests and commercial influences are not being involved in the process. The internet-based technologies have generated another form of WOM, the electronic one (e-WOM), which basically takes place in online environments. Notably, e-WOM creates a new era where reality is influenced by virtual relationships and online communities of consumers who exchange their opinions about goods and services (Litvin et al., 2008). However, as Bansal & Voyer (2000) found out in their study related to decisions on a service purchase context, e-WOM is mostly generated either by those who are very much in favor of the service or by those who didn't like it at all, thus, making it difficult to have a mid-range scale.

Electronic WOM can be categorized also as user generated content (UGC) and it can take the form of an online review, a photo, a comment, etc. User generated content can be found in three main types of websites: the sites which have as a main purpose the sales and profits, the social networking sites, and the combination of the aforementioned, thus websites

which have both social networking elements and purchase-related intentions (Williams, Wiele, Jwaarden, & Eldridge, 2010). For the current study, Booking.com, a purchase type of website, and Instagram, a social networking app will be investigated. Both platforms contain social elements, however, the former is related purely to e-commerce and evaluating services, while the latter is more personal and associated with the own image construction. Some information about the two different types of website will be illustrated below in order to have a clear understanding of their functions and the reasons why they were selected for the research.

1.1.1 *Booking.com*

Booking.com is an Online Travel Agency (OTA) owned by the Priceline Group. Its main function is facilitating online accommodation reservations, by establishing connections between the hotel properties and the users, while it provides relatively cheap prices, a vast amount of choices, and, also, reviews and a rating system which can help prospective customers in making the right decision for their accommodation (Tactics, 2017). According to Ye et al. (2011), OTA review websites have become a vital source of information and advice for international travelers, while, at the same time, driving the reservations of the accommodation properties as well.

For the purpose of this research, *Booking.com* is chosen because it is a global leader in online hotel reservations: the website and mobile app are available in over 40 languages, offer approximately 30 million total reported listings, and cover almost 150.000 destinations in 229 countries and territories worldwide (About Booking.com, 2019). According to the website, it is estimated that more than 1.5 million room nights are reserved through the platform each day.

What's important is the fact that ratings and reviews can only be submitted by customers who have successfully booked through the platform and stayed in the properties (Booking.com, 2019). Hence, as the reviews come from real and verified guests, they provide us with their actual perception of the hotel experience and their judgements on what they did or did not like about that hotel, reducing scams and any manipulations of opinions. Also, as it is specialized in hotel reservations, it is in its best interest to provide reliable data on the hotels and it offers both qualitative and quantitative data (Garrigos-Simon, Galdon, & Sanz-Blas, 2017).

1.1.2 *Instagram*

Instagram is an extremely popular platform nowadays, especially among teenagers and millennials, and is considered an effective social media marketing tool for businesses (Statista, 2019). Since its launch in October 2010, *Instagram* has attracted more than 1 billion monthly active users, as per June 2018 (Statista, 2019), with an average of 100 million photos and videos uploaded every day (Aslam, 2019). With *Instagram*, users can create and upload their own content in various forms: photographs, videos, text in the captions, *Instagram* stories, *Instagram* lives, and a new feature, *Instagram* TV.

Instagram operates as social networking platform, more or less similar to Twitter, where you can follow a number of people to keep up with their feed and postings, while you can choose to either have a private or a public profile so that you have control over who is following your posts or who can send you a direct message (Hu et al., 2014). However, the main idea behind *Instagram* is different than other social media platforms such as *Twitter* or *Facebook*: it offers its users the ability to capture photos and videos and add filters or special effects which can transform their photos before sharing them online with their followers, in order to have a more impressive result (Sheldon & Bryant, 2016). Additionally, *Instagram* users can categorize their content by using hashtags (#) in their captions, the option of geo-location, or mention and tag other users as well (Hu, Manikonda, & Kambhampati, 2014). Statistics show that posts containing a location and at least one hashtag, are more popular and generate bigger engagement among users than other posts (Aslam, 2019).

Due to its nature, *Instagram* is considered to be very much related with narcissism, as it is a platform based exclusively on image, where users have the complete power over self-presentation (Sheldon & Bryant, 2016). According to Lee et al. (2015), the two main incentives for using *Instagram* are self-expression and social networking; therefore, *Instagram* is a venue for people to manage and promote their ideal selves. By examining what people post on their *Instagram* accounts, evidence on whether reality corresponds to the social construction of self-image will be given.

1.1.3 *Location of the Research: Rotterdam*

As explained above, the first dataset of the research project was focused on user generated content from two different types of websites. In order to make this happen, the city of Rotterdam and the hotels located near the city center were chosen as the desired location for this research.

Rotterdam is located in the South of the Netherlands and is home of the largest seaport

in Europe. It is considered to be a dynamic and multicultural city, famous not only for its port but also for its contemporary and sustainable architecture (Welcome to Rotterdam, 2019). Indeed, after the city was bombarded in World-War II, the rebuilding process was relied upon innovation in order to create a modern metropolis.

Although Amsterdam is still the preferred city for tourists that visit the Netherlands, Rotterdam has an appealing landscape and architecture which attract a growing number of visitors every year (Boer, 2018). Notably, in 2017, over 1.1 million people spent over 1.8 million nights in hotels in the city; most of them were business travelers coming from another city in the Netherlands, or Germany and the United Kingdom (Pieters, 2018). On average, people that are travelling for business purposes spend more money than leisure tourists and are an important target group for the hotels on the visited cities. Therefore, it will be useful to examine a destination which is still growing and is not as consolidated as the city of Amsterdam, for example.

1.2 Relevance of the study

The research will add both social and scientific value to the existing literature on the role of ICTs and social media in tourism and hospitality management.

By investigating what people choose to share on social media platforms and why, we can then compare between expectations that are created before arriving in the accommodation property and the real perceptions that occur after the stay. Hoteliers could use the insights of the study to understand consumers' behavior on various websites and social media platforms and, thus, respond adequately to their needs in order to enhance guest satisfaction. Furthermore, user generated content could be managed in a way that it could be proved beneficial for the hotel properties and, at the same time, add to the experience of the guests which would therefore lead into a cycle of happy customers - positive reviews etc.

As per the scientific relevance, a recent empirical study by Narangajavana, et al. (2017), showed how user-generated content and online reviews create expectations for travel destination, either positive or negative. The authors of the above study proposed that future research should focus on factors generating tourists' post-trip perceptions in order to have a full overview of the whole travel experience and compare the findings with that derived from the information-seeking phase. Such a suggestion was the initial thought behind the rationale of the current study. However, as the hospitality industry is one of the main interests of the researcher, the study is focused on hotels rather on travel destinations in general.

By analyzing two different types of platforms: a photo-sharing and more personal

social media platform like *Instagram*, and *Booking.com*, which serves as an online travel agent and review website, there will be a clear view of what is being shared on these platforms, whether any differences exist, and what are the main things that people pay attention to when posting online on these communities. Finally, by comparing the results of the above content analyses with the outcome of the focus groups, there will be given a better understanding of people's motivations to spread e-WOM on social media and travel related websites, as well as their platform choices.

Undoubtedly, the findings of the study can be expanded beyond hotel-guests' experiences, as it can have similar application to other sectors of the travel and hospitality industry, such as restaurants, café-bars, cultural heritage sites and even on shaping the brand image of a destination.

2 THEORETICAL FRAMEWORK

On this chapter of the thesis a review with key theoretical findings from previous studies are presented. The main theories were derived from the field of media and communication, and the hospitality industry. First, the notion of user generated content and issues of credibility and trustworthiness are generally addressed, and then specified into the hospitality sector. Further, two main theories are developed and applied both in the case of *Booking.com* and *Instagram*. These theories are *Expectancy – Disconfirmation* and *Uses and Gratifications* theory. Other relevant concepts that are developed throughout the literature review are *e-WOM*, *Performativity* on social media and its influences on the travel and hospitality industry.

2.1 User Generated Content: Credibility Issues and Trustworthiness

Websites that contain user-generated content represent a form of electronic marketing made by consumers for consumers (Cox et al., 2009). In other words, internet users are considered co-developers of the online content as they can create images, videos and audio files, express their opinion, write reviews, and so on.

Electronic word of mouth (e-WOM) is the descendant of traditional word of mouth. Basically, e-WOM is an informal exchange of opinions and experiences between consumers, over products and services, on online communities (Jeong & Jang, 2011). According to Litvin et al. (2008), e-WOM can also be spread by businesses to their consumers through internet-based technologies and has been proved a successful and trustworthy means for both consumers and businesses.

There have been several studies conducted on the notion of user generated content, and the discussions about its trustworthiness and credibility are on-going and controversial. When making a purchase decision, interpersonal influence and word of mouth are believed to be a vital source of information (Litvin et al., 2008). According to Park, Lee, & Han (2007), online consumer generated content, such as reviews, play a crucial role both in influencing consumers' purchase decisions and in driving the sales of the product or service. Sweeney et al. (2008) state that electronic word of mouth is more reliable than traditional marketing practices, especially when it is generated by a source people trust. However, a study by Cox et al. (2009) revealed that official websites are considerably more reliable than user generated content, in the information seeking process.

Senecal & Nantel (2004) support that people usually tend to trust more the opinions and reviews of other individuals, especially when it comes to products and services for which experience is important. As some older studies reveal, indeed the influence of other people's opinion is greater for experience goods, since their quality is unknown before consumption

(Nelson, 1970; Klein, 1998). In particular, experience goods have features which are not accessible before the use of the product or service or are of high cost (Klein, 1998).

Besides experience, risk is also an indicator which influences the perceived credibility of WOM. According to Bansal & Voyer (2000), intangible goods and services are associated with higher risk and, therefore, consumers search for information and more details via WOM to reduce that risk. For instance, when it comes to tourism and hospitality industry, prospective customers take into consideration reviews and rankings prior to making a reservation. When booking a hotel in a place that travelers have never been before, reviews are proved to be extremely helpful and influential for prospective guests (Khan, 2017). The case of trustworthiness in travel and hospitality sector will be further analyzed in the following section.

2.2 Influences of UGC in the Hospitality Sector

In the travel and hospitality industry, e-WOM is usually produced post-experience. However, it can have a very big influence for the readers in the first two stages of the travel cycle: before and during the trip or the visit in an accommodation property (Sotiriadis, 2017). Tourists, in this case hotel guests, can share their experiences through various platforms and in different forms such as online reviews, recommendations and productive content (photos, videos, etc.), either in a positive or negative way (Zhang, Ye, Law, & Li, 2010).

Due to the intangible nature and high purchase risk of hospitality goods, references and evaluations from people who have had a prior experience, are of great significance during the decision-making process (Lewis & Chambers, 2000; Lam & Hsu, 2006; Currie et al., 2008). Online travel communities and social media create a network of people who are interconnected and interact regularly with each other. This network of people is considered a reference group, which provides an organic source of information to the online community (Mohd Ghazali & Cai, 2014). The extent to which social media can influence people's perceptions depends on the popularity of the media platform, which can be indicated by the number of subscribers or likes (Younhee Ha & Lee, 2018), and, on the cultural interpretations of the context of the message, either it is verbal or nonverbal (Gursoy & Umbreit, 2004).

Senecal & Nantel (2004) demonstrate in their study that consumers generally prefer independent and third-party websites for obtaining their information, instead of those who are run by businesses with direct interests. This might happen because third-party websites embody the notion of public and independent opinion. Nonetheless, the results of a research conducted by Cox et. al. (2009) proved that websites containing user generated content are not that trustworthy, but rather they act as a supplement to the information obtained through

the official providers and that, in any case, they cannot act as a substitute. Interestingly though, when looking at hospitality industry and specifically in the case of hotels, the same research revealed that most consumers wish to read the opinions of previous hotel guests and not rely on the hotels' own descriptions, which appear to be more formal and idealized than reality.

Nevertheless, the disadvantage of online WOM generated by consumers is that the identity and profile of the reviewer is most of the times unknown, which might make the authenticity and credibility of the source questionable (Park, Lee, & Han, 2014). Because of that aspect, the credibility of online WOM relies highly on the transparency of the source (Cox et. al., 2009). Moreover, White (2010) claims that the way people choose to decode and interpret the meanings behind user generated content is up to them and their socio-cultural background.

2.3 Expectancy – Disconfirmation Theory

Most creators of user generated content tend to have extreme opinions about the received service or a purchased product: so, either they are very much in favor of the consumed good or not at all, thus, creating a U-shaped response line, where middle opinions usually are missing (Bansal & Voyer, 2000). This trend seems to be helpful for the message receivers as people perceive extreme ratings, whether they are positive or negative, as more practical and pleasant than the moderate ones (Park & Nicolau, 2015). Yet, although extremes are perceived as better types of reviews, it should be noted that there are still differences on the extent to which extreme positive and extreme negative online reviews have a real impact on consumers' behavior.

Expectancy - disconfirmation theory by Oliver & Swan (1989), explains customers' satisfaction and dissatisfaction, while is often used for business purposes. It suggests that there are two stages in which consumers' feelings about a certain product or service are shaped: pre-purchase and post-purchase. In the pre-purchase period consumers have thoughts and influences that shape their expectations about the anticipated performance of the product or service. After the purchase or consumption, these expectations are converted either into satisfaction or dissatisfaction, according to the experience the person had while consuming the product or the service (Qazi et al., 2017). In other words, final outcomes are compared to initial expectations: when there are differences between expectations and outcomes, then there is disconfirmation. Positive disconfirmation occurs when the results are better than expected, therefore satisfaction is created. Negative disconfirmation and dissatisfaction occur when the results are below the anticipated performance (Pizam & Milman, 1993). Moreover,

satisfaction leads to re-purchase behavior; thus, by identifying what gives satisfaction to hotel guests, hoteliers can enhance their efficacy and hotel bookings. On the other hand, dissatisfaction leads to negative WOM and non-returning customers, as it is demonstrated in *Figure 1*.

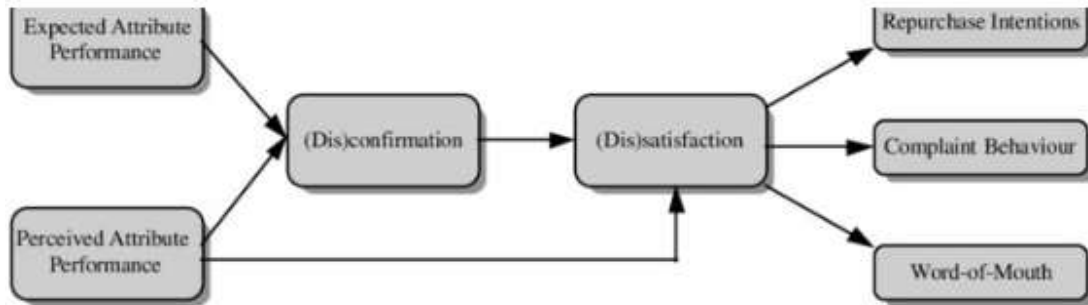


Figure 1 Expectancy - Disconfirmation Theory [Source: Schoop, 1999]

2.3.1 Satisfaction and Positive e-WOM

Positive reviews are preferred by consumers who search for a more hedonic and enjoyable aspect of consumption in regard to information search (Park & Nicolau, 2015). Joy and positive psychological factors also lead consumers to produce and publish positive online content, such as reviews. More specifically, consumers who have a positive experience with the product or the service of a brand have the need to reward somehow this brand and recommend it to other people in online communities (Yap, Soetarto, & Sweeney, 2013). This is in line with *Equity Theory*, which suggests that people strive for equal and fair transactions: when consumers receive a greater than expected output or input ratio from the company, they try to find a way to balance the situation (Huppertz, Arenson & Evans, 1978), and the spread of e-WOM is one of the ways to contribute in doing so (Hennig-Thurau et al., 2004).

The sentiment of hotel guests' reviews has a noteworthy impact on the business side. There is evidence that positive online reviews increase the performance and bookings of the hotels significantly (Ye, Law, & Gu, 2009; Ye, Law, Gu, & Chen, 2011; Ögüt & Onur Taş, 2012). Nonetheless, there are challenges that marketers should address affectively regarding the management of positive online WOM. Positive reviews might be in favor of consumers when they seek enjoyment, but they have a small impact on the usefulness and effectiveness of the message that is spread (Park & Nicolau, 2015).

In addition, according to a recent research by Sozer (2019), positive reviews can even influence negatively the service providers. In his research, Sozer explains this phenomenon based on *Prospect Theory*. *Prospect Theory*, by analyzing psychological aspects, suggests that

people become risk free when there is a chance of benefiting from something, whereas, when they have the fear of losing something, they turn into risk-takers. Using the above theory in the context of information searching and purchase decision making, consumers tend to become more aware of negative reviews and they do not pay so much attention to the positive ones (Koller & Zauner, 2013). In other words, too much exposure to positive online reviews and / or user generated content, could influence undesirably consumers' perceived risk and, subsequently, their willingness to share these messages with other people in online communities (Sozer, 2019). This phenomenon, thus, acts like a domino effect: fewer positive online reviews reduces the perceived risk of consumers, which then, decreases the intention to share positive online WOM, which finally will lead to minimum discussions around the good qualities of the product or service.

Díaz-Martín et al. (2000), examined customers' service quality expectations in tourism industry specifically, and found out that while positive WOM creates a positive attitude towards the company, it also increases customers' expectations. Similarly, the higher the level of expectation, the harder is for service providers to satisfy and meet these expectations.

2.3.2 *Disconfirmation and Negative e-WOM*

Older studies examining traditional WOM confirm that people, generally, value more a negative information than a positive one (Buttle, 1998; Ito et al., 1998). Negative electronic WOM shares the same statement. According to Beneke et al. (2015), negative e-WOM has greater influence over users and it attracts more attention than positive online WOM. Many studies concerning e-WOM, its motivations and trustworthiness, support that messages containing negative content will generate higher levels of e-WOM due to perceived risk (Sweeney, Soutar, & Mazzarol, 2008; Bronner & de Hoog, 2010; Sozer, 2019), and also will be more memorable for the message receivers (Sweeney, Soutar, & Mazzarol, 2008).

The motives behind the spread of negative e-WOM can be dissatisfaction, stress relief or even revenge for a bad product or service experience (Amblee & Bui, 2008). A consumers' revenge behavior is driven by the wish to "punish" the company that has caused them damage or inconvenience (Bechwati & Morrin, 2008). Sundaram, Mitra, & Wenster (1998), support that expressing negative feelings about an experience in an online platform, helps people to release their frustration and overcome any anxiety that is closely associated with the event. Additionally, when a customer is involved in a dissatisfying experience, the negative feelings that arise by this experience will lead him into wanting to share it with other people in order to feel better and expel the discontent (Hennig-Thurau et al., 2004).

The spread of negative e-WOM has significant effects both on the consumers who receive the negative information, and on the companies which provide the product or service. The consequences of a negative comment might result into changing previous consumers' attitudes towards a known brand (Beneke et al., 2015), or form a completely unreliable image based on distrust for a brand that consumers are unfamiliar with (Wang, 2010). The negative image that is formed on people's perceptions is crucial, as it has a strong impact on brand concepts such as trust, affect and loyalty (Wang, 2010). Accordingly, Liu, Wang, & Wu (2010) support the fact that negative information can create a negative image against the brand and weaken the purchase intention of the buyers, thus, their decision to acquire the product or service provided by the brand in the future.

All of the above aspects are significant for the companies. The negative spread of e-WOM can harm irreparably the reputation of the brand, decrease the revenue models, and result into the loss of loyal customers (Holloway & Beatty, 2003; Chang & Wu, 2014). Schneider, White, & Paul (1998) support that a negative experience with a product or service is extremely important among customers who are already familiar with the brand as they have more power over the brand itself. Additionally, it is less expensive and time-consuming to retain existing customers than to gain new ones (Schneider, White, & Paul, 1998). Hence, companies should monitor relationships with their customers and manage any bad experiences concerning their products or services. By concentrating on existing customers who are familiar with the brand, companies automatically benefit, as these customers remain loyal, while being more willing to share their experiences and recommend the brand to prospective customers (Reichheld & Scheffer, 2000).

Yet, the concept of information adoption is worth being mentioned, as receivers might decide not to rely on online content generated by other users and, therefore not change their opinion even after they have read a negative review or comment about a product or service of a brand (Gershoff et al., 2003). Subsequently, personality traits and personal values are crucial when it comes to the decision-making process and to whether the user will let the opinions of other influence him or not.

2.4 Uses and Gratifications Theory

In relation to the media, until the 1960s people were seen more as passive rather than active players (Blumler, 1979). However, *Uses and Gratifications* theory suggested that individuals are active participants in the communication process. Therefore, the goal was to further understand how and why audiences participate in mass communication platforms and which

are the factors that motivate them to engage in such practices (Blumler, 1979). The elements of the theory model that were identified by Katz, Blumler, & Gurevitch (1973) can be applied into today's communication, which is based on the Web 2.0 services. Hence, participants are dynamic players and the ones who have the control over communication, while media serve as platforms for the satisfaction of users' needs (Katz, Blumler, & Gurevitch, 1973).

Nowadays, there is a plethora of websites and social media platforms from which users can choose in order to satisfy their needs. For instance, some people may use Web 2.0 services to keep in touch with their friends on a daily basis, while others to learn on real time what is happening around the world and what are the current trends. Subsequently, beyond personal relationships and information seeking, other needs that Web 2.0 applications cover, may be emotional release and getaway from reality, the creation of personal identity, convenience and opinion sharing (Sheldon & Bryant, 2016). Below, the uses and gratifications of online review websites and social media platforms will be analyzed, in order to obtain information about the motives of participating and sharing e-WOM on those websites / platforms.

2.4.1 *Uses and Gratifications of Online Review Websites*

According to research, the reasons behind participating in online communities and producing e-WOM vary. Emotional elements such as satisfaction, pleasure, sadness and anger create in consumers the need to share their experiences with others (Neelamegham & Jain, 1999). In addition, the sense of belonging and the enjoyment of helping others are also some of the reasons people express their opinions in online environments (Munar & Steen Jacobsen, 2014).

A study conducted by Yoo & Gretzel (2008) on the motivations of travelers to post online travel related reviews, distinguishes between four main reasons which inspire users to share their content with the online community, namely: 1) *enjoyment and positive self enhancement*, 2) *venting negative feelings and collective power*, 3) *concerns for other consumers*, and finally 4) *assisting the business provider*. According to a similar study by Bronner & de Hoog (2010) the motives are more or less the same: 1) *personal reasons*, such as self-expression and establishment of a status quo, 2) *social concerns*, therefore the need to help other tourists, 3) *social benefits*, such as interconnectivity and the sense of belonging, 4) *consumer empowerment* by ensuring quality assurance and enforcing service excellence, and 5) *helping service providers* by giving them constructive feedback or supporting them. Additionally, Jurca et. al (2010), highlight the issue of risk by supporting that when a higher transaction risk is involved, consumers are more prone to share their opinion in online

environments. Risk is not only related to money matters, but to the whole experience, as it can ruin a romantic getaway or a business trip when the right or expected criteria are not met in each of the situations.

Electronic WOM is also deeply affected by the characteristics and the demographics of the users. Yoo & Gretzel (2008), demonstrated in their study that females are more prone to share their experiences driven by positive feelings and the need of assistance, while for men the incentives mostly concern negative emotions. The same applies in low-income groups, as they tend to be more judgmental about the service providers, due to the fact that they value more the money and they are careful on where they spend it, so they want other users to be careful as well (Yoo & Gretzel, 2008).

Meanwhile, personality traits also play an important role, as some people might prefer to just passively consume information that already exists online and not perform the role of the influencer by sharing their own thoughts and opinions (Yoo & Gretzel, 2011). For instance, user generated content is more likely to be produced by people who are extroverts and more open in communicating with unknown audiences, as it usually happens in offline environments (Yoo & Gretzel, 2011). According to the same study, personality traits not only influence the motivations for producing and sharing online content, but also the context of the content depending on the type of the website. The context might be either positive or negative, as explained by Expectancy – Disconfirmation theory above.

2.4.2 *Uses and Gratifications of Social Media*

According to Munar A. M. (2011), social media are online communities which vary in terms of context, size, membership and involved activities. Content-driven sites, media sharing sites, virtual worlds, blogs and social networking sites are some of the different types of social media (Mohd Ghazali & Cai, 2014). Important fact about social media is that they are easily accessible via mobile phone apps, thing which facilitate their usage, and that they create a new culture among age groups that mostly use new technological advancements - youth and adults (Mohd Ghazali & Cai, 2014). Subsequently, communication and the spread of e-WOM is facilitated through social media, as users can easily update their status and upload photos in their personal social media accounts in real time (Mohd Ghazali & Cai, 2014).

Taking into consideration the plethora of the available social media platforms, users make constant decisions on where they want to publish their content. The *Uses and Gratifications Theory* (UGT), which was developed in the early 1960s, can be still used today to explain the uses and purposes of the mass media from the user's perspective.

As per *Instagram* specifically, it is believed that it is mostly used for self-promotion and having the sense of belonging into a community rather than maintaining personal relationships (Marcus, 2015). Sheldon & Bryant (2016) investigated the uses and gratifications of *Instagram* and they found out four main factors that predict *Instagram* usage: *Surveillance*, *Documentation*, *Coolness* and *Creativity*. They define *Surveillance*, as the desire to know about others and how they are performing, what they post and what they like on their personal social media. *Surveillance* was the most influential reason behind *Instagram* usage among the four factors, and it is a motive with which other studies on social media usage agree as well (Mutinga, Moorman, & Smit, 2011; Whiting & Williams, 2013). The factor of *Documentation* contains elements such as commemorating events and documenting one's own life through photos, which can be basically explained due to *Instagram*'s photo-sharing nature. *Coolness* has to do with self-promotion and becoming popular. All filters and features that *Instagram* provides may be considered as cool and trendy, while it is a popular online platform where people like to subscribe, as they peers do so. Finally, the least influential motive was *Creativity*, which depicts people's need to show their skills or to create a kind of art and share it with others.

2.4.3 *Performativity on Social Media*

What makes social media stand out, is the fact that they are not websites, but platforms that allow users to present and express themselves. While in regular e-WOM practices people share their opinions and experiences they had with a product or service (Jansen et al., 2009), the way the same people act on social media and express their emotions or thoughts is different. In fact, the information that is available on users' social media accounts is what the user wants to show of himself and how he wants to be perceived in other people's minds.

Butler's theory of *Performativity* can be used in the social media context to explain the rationale behind the way people utilize social media. The key idea behind the theory of *performativity* lies in the fact that identity and personality are dynamic processes which are constantly evolving in order to reach the state of being (Butler, 1990).

Social media and their functionalities provide people a useful tool for creating and performing different identities (Cover, 2012). Helen Kenedy (2006) describes social media usage as a continuous process which is constantly changing and performing various actions just as our real identities do. As a consequence, the creation and management of a personal social media account must not be interpreted as a real life representation or a biography of one's life, but instead as a performative act through which self and identity are constituted, and eventually get stabilized by the effect of undertaken choices (Cover, 2012).

3 METHODOLOGY

As mentioned in the introduction, this thesis is a mixed qualitative analysis of both contents found on the internet and from focus groups organized by the researcher. The internet-based content consists of datasets from two different platforms: *Booking.com* and *Instagram*. Both platforms contain user generated content, but, the type and context of the contents on the two platforms vary. On one hand, *Booking.com* is a website on which people express their opinion about the properties they have stayed at, in the form of online reviews or ratings. On the other hand, given the fact that *Instagram* is a social networking tool containing mostly images and videos of the users themselves, it is assumed that the purposes and motives that make people share content on the app differ from those that motivate users to write online reviews.

To identify how does the hotel experience of the guests affect the creation of e-WOM after their stay in the property, a mix of qualitative research methods were used to analyze and code concepts, such as pre-trip and post-trip behavior, e-WOM and trustworthiness of user generated content both on review sites and social media platforms. The following section contains an extensive discussion on the research design, data collection and the matter of reliability related to the chosen methodology.

3.1 Research Approach

Previous studies on the field of travel and hospitality industry examining online reviews and user generated content, mostly used quantitative methods and analytics based on the ratings that users give to the accommodation properties (Ye et al., 2010; Berezina et al., 2015; Melinas et al., 2015; Asimakopoulos et al., 2016). In other words, they measured whether those scores had an impact on the online hotel bookings, on the profitability of the hotels, and so on. However, a qualitative approach is thought as a more appropriate method to examine the motives, incentives and perceptions of the content generated by hotel guests themselves. Generally, qualitative analysis methods are ideal for exploring emotions, experiences and connections of various concepts and for in-depth understanding of the data that is under research (Flick, 2013).

As mentioned above, the current research consists of various datasets: short text from the online review site *Booking.com*, pictures and captions uploaded by *Instagram* users, and finally, transcriptions from two focus groups held by the researcher. Taking into consideration the different nature and context of the datasets, diverse methods will be used for analysing the available information. The core method used was content analysis based on grounded theory, but the tools that were employed each time were selected to specifically meet the needs of the data.

The four sub-questions posed in the introduction of the paper will guide the analysis. First of all, to figure out what aspects of the hotel properties are mostly being discussed on online reviews on Booking.com and what on the personal social media accounts of the hotel guests, corpus linguistics and topic modeling using the ConText software were used. Then, using the same software, sentiment analyses of both the reviews and the Instagram captions shared by hotel guests were conducted. The method of sentiment analysis is ideal for determining whether subject users are more prone to sharing positive or negative content about their hotel experiences. The Instagram photos were coded as well using the technique of visual discourse analysis; the coding process of the visual discourse analysis was done on ATLAS.ti 8 software. These codes from the Instagram pictures act as a complement to their captions and may add new information on what is shared on the personal social media accounts of the hotel guests. Furthermore, by having this information, it is possible to define the key differences between user generated content shared on social media and that on online reviews. Finally, to confirm the above findings and better understand the online behavior and choices of the users, two focus groups were held. The focus groups were audiotaped, transcribed verbatim and then analyzed using the method of thematic analysis.

3.2 Data Collection

The data collection process of online reviews was done manually by the researcher. First, the hotel properties were selected based on specific criteria and filters on *Booking.com* website, which will be explained below: Rotterdam, the case study, provides various types of accommodation for its tourists. As seen on *Booking.com* there are options for short-stay apartments, boat houses, hostels, etc. In order to reduce the amount of data received, the filter “Hotels” was selected, and the location was specified to “the center of Rotterdam”. According to the website, under this category fall hotels that are located no more than 2.2 kilometers away from the center, meaning the areas around Rotterdam Central Station, Cool District and Blaak.

After using the above location-based filters, the results show 34 hotel properties in downtown Rotterdam. However, given the fact that the amount of data for the thesis is specific and that a combination of methods is used, not all the reviews were collected. From the 34 hotel properties, the ten hotels that have received the most reviews from the guests were examined, as it is assumed that the more reviews a hotel has, the more people have something to say about it and about their experience while staying in the particular hotel. A list of the top

ten reviewed hotels can be found in the *Table 3-1*. These ten hotels were the corpus of data collection both for *Booking.com* and *Instagram*.

Name of Hotel	Number of Reviews
citizen Rotterdam	6.183
Holiday Inn Express Rotterdam – Central Station	6.101
Mainport Design Hotel	5.261
nhow Rotterdam	5.198
easyHotel Rotterdam City Centre	3.859
Ibis Rotterdam City Centre	3.328
Inntel Hotels Rotterdam Centre	2.975
Grand Hotel Central	2.698
The James Rotterdam	2.682
Bilderberg Parkhotel Rotterdam	2.603

Table 3-1 List of Hotels located in Rotterdam city center with the most reviews on Booking.com

After selecting the hotels, the reviews of each hotel were sorted by date from the newest to oldest, and the fifteen first reviews of 2019 were finally gathered. Another filter that was used on Booking.com website was language; only reviews written in English were chosen in order to avoid confusions and misinterpretations from reviews written in other languages. Moreover, reviews that only consisted of ratings were excluded, as it was necessary for the study to obtain and analyze actual context and not solid numbers. Thus, the total number of reviews obtained from Booking.com was 150.

Likewise, the same hotels were searched on Instagram using the option of “geo-location”: by typing the name of the hotel in the “search places” tab of Instagram, the users are able to view all the posts and pictures that others have taken into the specific hotels. Instagram gives its users the ability to view those posts either based on their popularity (top posts) or date (recent posts). As previously done on Booking.com, the posts were sorted by date and the time frame remained the same: so, pictures that were posted from January 1st and onwards. Some criteria for making the selection of the posts were also implemented: the posts needed to have a caption, either text or at least a hashtag, and they also had to be generated by users and not by official accounts of the properties or associates.

To avoid any biases, the researcher collected the information by entering the platform anonymously and gathered data that at the time of the research was shared on public profiles. Initially, the main goal was to gather the same amount of Instagram posts as online reviews, though due to insufficient amount of posts for some of the hotels, the number was reduced to ten posts per hotel. Nevertheless, in one case the posts were less than expected (Grand Hotel accounted for 6 posts), and one of the hotels was not represented at all (easyHotel Rotterdam City Centre accounted for 0 posts). Therefore, from *Instagram* there were gathered 86 pictures and 86 captions in total.

Lastly, two focus groups were held by the researcher. The selection of the participants was done in a way to minimize sample biases by achieving homogeneity and segmentation (Morgan, 1996). To qualify for participation in the focus groups, participants needed to meet the following criteria: a) have at least one active social media platform which they check upon or post regularly (e.g. once a day), b) have used online platforms (social media or online travel agencies) for travel related decision-making purposes, and c) have stayed in a hotel property during the previous year. Furthermore, there were no specific demographic criteria, such as age, gender, or education level. As long as the individuals passed the three first screening questions, they were considered eligible for the study.

3.3 Data Analysis

The online reviews from *Booking.com* were collected manually and put into an Excel spreadsheet. The preliminary data that was gathered contained information about the date that the review was written, the score that the user gave to the hotel, the positive and negative comments of the guests as the website already makes a distinction for the users where they can write what they liked about the hotel and what they did not like, the period of time that the guest stayed in the hotel property and the country of his/her origin. However, to explore how do hotel experiences of the guests affect the creation of e-WOM, using guests' comments was adequate for the research. Both the positive and negative comments of all ten hotel properties were put into a separate excel file, which was used for the final analysis.

Before importing the data in the ConText software, it was necessary to follow a basic cleaning process of the Excel spreadsheet: non- text characters and any URLs were removed, and then the file was saved in a CSV (Comma Separated Values) format. The cleaning process continued on ConText, using the “stemming” and “remove stop words” functions of the software. Stemming is a tool of Natural Language Processing (NLP) which helps in reducing the inflectional and related forms of a word to a common base form (Manning, Raghavan, &

Schütze, 2008). Additionally, stop words in a text are functional words such as “the” and “a”, and usually are the most frequently used ones; therefore, it is essential to remove them using the predefined list of the software (Diesner, Franco, Jiang, & Chin, 2016).

3.3.1 *Corpus Statistics and Topic Modelling*

Once the pre-processing phase is over, the text analysis process can start by using the new cleaned file. Initially, we run “*corpus statistics*” in order to identify the most frequently mentioned words. This will give us a sense of what aspects people talk about the most when writing an online review on a third- party website, such as *Booking.com*. According to Stringam & Gerdes (2010), the method of frequency analysis is based on the fact that words which are being repeatedly used are crucially important and therefore they need further attention.

Afterwards, the top words were assigned into categories. The topics were derived from the categorization made by Booking.com, and are as follows: 1) *location*, 2) *service*, 3) *quality and value for money*, and 4) *facilities and amenities* of the hotels. By applying the word frequency method and topic modeling of the online reviews, we are able to recognize what are the aspects of the hotel properties that are mostly being discussed on associate websites, such as *Booking.com*.

As per the aspects of hotel properties discussed on personal social media accounts, such as on *Instagram* profiles, the captions that go along with the collected posts were gathered and put into an Excel spreadsheet. The exact same steps mentioned above for the online reviews were followed: basic cleaning of non-text characters and removal of hyperlinks on Excel, stemming, stop-words elimination and corpus statistics on ConText, and manual topic modeling. The results of the frequency analysis and topic modeling are discussed in the findings section of the thesis and reveal what is being shared about those hotels on the personal Instagram accounts of previous guests.

3.3.2 *Visual Analysis of Instagram Photos*

Instagram pictures that were collected from public profiles using the option of geo-location, were analyzed as well. The method that was implemented in this case was visual critical discourse analysis. According to Machin & Mayr (2012), meanings are not only transmitted through language and words, but also through images, which shape and are being shaped by society. However, these meanings are implicit and can only be found through close attention to detail.

In the same book by Machin and Mayr (2012), four tools for doing visual critical discourse analysis are proposed. These are:

1. *Denotation and connotation*. Denotation answers the question of who and what is being shown in the image, while connotation explores the symbolic meaning behind what is presented.
2. *Objects*; the ideas and values that they communicate.
3. *Settings*. Settings can also be used to communicate general ideas, identities and values.
4. *Salience*. Potential salient features might be cultural symbols, colour or the focus of the image; these are the features that usually make a difference and stand out by having the central symbolic meaning in the image.

To organize the data and facilitate the coding process, *ATLAS.ti 8* program was used. All the image files were imported, and then based on the four principles mentioned above, codes were made for each image. After a certain point there was a repeated pattern of the codes, thus, reaching saturation. The codes of each image, were then grouped into categories, which acted as umbrellas to the main theme.

3.3.3 Sentiment Analysis

Although Booking.com might give its users the opportunity to distinguish between the positive and negative comments that they had to make about the hotel property, not all the people used these classifications consistently. During the collection of the data it was observed that users might have written in one of the sections both what they liked and what they did not like about the hotel. Therefore, the categorization was not very clear and representative of the guests' feelings towards their experience in the accommodation property.

To examine whether people are prone to share more positive or more negative experiences online, a sentiment analysis using the *ConText* software was performed. The process was conducted twice: once for the online reviews and once for the Instagram captions. The same cleaned files used for the corpus statistics, were selected, and then three steps were followed on the software: 1) *text analysis*, 2) *summarization*, and 3) *sentiment analysis*. By conducting a sentiment analysis of all the available reviews and of the *Instagram* captions, terms which represent a positive, a negative or a neutral sentiment were identified.

Yet, a limitation of the *ConText* software is the fact that it is performed at the level of the words and not the whole sentence, thing which may cause biases, as it is sometimes difficult to interpret the meaning of a single word without the whole context. Thus, it is

important to always refer to the complete sentence, when there are doubts about the real sentiment of a word.

3.3.4 *Focus Groups*

The focus groups that were conducted were two and consisted of five participants each. Furthermore, they were semi structured and lasted approximately 50-60 minutes. This way, the participants of the focus groups were able to go in depth into the topic of the researcher's interest (Morgan, 1996). The participants were either young professionals or University students and came from various European countries, such as France, Spain, Greece and Switzerland. Taking into consideration their background, participants traveled often both for business and leisure purposes, while they also used online travel agencies and social media.

The topics that were discussed in the focus groups were mainly three: the first part of the questions addressed mainly the travel habits of the participants and their personal experiences around the hospitality industry. Some of the questions included how often do they stay in hotels when traveling, what do they look for when booking a hotel, what are some good and bad aspects that a hotel needs to have in order for them to proceed with the booking, etc. In the other group of questions, the online behavior of the participants regarding the hospitality industry and e-WOM, user generated content and social media usage, was specified. Finally, the last group of questions, addressed previous behavior of the participants towards experiences that they had when staying in a hotel, and their willingness and motives to share these experiences on online platforms. The topics of the focus groups more specifically, can be found on Appendix 1.

The focus groups were audiotaped and then carefully transcribed. The transcripts were then analyzed and coded thematically. Thematic analysis is “a method for identifying, analyzing and reporting patterns (themes) within data” (Braun & Clarke, 2006, p. 79). The process of thematic analysis starts with a general description of the data, which is then organized into codes (open, axial and selective codes) and summarized in order to produce meanings (Braun & Clarke, 2006). The coding procedure was done in a deductive way, where the main categories emerged from the previous analyses were used.

4 FINDINGS

4.1 Content Analysis

The first sub-question of the thesis was to identify the aspects of the hotel properties that were mostly being discussed on online review sites, such as *Booking.com*, and on personal social media platforms, such as *Instagram*. To identify those aspects, a word frequency analysis was held by using the software *ConText*. After the collection of the online reviews from *Booking.com* and *Instagram* captions, the extraction process identified all unique words contained in the text comments. A total of 150 online hotel reviews on *Booking.com* and 86 *Instagram* captions were analyzed.

4.1.1 Content Analysis of Online Reviews from *Booking.com*

The top 40 most frequently mentioned words of online reviews from *Booking.com* are shown in the *Table 4-1*. They highlight the aspects that hotel guests value the most when they write their opinion on a review website. As users dedicate some time to write the reviews and mention these specific aspects, it is supposed that those are important to them and they also consider it important for other guests to receive the same information.

Obviously, *Booking.com* is a website whose basic service is facilitating the reservation of hotel rooms; so, users are supposed to write their opinions and thoughts about the rooms that they stayed at. This is what makes the word “*room*” itself the most frequent used one in the online reviews, as it was mentioned 120 times. Generally, the discussion about the rooms mostly concerned the size and whether they were comfortable and clean. The next most frequent word was “*location*”. Given the fact that the location of the research was specified into the center of Rotterdam, the reviews regarding the location were all positively mentioning that aspect. As it is implied from the number of times that the word “*location*” was mentioned it is very important for the guests, that the hotel they choose to stay at is in a central and convenient location, where they can easily have access to all the points of interest and the places that they want to visit when they are away from home.

Additionally, there were also other words in the reviews that were referring to the aspect of location. To have a clear overview of all the words and their meanings in the reviews, these were assigned into specific themes which facilitate the process and give depth to the analysis. The categories were basically derived from *Booking.com* and were specified into four according to the most frequent words. These categories are: “*Location*”, “*Service*”, “*Quality*” and “*Facilities*”.

Term	Frequency	Term	Frequency
room	120	price	12
location	56	walk	12
hotel	55	reception	12
staff	48	time	12
bed	44	excellent	12
good	38	city	12
breakfast	36	place	11
great	34	check	11
clean	29	amazing	10
nice	26	helpful	10
stay	25	bar	10
view	24	wait	9
small	22	smell	9
friendly	20	close	8
comfortable	17	water	8
bathroom	16	3	8
shower	15	restaurant	8
night	15	money	8
parking	15	perfect	8
service	14	floor	8

Table 4-1 Top 40 most frequent words of online reviews on Booking.com

As presented in the *Table 4-2*, in the terms that fall under the category of *Location* according to the context of the reviews are the words “*location*” which was mentioned 56 times, the words “*walk*” and “*city*” that were both mentioned 12 times, the word “*place*” accounted for 11 times and “*close*” which was mentioned 8 times. All these words were closely associated with the location of the hotel and they demonstrate its importance when booking a hotel room. Words such as “*walk*” and “*close*” were used to show that the hotels were in a walking distance from the central attractions of the city, next to a metro or train station or near restaurants and shops.

Location	
Term	Frequency
Location	56
Walk	12
City	12
Place	11
Close	8

Table 4-2 Location category of online reviews

The next category is that of the *Service* [see *Table 4-3*]. By service it is meant the level of human interaction between the hotel staff and the hotel guests. More specifically, the word frequency analysis showed that staff members of the hotels are one of the most important aspects, in regard to the service, as they were mentioned 48 times in the online reviews. Moreover, the rest of the words that were assigned to the same category were also related to the personnel of the hotels and their attitude towards the guests. Hotel staff members were mostly described by guests as *friendly* and *helpful*, thing which is crucial as it can change the whole perception of the hotel experience a guest has. The employees of a hotel play a significant role on the image of the property, as usually they are the first and the last thing that a guest encounters when arriving or when leaving the destination. Therefore, their behavior and quality of service can have a big influence over foreign travelers when spreading either positive or negative word of mouth (Berezina et al., 2015).

Service	
Term	Frequency
Staff	48
Friendly	20
Service	14
Reception	12
Time	12
Check	11
Helpful	10
Wait	9

Table 4-3 Service category of online reviews

The most extensive category was that of the *Quality and Value for Money* [Table 4-4]. A hotel is value for money when the needs and expectations of the guests are met, causing, therefore, satisfaction. However, the opposite can also happen: when guests expect more from the hotel and their expectations are not fulfilled dissatisfaction arises as explained by the expectancy-disconfirmation theory. For instance, people used on their online reviews the adjectives “good”, “great”, “nice”, “small”, “comfortable”, “excellent”, “amazing” and “perfect” to describe the property or compliment specific aspects of the hotel, such as the view, the location or the interior design.

Furthermore, the cleanliness of the hotels was also criticized. Cleanliness is something basic, yet extremely important for the guests and the image of the hotel, as guests will always pay attention on whether the room, and especially the bathroom, was properly cleaned (Lockyer, 2000; Lockyer, 2002). The words “clean” and “smell” were the most frequent used ones concerning the cleanliness. The reviews containing the word “smell” were all negative reviews, mentioning that, either the room or the bathroom, had a weird and unpleasant smell that the guests couldn’t stand.

Quality and Value for Money	
Term	Frequency
Good	38
Great	34
Clean	29
Nice	26
Small	22
Comfortable	17
Excellent	12
Price	12
Amazing	10
Smell	9
Money	8
Perfect	8

Table 4-4 Quality and Value for money category of online reviews

Another sub-theme in this category was the economic aspect, which was stated by the words “price” and “money”. Hotels are considered as a luxury for some people, and especially for low-income groups, as they need to spend money and a lot of time in the property that they have chosen (Law, Hsu, 2006).

Moreover, as intangible goods, travel products and services are both expensive and hard to judge beforehand. Therefore, guests after their stay at a hotel, express their opinion on whether their choice was worth the money they spent or not. An interesting pattern that was observed in the current case study of the hotels located in the city center of Rotterdam, was the fact that the word “*price*” was mostly used to indicate that guests found the hotel, or the provided facilities overpriced. Guests by paying a certain amount of money for a hotel, they had greater expectations which were not met, and which according to expectancy-disconfirmation theory, caused dissatisfaction, thus leading to negative e-WOM. On the other hand, the word “*money*” was most of the times related to satisfaction levels, indicating that the quality of the property was worth its price.

Finally, the last big and important category that was identified, was that of the “*Facilities*

and Amenities” provided by the hotels [Table 4-5]. Basic amenities of the bedroom and bathroom were mostly discussed: the bed, the bathroom itself, the shower and the water in the shower, with which some of the hotels encountered difficulties, as in a lot of reviews it was stated that there was no hot water in the shower. Additionally, it can be seen from the reviews that breakfast was often mentioned by the guests, and especially when it was complimentary to the room it generated positive feedback.

Besides the basic amenities, other facilities were also discussed, such as the view outside of the hotel, if there was provided a free parking for the guests, as well as the bar and the restaurant of the property or around the property. Generally, those facilities may not be equally important for all the hotels, however when provided, they create satisfaction and generate more discussion on online environments.

Facilities and Amenities	
Term	Frequency
Room	120
Bed	44
Breakfast	36
View	24
Bathroom	16
Parking	15
Shower	15
Bar	10
Restaurant	8
Water	8

Table 4-5 Facilities and Amenities category of online reviews

4.1.2 Content Analysis of Instagram Posts

4.1.2.1 Content Analysis of Instagram Captions

In the Table 4-6 presented below, the 40 most frequently used words of Instagram captions are demonstrated.

Word frequency for Instagram captions			
Term	Frequency	Term	Frequency
Rotterdam	59	night	4
2019	16	time	4
Netherland	14	dutch	4
hotel	14	visitrotterdam	4
travel	13	friend	4
city	13	art	4
year	12	nice	4
holland	10	tour	3
happy	10	start	3
love	9	perfect	3
view	8	instagram	3
room	8	back	3
make	8	ready	3
day	7	holiday	3
good	7	gaydutch	3
life	5	train	3
happynewyear	5	street	3
CitizenM	5	vacation	3
thing	4	connect	3
food	4	great	3
2018	4	modern	3

Table 4-6 Top 40 most frequent words on Instagram captions

The table shows that the word “*Rotterdam*” was the most frequently used one, as it was mentioned 59 times on the captions of the Instagram posts. This can be explained since the

actual location where the hotels of the research are situated, and therefore where the photos were taken, was in the city center of Rotterdam. Hence, people who were sharing their photos on Instagram, even if these photos showed the inside of the hotels, prefer to commemorate and mention the city where they had been rather than the hotel itself. According to the *Uses and Gratifications Theory*, one of the main factors why people share personal content on Instagram is to document any special events in their lives and the place where these events took place. Travelling and being in a foreign country or city is definitely an event that people like to share with the online community (Wang, Fesenmaier, 2004).

The second most used term was “2019” with 16 mentions. This was because the dataset consisted of photos that were posted from January 1st, 2019 and onwards. Therefore, as it can be seen from the Instagram captions and posts, users spent their New Year’s Eve at the hotels of Rotterdam and they also documented the event in their Instagram pictures from that night with many pictures showing the fireworks on the Erasmus Bridge, and the hotel guests’ being well dressed and ready to welcome the new year.

Additionally, the next most frequent used terms were “*Netherland*” and “*hotel*” with 14 mentions both. Regarding the hotels, people mostly referred to the brand of the hotel and its view either from the lobby or their private rooms. As it was observed from the pictures, the view of the hotel plays an important role, especially when people choose to share content on their personal social media accounts. To be able to capture a moment of the outside view of the hotel is in line with the motive of “*Coolness*” as people show that they are staying in a nice place which has a nice view overlooking the city of Rotterdam or other important sights, such as the Erasmus bridge or the river along with the boats.

The most frequent used words were also assigned into specific categories based on the context of their reviews. The categories are as follows: *Location*, *Quality*, *Facilities* and *Personal Experience*, and they are explained below in the analysis of the results.

The first category which is “*Location*” played an important role when guests shared their content on their personal social media accounts, as it was observed on the online reviews as well [see *Table 4-7*]. More generic words such as *Netherland*, *Rotterdam* and *Holland* were being mentioned by the users. Instagram users mentioned these words particularly in their hashtags. Hashtags are an effective way of communication between users who are interested and searching for relevant content. By using the hashtags of a specific place or country, Instagram users can, on the one hand, state the place that they have been, and also become more easily spotted by other users who have visited or wish to visit the same place.

It is worth mentioning that, in this category the name of the “*citizenM*” hotel was

mentioned five times. The name of the hotel was mentioned once from a staff member who had uploaded a picture of the whole working team, from an influencer who was stating that he belongs to the “*citizenM family*” and was also used as a hashtag. This means that the management of *citizenM* works on the brand image of the hotel on social media and tries to produce engagement and user generated content by empowering social media users to share posts from the hotel while using the hotel’s hashtag. This technique can be proved efficient and successful, especially for hotels that provide an appropriate setting which will inspire guests to capture the moment and share it with the online community by using the same hashtag in order to show that they have also been there and that they are staying in a cool hotel. Thus, the more content the users share on their personal social media accounts, the more popular this hotel will become. Nevertheless, popularity is not always associated with higher bookings or higher service quality, yet, the more people choose to post and refer to a hotel, the better and more reliable this hotel is perceived to be.

Location	
Term	Frequency
Rotterdam	59
Netherland	14
city	13
holland	10
CitizenM	5
visitrotterdam	4
train	3
street	3

Table 4-7 Location category of Instagram captions

Another category derived from the *Instagram* captions is that of the *Facilities and Quality* of the hotel, as in the reviews from *Booking.com* [see Table 4-8]. However, in this case the list is not so extensive as in the online reviews. More specifically, the hotel guests referred to the hotels as a brand and the fact that they stayed in those during their holidays abroad. Furthermore, as facilities and amenities of the hotels, the room, view and food were frequently mentioned on the captions. *Instagram* users usually described their room, the room view or a

meal that they enjoyed during their stay. The rooms that were mentioned were characterized as having a modern and nice design, while art is also present in the facilities category, as is something that differentiates the rooms and the personality of the hotel, thus making a statement and becoming memorable for the guests.

Facilities and Quality	
Term	Frequency
hotel	14
view	8
room	8
food	4
art	4
nice	4
perfect	3

Table 4-8 Facilities and Quality category of Instagram captions

As it was supported from the *Uses and Gratifications Theory*, the reasons why people share on social media are different from the reasons they share on third party and review websites. Notwithstanding, we shall not forget that *Instagram* is a personal social networking platform where people prefer to express themselves through images which construct their online persona. Consequently, it is expected from users to share their experiences and thoughts, rather than writing a solid review about a good or service they received.

Accordingly, the majority of the *Instagram* captions did not refer at all at the hotel aspects and amenities, but instead, at the personal experiences of the guests. The category of *Personal Experiences* was the one which contained most of the words that were mentioned in the *Instagram* captions. Given the fact that this category is not directly related to the subject of the research and does not provide any information about the hotel properties, it will not be further analyzed.

Besides the word frequency analysis of the *Instagram* captions, a coding process of the accompanied *Instagram* pictures also took place, in order to receive more information about what people choose to share on their personal social media accounts when referring to a hotel. An analysis of the *Instagram* is presented in the section below.

4.1.2.2 Coding of Instagram Photos

After the coding of the *Instagram* photos, four main themes were identified: “*Interior Design*”, “*Food and Drinks*”, “*Outside Views*” and “*Hotel Amenities*”. These were the selective codes which characterized what was being depicted in the pictures that were uploaded by the guests on *Instagram* using the location of the hotel as an indicator of where the pictures were taken. These themes act as a complement to the captions, given the fact that from the captions of the posts it was not always clear which were the aspects that the hotel guests preferred or liked the most on that specific hotel.

First, regarding the theme of the *Interior Design*, the things that were observed in the pictures were mainly four: the *furniture*, *art pieces*, *special decorations* and *color palette* [see *Figure 2*]. *Furniture* is one of the axial codes. In the pictures that were taken inside the hotel rooms, people sitting in armchairs or large sofas with pillows in contrasting colors, were being demonstrated. Furthermore, the beds of the rooms were often showed, either with people lying down on them, or just as a feature of the room. In all seven pictures that beds were displayed, there were white bed linens, duvets and many pillows as well. White bed linen gives a feeling of cleanliness and luxury; that is why they are the preferred choice of most hoteliers (Mussio, 2017). Other furniture that was depicted in the pictures were office style chairs and desks on the rooms which give a business touch. Many tourists that visit Rotterdam travel for business related purposes and therefore, it is important for them to have a comfortable space inside their room, from where they can easily work.

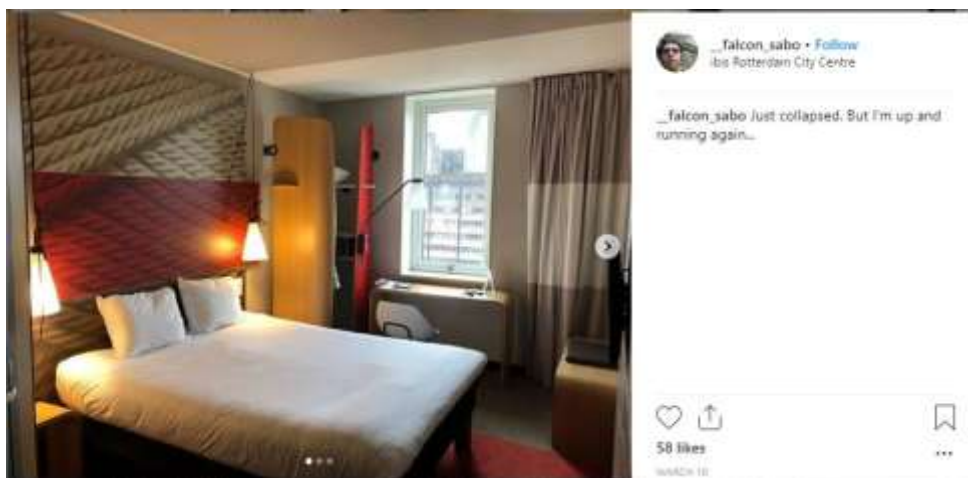


Figure 2 Interior Design theme on Instagram

Moving on, another axial code was that of *art pieces*. The word *art* was also mentioned

in the captions, and the pictures proved that it is an important aspect of the hotel. Some art pieces that were spotted in the photos were large and small paintings, posters and wall art, whereas *special decorations* were present in almost all the pictures: candles, vases with plants and flowers, small decorative objects and of course the Christmas tree and other Christmas related decorations, which is explained due to the period of the data collection. Finally, the photos showed that hotels used a bright and soft *color palette* in the private rooms of the guests, while darker colors were implemented in the public and common areas, such as the restaurant or the lounge, giving a more atmospheric aura.

The next main theme of the Instagram pictures was “*Food and Drinks*”. As it was observed from the word frequency analysis of the captions, food was also frequently used in the texts. Breakfast was being mostly shown in the pictures, which contained eggs, cheese, slices of bread, butter, yogurt, juices and coffee [consider *Figure 3*]. When on holidays people tend to enjoy a big breakfast with variety of choices (Juvan, Grün, Dolnicar, 2017), as they will probably be all day out exploring the city when they are travelling for leisure, or on meetings when they are travelling for business purposes. Other than breakfast, a more gourmet dish was also portrayed in the dataset. Well prepared and gourmet dishes are also a subject of documentation and can become a signature for a restaurant (Zeamer, 2018).



Figure 3 Food and Drinks Theme on Instagram

These representations of the hotel's food on Instagram, revealed that, especially breakfast, is something that people pay attention to and like to share with their friends and

followers on *Instagram*. Besides food, many pictures contain at least a drink either it is alcoholic like a beer, a cocktail or wine, or nonalcoholic such as water and coffee. Guests uploaded photos of their drinks or themselves holding a glass, thing which is related to the motive of sharing Instagram pictures in order to be “cool”.

Moreover, when looking at the *Instagram* pictures, a big part of them consisted of *Outside Views* [see *Figure 4*]. Apparently, the view that the hotel offers to their guests either from their rooms or from the public areas catches the attention of the guest, who is likely to take a moment to appreciate the view from the large windows and share it on Instagram. The most photographed attraction was Erasmus Bridge, which was captured in ten photos. Other attractions that were being often portrayed in the photos were the river Maas, the old Town Hall of Rotterdam and the skyscrapers. Definitely, the view depends on the location of the hotel. For instance, other hotels were closer to the river and offered a better view of the Erasmus Bridge and the boats, while others were hidden in the center, offering a more urban view of the nearby buildings. Nonetheless, even if the hotel was not in a strategic position, just the sky with the sunrise and the sunset provided a good setting for a picture, as it was observed in many of the Instagram photos.



Figure 4 Outside Views theme on Instagram

Finally, the last category derived from the coding of the Instagram pictures was that of the *Hotel Facilities and Amenities* that were demonstrated in the pictures. These amenities were usually seen in the surroundings and background of the pictures. Undeniably, the most popular spot of the hotels was the bar – restaurant area, which was demonstrated in fourteen

pictures. Additionally, another location - facility that was very popular in the guests' pictures was the bathroom. Especially bathrooms with large mirrors and a bathtub where preferred to be shown. Guests' uploaded mirror selfies wearing bathrobes or even more intimate photos of themselves being inside the bathtub or a jacuzzi. The finest and fancier the amenity (e.g. jacuzzi), the more willing were people to share it on social media even if it contained a more private content [see *Figure 5*]. This is supported also by the fact that lower budget hotels such as *Grand Hotel Rotterdam* and *easyHotel Rotterdam City Centre*, were underrepresented on Instagram. The table with details of the visual analysis of the *Instagram* pictures can be found on Appendix 2.



Figure 5 Facilities and Amenities theme on Instagram

4.2 Sentiment Analysis

The second sub-question that is aimed to be answered through this thesis, is whether people are more prone to share a positive or a negative comment about a hotel they have stayed in online environments. For this purpose, a sentiment analysis of the online reviews derived from Booking.com and of the Instagram captions was conducted. The results of the findings will be analyzed in this section and will give an overview of the post-travel online behavior of the hotel guests.

4.2.1 Sentiment of Online Reviews from Booking.com

According to theory most people that share their opinion online about a product or service that

they received, are keen on having extreme opinions about it, either positive or negative (Bansal & Voyer, 2000). Consumers usually will not dedicate much time and effort talking about things that do not interest them or about things that are not passionate about. This passion could be either generated by a positive experience and feeling or by a negative one and will lead people into having the need of sharing it with others as well (Hennig- Thureau et al., 2004).

A sentiment analysis of the 150 online reviews found on *Booking.com* for the specific ten hotels located in the city center of Rotterdam, proved the above statement is correct. As it can be seen from *Figure 6*, there was a clear differentiation between the extreme opinions of the users and the neutral sentiment. The reviews that expressed a neutral sentiment were just a few, while those who expressed a positive sentiment were considerably higher than those who expressed a negative sentiment.

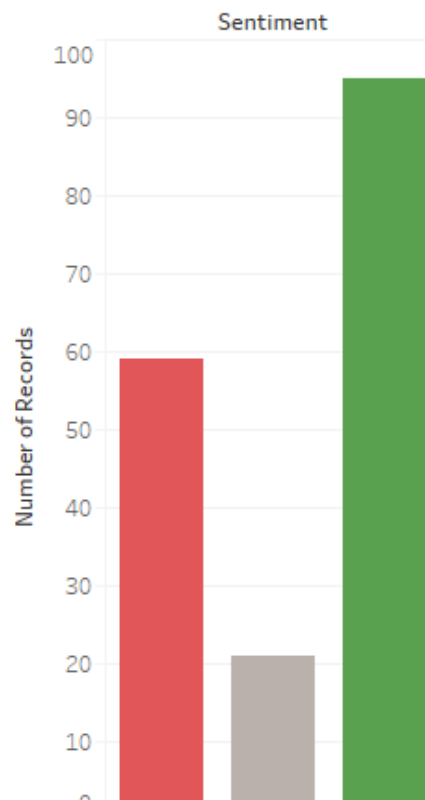


Figure 6 Sentiment of Online Reviews from Booking.com

In the positive reviews, the online users mostly used the adjective “*great*” in order to generally describe the hotel and in some specific reviews, the location of the hotels. Other positive adjectives that were used to describe guests’ overall experience in the hotels were “*nice*”, “*amazing*”, “*perfect*” and “*lovely*”. This is in agreement with the *Equity Theory*, which suggests that when customers receive a very good quality of service, they are keen on sharing it with other people as a form of reward to the service provider (Oliver & Swan, 1989). By

spreading WOM, traditional or electronic, people give their recommendations to other consumers, who then will most likely proceed into the purchase decision of the same product or service in order to feel the same positive experiences. Furthermore, these positive reviews regarding the experience the guests had while staying in the hotels reveal their level of satisfaction. Therefore, the criteria and expectations that the guests had prior to their visit in the hotel were met or even exceeded after their stay.

Another positive aspect that guests mentioned in their online reviews was the kind and helpful treatment they received by the staff members of the hotels [see *Figure 7*]. Human interaction is always important in customer service, and it is generally common for guests to value the experience they had with a service provider based on the contact they had with the person that was in charge (Kandampully, 1998). In the case of hospitality industry, when people mention staff members, they usually refer to the reception and front office team. Given the fact that the sentiment of the reviews regarding staff members was mostly positive in this case study, customers appreciated a friendly behavior from the crew members and were prone to share it with other people online.

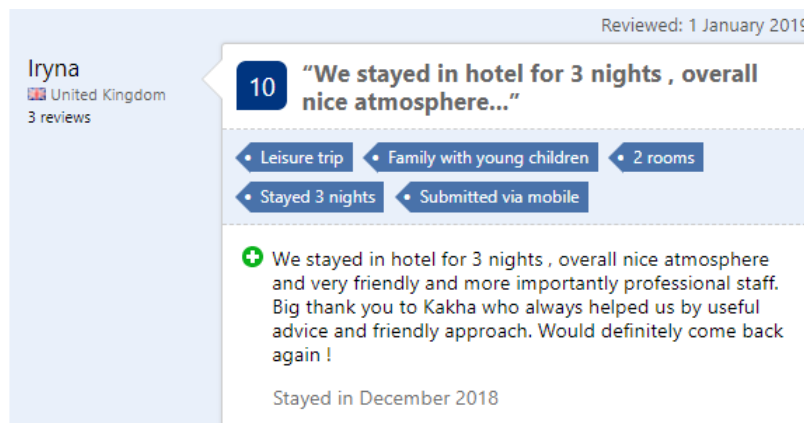


Figure 7 Positive Review on Booking.com

On the other hand, the negative sentiment of the reviews is lower than the positive sentiment, as it is shown on *Figure 6*. However relevant research supported that negative reviews generally have a greater influence over customers and the brand image of the company in general (Beneke et al., 2015). Users on *Booking.com* talked with a negative sentiment regarding basic facilities and amenities of the hotels. For instance, lack of cleanliness and bad smell were frequently mentioned [see *Figure 8*]. Furthermore, guests reported the malfunction of some services such as wrong room temperature and not enough warm water in the shower.

Those basic amenities are necessary and are considered as obvious from guests, therefore, when they are missing or when they are not handled properly, dissatisfaction is caused which has as a result the spread of negative e-WOM (Kandampully & Suharanto, 2000).

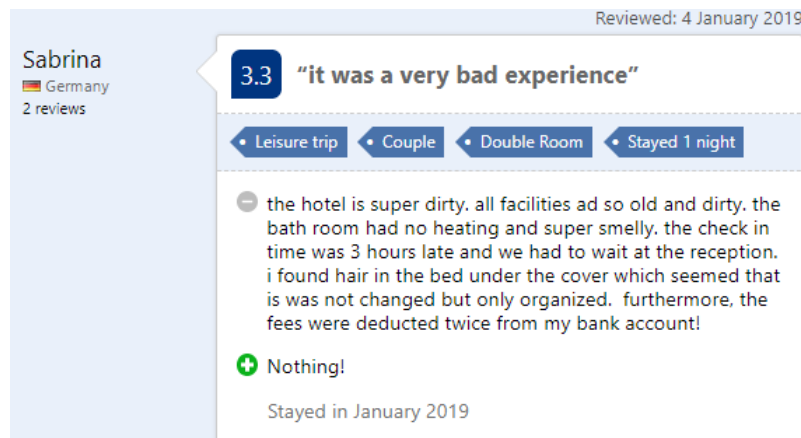


Figure 8 Negative Review on Booking.com

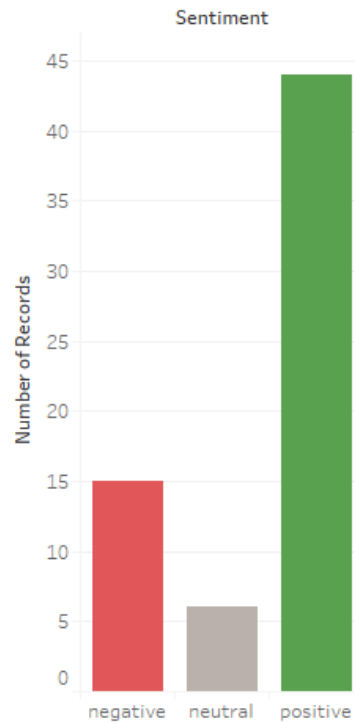
4.2.2 Sentiment of Instagram Captions

The sentiment analysis of the Instagram captions also revealed a tendency for positive attitude, however, in this case the amount of positive exposure is significantly higher than the amount of negative. In particular, as it is shown on *Figure 9*, the bar of the positive sentiment is triple the size of the negative sentiment's bar.

This phenomenon can be explained due to the nature of *Instagram* as a personal social media app. As shown in the word frequency analysis of the *Instagram* captions, *Instagram* users did not refer explicitly to the hotels but rather to their experience and travel lifestyle. Even more, when using a personal social media platform in which people can construct their very own identity and online persona, users are more prone to share a positive experience in order to conform with the notion of self-promotion. Consequently, even when hotel guests might have encountered difficulties or dissatisfaction with a service that was provided, they did not mention it in the *Instagram* caption of their photos.

Regarding the amenities provided by the hotels, what was mentioned in a positive sense was the view with which guests "loved"; the food which was "delicious" and the "modern" architecture. On the contrary, one of the negative aspects that was mentioned for one of the hotels, was the fact that sometimes it got noisy overnight due to being close to a

Figure 9 Sentiment of Instagram Captions



main street. Apart from that, other words that were marked as showing a negative sentiment, were not necessarily associated with the hotels nor even with a bad experience of the guest. To demonstrate, the word “*hard*” which was mentioned twice in the *Instagram* captions referred to motivational quotes, while the word “*panic*” which might imply a bad or difficult situation, was mentioned with a humoristic approach, which did not have to do with the hotel itself [see *Figure 10*]. Subsequently, taking into consideration the context of the captions, the negative sentiment was even lower than the one projected in *Figure 9*.



Figure 10 Examples of Instagram captions

4.3 Focus Groups Analysis

4.3.1 Online Behavior prior to Booking.com

Participants of the focus groups discussed the subject of user generated content in hospitality industry throughout the whole travel phase. First, they described their personal experiences and habits when traveling both for business and leisure purposes. When conducting a business trip, the participants usually were not involved in the booking process of the hotel. The company itself provided accommodation with a partner hotel property based on the needs of the trip. However, there was also an exception: one of the participants revealed that the company he works for gives a budget for the expenses of the whole travel, and employees are free to reserve their own hotel within this budget. The priorities when booking a hotel for business purposes in both cases were: the length of the trip, safety and quality of the provided services.

On the other hand, when travelling for leisure purposes and having the opportunity of organizing the trip and reserving the accommodation themselves, participants admitted that the location and the price of the hotel are the most crucial aspects for them when considering to book a room. Other important features of the hotels that were mentioned by the participants were facilities, such as swimming pool and terrace, the cleanliness of the room and good customer service. Especially for the customer service aspect, participants mentioned frequently their experiences with people working on the hotels they have stayed at, and also considered staff members as being equally important with other facilities and amenities that the hotel provides. All these characteristics were considered among the most important ones for online users as well, especially on *Booking.com*, as seen in the analysis previously.

Furthermore, participants said that they rely heavily on ICTs. More specifically, they explained that they visit a variety of websites, including *Booking.com*, whether these are official websites or online travel agencies. The key behind visiting different web sources is to be able to gather more information about the properties and cross check the all the available information, in order to avoid frauds. In addition, several participants referred to false information and photoshopped images of the properties, which caused them problems and frustration. In two of the cases, participants admitted that if they had also read previous guests' online reviews prior to the reservation they probably would have never proceeded to the booking of the property.

M. - F1: *“Both the images and the advert was not equal made of what they offered for sure. And I made a mistake that I didn't read the recommendations and the reviews because I was in a hurry.”*

Consequently, it was generally agreed that reading the opinions of previous hotel guests in online environments is essential, especially when the property that is being visited is unknown. However, the extent to which these opinions have an influence on the participants, depends on the specific situation each time. For instance, if there are many negative reviews for a hotel, but which concern personal complaints or individual preferences, these will not be taken seriously into consideration. However, even if the reviews contain something negative about one or more of the important aspects mentioned above, participants would consider visiting the accommodation property if there is no other option, and when doing so, they would still go without any biases as mentioned in one of the focus groups.

C.- F2: *“(...) if I saw a bad review and I still chose to go to the place, I would arrive there open minded. Knowing that, whatever comes can be good or bad.”*

Interestingly, despite the fact that literature supported extreme opposite opinions are more practical, in the first focus group it was stated that mid range reviews are more useful, as:

G. – F1: *“(...) the one or two stars are very angry about a certain thing that happened and the five star usually are sponsored or very enthusiastic about something. But when somebody gives three stars, it's going to be an equal list of the pros and cons.”*

Concerning the credibility and trustworthiness of the user generated content found on online review websites or social media, participants of both focus groups agreed that review websites are more trustworthy in terms of content.

First of all, even if the content on third part websites is generated from other users, it contains actual information and feedback regarding the hotel and the provided services and is considered by other potential customers as more useful and helpful. As seen from the content analysis of the reviews, *Booking.com* for instance, has various filters which users can select and base their research adequately, while, on the other hand, they can write their opinion and share their experience after they book and stay in a hotel regarding every aspect of it. This fact is very useful for future guests as they can find any kind of information they want. As it was discussed in one of the focus groups, there should be a balance between the services provided by the hotel: the ideal is of course for every amenity and facility to be good, however, if the hotel itself is good but the staff members are not friendly and efficient, this might have a bad influence on the overall image of the hotel. A way to evaluate the services, before visiting the hotel, is to search for the specific aspects on the previous guests' reviews on third party websites.

On the other hand, content on social media, and especially *Instagram*, is more questionable in terms of the information that is provided, the reasons behind sharing it and its trustworthiness. First of all, the photos uploaded by *Instagram* users had more or less similar settings, depicting either the view of the hotel from a large window or a moment when guests enjoyed themselves either at the restaurant or in a jacuzzi. Additionally, the captions under those posts were more random and, in many occasions, did not talk about the hotel specifically. This fact is also acknowledged by other people when coming through *Instagram* posts:

G. – F1: *“What you see on social media, all the comments you see underneath they never have to do with the hotel (...) So, it's not really helpful, in any way.”*

Furthermore, the case of promoted posts and influencers was also touched upon by the participants of the focus groups, something that it was not seen on the content analysis, but which is an important factor affecting the trustworthiness of the social media content. More specifically, all of the participants said that the hotels they see on social media are usually very expensive and out of their price range, so they do not consider them at all.

N. - F1: *“I have been in one hotel website because of Instagram and stuff like that, but it was 10,000 per night so I said, sorry...”*

R. – F2: *“Normally those are too expensive for me.”*

This trend can also explain why for the lower budget hotels in our list, such as the easyHotel Rotterdam City Centre and the Grand Hotel Central, the *Instagram* posts were less. Furthermore, as observed by the focus groups' members, user generated content regarding hotel properties is most of the times shared by social media influencers, thus, people who have a large number of followers and who can enjoy a free stay in a hotel in exchange for an *Instagram* post. The hospitality industry and other sectors use social media influencers as a way to reach more people and grow organically, without making other marketing or advertising efforts. The case with the posts shared by social media influencers though, is the fact that they might be biased, as the hotel itself is sponsoring them.

C. – F2: *“(...) because I know that the hotel just paid. It's not from a random person. This guy will have like 10 or 15 pictures of different hotels”*

However, even if the posts are shared by random guests and not by social media influencers, there is still a matter of trustworthiness. Both online reviews written on third party websites and photos shared on social media platforms are subjective. The participants agreed that it is

hard to judge a whole situation by a single review or *Instagram* post. Therefore, they search for additional information and various sources, including the official website of the accommodation provider, third party websites, and lastly social media, which serve more as a means of getting inspiration for the whole destination and the nearby surroundings and attractions rather than hotel booking purposes.

4.3.2 *Online behavior post-trip and willingness to share their own experiences*

Almost all the participants of the two focus groups agreed on the fact that they preferred to share their post travel experiences on third-party websites rather than on social media. More specifically, the participants mentioned that they usually provide feedback on the website through which they initially made the booking, but only if the website requires it. This feedback might be either just a general score for the hotel, based on the ranking system of the website, or an additional comment if something exceptional happened during the stay at the hotel.

At the sentiment analysis of online reviews from *Booking.com* and *Instagram*, a tendency towards positive reviews and positive user generated content was observed. Nonetheless, the participants of the focus groups had a different point of view on this subject. In other words, in both focus groups the participants said that they almost only share a negative experience and not a positive one. To demonstrate, a participant from the first focus group acknowledges the high risks that are involved when booking and staying in a hotel and that's why she wants to inform other people of any bad circumstances prior to making their purchase decision. Especially, she states:

M. – F1: *"I don't really share a good experience to be honest (...) but definitely if something goes wrong, I would like the rest of the world to be part of it since we spend a quite big amount of money to have fun and not to be disappointed for the accommodation and attitude of staff or food poisoning, etc."*

Moreover, other participants of the focus groups agreed on the fact that people write reviews for altruistic reasons and social concerns, and that any bad experience caused by the hotel properties, should be made public.

J. – F1: *"To inform the others, because when you are in a hotel and they don't reach your expectations, you should inform the other people in order to let them know that this is not what they are offering"*

In addition, it was mentioned by the participants of the second focus group that when they

visit a hotel, they expect that at least the basic services and facilities are of good quality as long as they pay for them. So they are not keen on sharing a positive review on these aspects as it is obvious for them that these should be at least decent. However, if those basic amenities and facilities are missing or not reaching participants' expectations, they will mention it with dissatisfaction to the hotel property, as a way of providing constructive feedback. In this way, both service providers and the next customers can benefit by ensuring better quality of the facilities.

C. – F2: *"If I write a negative review and it's very constructive, maybe they can improve in this level. I don't expect anything in return."*

On the contrary, one of the participants said that he is more prone to share a positive experience rather than a negative one, because he wants the other people to:

B. – F2: *"(...)have the same experience that I had. So it's more like a trust thing."*

However, he also he usually makes his recommendations in a form of traditional WOM and not in an online environment, as for him the relationship you have with a hotel is short, so if he encounters an unpleasant situation he just forgets it and prefer not to talk about it.

B. – F2: *"(...) with the hotel the relationship is so short you just connect and disconnect so I just disconnect."*

Regarding social media, participants do not use them to share content from the hotels they stay. In fact, only two of the participants revealed that they might upload a nice photo they took from the hotel on their personal social media accounts and tag the hotel or the location of the hotel, but they do it for personal purposes and to document where they have been, rather than for making recommendations to their friends or social media followers. It should be noted though, that even the practice of tagging the location of the hotel or using a specific hashtag or feature of social media, in this case *Instagram*, is a form of producing and spreading e-WOM, even though internet users might not realize it at first. This sort of unconscious e-WOM is extremely influential when the profile is private, or when it is followed by a large amount of other (*Instagram*) users. The coding table of the thematic analysis done for the focus groups can be found on Appendix 3.

5 CONCLUSION

In this final chapter of the thesis, a discussion will take place, where the four sub-questions posed in the beginning of the study will be answered, leading also into the answer of the main research question, which was “*How does the hotel experience of the guest affect the creation of e-WOM after their stay?*” After the discussion, main limitations of the study and suggestions for future research will be addressed.

5.1 Discussion

The current study explored post-travel experiences of hotel guests and their online behavior, both as passive receivers of the message in the information seeking process (pre-trip phase) and as active producers of user generated content after they have made their travel related purchase decisions (post-trip phase).

Regarding the first sub-question: “*What aspects of the hotel properties are mostly being discussed on online reviews and what on social media?*”, the word frequency analysis of the online reviews generated from *Booking.com*, revealed that internet users care mostly and choose to share practical information for the accommodation properties which will be proved useful both for prospective customers and the service providers. The main themes that were mostly discussed on online reviews were: the location of the property, the services that were provided, the quality of those services and other facilities or amenities of the hotels. These characteristics of the hotels were also considered as crucial for the participants of the focus groups, with location and price being the two most crucial ones. However, this was not the case for *Instagram* posts. Even though *Instagram* captions did not provide fruitful information about the hotels, the coding of the photos showed a tendency for capturing a more artistic and ideal side of the hotels, something which was not observed on online reviews from *Booking.com*. At the focus groups the design of the hotel or the room was discussed, but in a negative way due to false expectations that were created from photoshopped images which did not depict the true image of the accommodation property. Therefore, the aspects of the hotels found on *Instagram* photos, such as the interior design and the outside views, were not considered important for the participants; however, when participants received less than expected, this caused dissatisfaction leading to negative WOM.

The second sub-question addressed the sentiment of user generated content, and whether people are more prone to share online a positive or a negative experience. The sentiment analysis that was conducted for both online reviews derived from *Booking.com* and for *Instagram* captions, gave us an understanding of the ratio of satisfaction and dissatisfaction among hotel guests. By identifying the amount of positive and negative comments in online

environments, it was explored whether people are keen on sharing more positive or more negative experiences in online environments. From the sentiment analysis, it was observed that there was a tendency for positive sentiment on both platforms – *Booking.com* and *Instagram*. Nevertheless, on *Instagram*, the level of positive sentiment was significantly higher than that of the negative sentiment.

On the contrary, findings from the focus groups that were organized by the researcher, were against the findings of the sentiment analysis of the online content. More specifically, participants of the focus groups expressed their willingness to mostly share negative feedback from their stay at a hotel. They explained that in a domain, such as the hospitality industry, where the risk of money, time and even health is involved, a negative comment can be more constructive and helpful for both the service providers and the prospective customers.

Consequently, as it was seen from the analysis of the reviews, usually when there was nothing exceptional to mention, people used a variety of adjectives to describe a good hotel in general. However, there was given an extensive focus and description of the bad experiences on negative comments. This can explain why online reviews had a tendency for positive sentiment. Hotel managers by monitoring these online reviews can identify their strengths and weaknesses, and improve guests' experiences, thus keeping the ratio of positive and negative reviews in a satisfactory level.

On the other hand, users on social media in almost all of the cases did not share a negative hotel experience. Therefore, *Instagram* users and hotel managers should not view social media posts as a way of obtaining actual and meaningful feedback for the accommodation property, but rather as an online community of exchanging experiences and inspiration.

Furthermore, the findings from the focus groups were used to answer the third sub-question of the research, which stated: "*On which platforms do hotel guests prefer to share their post travel experiences?*" According to the participants of the focus groups, online travel agencies and review websites are preferred over personal social media accounts, in order to express opinions and thoughts on a travel related product or service. Particularly, the majority of the participants revealed that they usually provide feedback on the website that they used in order to book their accommodation. This feedback can either be a rating, based on the star system of each website / platform, or both a rating and a written comment if they had to mention something exceptional. As per *Instagram* posts and generally social media profiles, the interviewees agreed that sometimes they may upload a picture of the hotel they have stayed in and even tag the hotel or the location, but they do it for personal documentation reasons and

not to provide feedback or recommendations to prospective guests.

The above analyses make it clear that there are certain differences between user generated content shared on review websites and those shared on personal social media accounts. First of all, taking into consideration that the uses and gratifications of *Booking.com* and *Instagram* are different, the content that someone can find on these media varies as well. The main difference is the type of information that is provided: while on *Booking.com* someone can obtain practical evidence about the hotel property and every aspect of it, either intangible or tangible, on *Instagram*, the information is limited. For instance, even though the *Instagram* pictures of the dataset were uploaded the same period as the online reviews from *Booking.com*, and they were about the same hotels, the problems or any other inconveniences that guests mentioned on the online reviews, were not depicted nor on the captions or the images on *Instagram*. As a personal social media platform, *Instagram*'s idealism is way for users to construct their own identity and reality. Therefore, it can be supported that *Instagram* posts are superficial and present a more idealistic side of what is being present on the image.

Another key difference between online review websites and social media platforms, that was marked on the focus group's discussions, is the presence of influencers, especially on *Instagram*. As participants mentioned, there are many examples of hotels, and one of them was also observed on the dataset (*citizenM Rotterdam*), which use people who have a large number of followers, and thus, influence, as a way of receiving more publicity. The "deal" between social media influencers and hotel properties is a free accommodation or even paid partnerships, for promoting the hotels and uploading relevant images or videos on their personal social media accounts. Being aware of this situation, the trustworthiness of the message is weak because *Instagram* users perceive sponsored information as something biased and not authentic. Notwithstanding, this is not the case for online review websites. Well-known travel websites, and in this case *Booking.com*, contains information and feedback only from verified guests, who are guaranteed that they have booked and have visited the property for which they have written a feedback about.

Overall, the research demonstrated that travelers value and use Information and Communication Technologies (ICTs) throughout the whole travel cycle. The hotel experience that a guest has is closely associated with ICTs and is also affected during the three travel phases (pre-trip, during the trip, and after the trip). In other words, as data demonstrated, both good and bad hotel experiences can affect tourists' perceptions and the creation of e-WOM.

Overall, generally, hotel guests will be keen on sharing a positive feedback with the online community, especially on their personal social media accounts. However, negative e-

WOM can be more intense and have a bigger influence on the receiver. It should be noted that negative e-WOM is mostly generated by dissatisfaction caused during the trip. The absence of basic facilities, such as a clean room or a rude and unhelpful employee is a key contributor in spreading negative e-WOM. Another important factor is the inability to deliver what was promised before booking the accommodation property. For instance, as it was seen on the literature review, reserving a hotel room is an expensive process especially for low income groups; online reviews revealed that the price of the hotel is something that creates high expectations. Therefore, when these expectations are not met, users wrote negative comments mentioning that there was no value for money paid. Likewise, discussions between the participants of the focus groups showed that fake information, such as photoshopped images, also creates a false expectation, which causes frustration, complaints and spread of negative e-WOM.

To summarize, hotel guests before visiting the accommodation property, especially if there have never visited it before, they search for relevant information from verified online sources and secondly from social media platforms, more as a way of finding inspiration. Moreover, after their stay, they engage into online communities by providing feedback and evaluations. However, as it was proved, they use different platforms for different purposes, and the more exceptional is their experience, the more engaged they become into storytelling practices.

5.2 Limitations and Suggestions for Future Research

It is acknowledged by the researcher that certain limitations arise from this thesis. The subject of the research was to identify key differences and online behavior of internet users on online travel review websites and personal social media platforms. A limitation is the fact that for this purpose, data was parsed only from two sources: *Booking.com* and *Instagram*. Although the selected website and platform are good examples of the two types of media wanted for the research, there are also quite a lot of other sources, such as *TripAdvisor* and *Facebook*, which could provide a lot more information and diversity of content. Therefore, it is suggested that future studies focus on multiple other channels as well in order to obtain more data.

Moreover, another limitation is the fact that people that posted the online reviews on *Booking.com* were not the same people who shared the *Instagram* posts for the specific hotels, nor the same that participated in the focus groups. A possible suggestion for future research could be the extension of the current study, by getting in touch and conducting in-depth interviews with the hotel guests who have spread e-WOM for a hotel, either on a review website, or on their personal social media accounts. By doing so, the motives behind user

generated content will be explored and confirmed by the actual contributors.

Finally, this thesis adds knowledge in the field of media usage on tourism and hospitality industry, by demonstrating how hotel experiences of the guests affect the creation of e-WOM. The findings of the study could be used as an initiative for further qualitative research on user generated content and e-WOM on the tourism and hotel industry. As case studies for future research, could be used a larger amount of data for hotels located in the city of Rotterdam, a comparison of Rotterdam hotels with those located in other Dutch cities, or even, a comparison of chain or affiliated hotels located in two different countries. Consequently, larger amount of data could provide better insights about media usage and e-WOM in tourism and hospitality industry.

6 REFERENCES

About Booking.com. (2019). Retrieved from Booking.com:

<https://www.booking.com/content/about.en-gb.html>

Amblee, N., & Bui, T. (2008). Can Brand Reputation Improve the Odds of Being Reviewed On-Line? *International Journal of Electronic Commerce*, 11-28.
doi:10.2753/JEC1086-4415120302

Aral, S., Dellarocas, C., & Godes, D. (2013). Introduction to the Special Issue—Social Media and Business Transformation: A Framework for Research. *Information Systems Research*. doi:<https://doi.org/10.1287/isre.1120.0470>

Aslam, S. (2019, Jan 6). *Instagram by the Numbers: Stats, Demographics & Fun Facts*. Retrieved from Omnicore: <https://www.omnicoreagency.com/instagram-statistics/>

Assimakopoulos, C., Papaioannou, E., Sarmaniotis, C., & Georgiadis, C. K. (2015). Online reviews as a feedback mechanism for hotel CRM systems. *Anatolia*, 5-20.
doi:10.1080/13032917.2014.933707

Bansal, H., & Voyer, P. (2000). Word-of-Mouth processes within a services purchase decision context. *Journal of Service Research*, 166-177.
doi:10.1177/109467050032005

Bechwati, N., & Morrin, M. (2008). Outraged consumers: Getting even at the expense of getting a good deal. *Journal of Consumer Psychology*, 13(4), 440-453.
doi:10.1207/S15327663JCP1304_11

Beneke, J., Mill, J., Naidoo, K., & Wickham, B. (2015). The impact of willingness to engage in negative electronic word-of-mouth on brand attitude: a study of airline passengers in South Africa. *Journal of Business and Retail Management Research*, 9(2), 68-84.

Berezina, K., Bilgihan, A., Cobanoglu, C., & Okumus, F. (2015). Understanding Satisfied and Dissatisfied Hotel Customers: Text Mining of Online Hotel Reviews. *Journal of Hospitality Marketing & Management*, 1-24. doi:10.1080/19368623.2015.983631

Blumler, J. G. (1979). The Role of Theory in Uses and Gratifications Studies. *Communication Research*, 6(1), 9-36.
doi:<https://doi.org/10.1177/009365027900600102>

- Boer, J. (2018, May 2). *Tourism in Rotterdam continues to rise*. Retrieved from Rotterdam Partners: <https://en.rotterdampartners.nl/tourism-in-rotterdam-continues-to-rise/>
- Braun, V., & Clarke, V. (2006). Using Thematic Analysis in Psychology. *Qualitative Research in Psychology*, 77-101. doi:10.1191/1478088706qp063oa
- Bronner, F., & de Hoog, R. (2010). Vacationers and eWOM: Who Posts, and Why, Where, and What? *Journal of Travel Research*, 15-26. doi:10.1177/0047287509355324
- Buttle, F. A. (1998). Word of mouth: understanding and managing referral marketing. *Journal of Strategic Marketing*, 241-254. doi:10.1080/096525498346658
- Carl, W. J. (2006). What's the buzz about?: Everyday communication and the relational basis of Word-of-Mouth and buzz marketing practices. *Management Communication Quarterly*, 601-634. doi:10.1177/0893318905284763
- Chang, H., & Wu, L. (2014). An examination of negative e-WOM adoption: Brand commitment as a moderator. *Decision Support Systems*, 206-218. doi:10.1016/j.dss.2013.11.008
- Cover, R. (2012). Performing and undoing identity online: Social networking, identity theories and the incompatibility of online profiles and friendship regimes. *Convergence: The International Journal of Research into New Media Technologies*, 18(2), 177-193. doi:10.1177/1354856511433684
- Cox, C., Burgess, S., Sellitto, C., & Buultjens, J. (2009). The role of user-generated content in tourists' travel planning behavior. *Journal of Hospitality Marketing & Management*, 18(8), 743-764. doi:10.1080/19368620903235753
- Currie, R. R., Wesley, F., & Sutherland, P. (2008). Going where the Joneses go: understanding how others influence travel decision-making. *International Journal of Culture, Tourism and Hospitality Research*, 2(1), 12-24. doi:10.1108/1750618081085611
- Díaz-Martín, A., Iglesias, V., Vázquez, R., & Ruiz, A. V. (2000). The use of quality expectations to segment a service market. *Journal of Services Marketing*, 14(2), 132-146. doi:10.1108/08876040010320957
- Diesner, J., Franco, S., Jiang, M., & Chin, C.-L. (2016). *Short Training Guide for ConText*. Retrieved from ConText:

<https://docs.google.com/document/d/1GQlA9wZ8a4mjS6RdaERTkbKUWtbyAPcCxAu1aocPFvA/pub>

- Flick, U. (2013). *The SAGE Handbook of Qualitative Data Analysis*. SAGE publications.
- Fotis, J., Buhalis, D., & Rossides, N. (2012). Social media use and impact during the holiday travel planning process. *Information and Communication Technologies in Tourism 2012*, 13-24.
- Garrigos-Simon, F., Galdon, J., & Sanz-Blas, S. (2017). Effects of crowdvoting on hotels: the Booking.com case. *International Journal of Contemporary Hospitality Management*, 29(1), 419-437. doi:10.1108/IJCHM-08-2015-0435
- Gershoff, A. D., Mukherjee, A., & Mukhopadhyay, A. (2003). Consumer acceptance of online agent advice: Extremity and Positivity effects. *Journal of Consumer Psychology*, 161-170. doi:10.1207/S15327663JCP13-1&2_14
- Gursoy, D., & Umbreit, W. (2004). Tourist information search behavior: Cross-cultural comparison of European union member states. *International Journal of Hospitality Management*, 23(1), 55-70. doi:10.1016/j.ijhm.2003.07.004
- Hennig-Thurau, T., Malthouse, E., Friege, C., Gensler, S., Lobschat, L., Rangaswamy, A., & Skiera, B. (2010). The Impact of New Media on Customer Relationships. *Journal of Service Research*, 311-330.
- Holloway, B., & Beatty, S. (2003). Service Failure in Online Retailing: A Recovery Opportunity. *Journal of Service Research*, 6(1), 92-105. doi:10.1177/1094670503254288
- Hu, Y., Manikonda, L., & Kambhampati, S. (2014). What we Instagram: A first analysis of Instagram photo content and user types. *International AAAI Conference on Weblogs and Social Media*.
- Huppertz, J. W., Arenson, S. J., & Evans, R. H. (1978). An application of equity theory to buyer-seller exchange situations. *Journal of Marketing Research*, 250-260. doi:10.2307/3151255
- Ito, T. A., Larsen, J. T., Smith, K. N., & Cacioppo, J. T. (1998). Negative information weighs more heavily on the brain: The negativity bias in evaluative categorizations.

- Journal of Personality and Social Psychology*, 75(4), 887-900. doi:10.1037/0022-3514.75.4.887
- Jansen, B. J., Zhang, M., Sobel, K., & Chowdury, A. (2009). Twitter power: Tweets as electronic word of mouth. *Journal of the American Society for Information Science and Technology*, 60(11), 2169-2188. doi:10.1002/asi.21149
- Jeong, E., & Jang, S. (2011). Restaurant experiences triggering positive electronic word-of-mouth (eWOM) motivations. *International Journal of Hospitality Management*, 30(2), 356-366.
- Jurca, R., Garcin, F., Talwar, A., & Faltings, B. (2010). Reporting incentives and biases in online review forums. *ACM Transactions on the Web*, 4(2), 1-27. doi:10.1145/1734200.1734202
- Juvan, E., Grün, B., & Dolnicar, S. (2017). Biting off more than they can chew: Food waste at hotel breakfast buffets. *Journal of Travel Research*, 232-242. doi:10.1177/0047287516688321
- Kandampully, J., & Suhartanto, D. (2000). Customer loyalty in the hotel industry: the role of customer satisfaction and image. *International Journal of Contemporary Hospitality Management*, 346-351. doi:10.1108/095961100103
- Kandampully, J. (1998). Service quality to service loyalty: A relationship which goes beyond customer services. *Total Quality Management*, 431-443. doi:10.1080/0954412988370
- Kaplan, A., & Haenlein, M. (2010). Users of the world, unite! The challenges and opportunities of Social Media. *Business Horizons*, 59-68. doi:10.1016/j.bushor.2009.09.003
- Katz, E., Blumler, J., & Gurevitch, M. (1973). Uses and Gratifications Research. *The Public opinion Quarterly*, 37(4), 509-523.
- Kennedy, H. (2006). Beyond anonymity, or future directions for internet identity research. *New Media & Society*, 8(6), 859-876. doi:10.1177/1461444806069641
- Khan, M. (2017). *Hospitality Marketing and Consumer Behavior: Creating Memorable Experiences*. Oakville: Apple Academic Press Inc.

- Klein, L. R. (1998). Evaluating the potential of interactive media through a new lens: Search versus experience goods. *Journal of Business Research*, 41(3), 195-203.
doi:10.1016/S0148-2963(97)00062-3
- Koller, M., & Zauner, A. (2013). Taking a deeper look at online reviews: The asymmetric effect of valence intensity on shopping behaviour. *Journal of Marketing Management*, 29(5-6), 646-670. doi:10.1080/0267257X.2013.776620
- Lalicic, L., & Weismayer, C. (2018). Being passionate about the mobile while travelling. *Current Issues in Tourism*, 950-963. doi:10.1080/13683500.2016.1141179
- Lam, T., & Hsu, C. (2006). Predicting behavioral intention of choosing a travel destination. *Tourism Management*, 27, 589-599. doi::10.1016/j.tourman.2005.02.003
- Law, R., & Hsu, C. H. (2006). Importance of hotel website dimensions and attributes: Perceptions of online browsers and online purchasers. *Journal of Hospitality & Tourism Research*, 295-312. doi:10.1177/1096348006287161
- Lee, E., Lee, J.-A., Moon, J., & Sung, Y. (2015). Pictures speak louder than words: Motivations for using Instagram. *Cyberpsychology, Behavior, and Social Networking*, 18(9). doi:10.1089/cyber.2015.0157
- Lewis, R. C., & Chambers, R. E. (2000). *Marketing Leadership in Hospitality*. New York: John Wiley & Sons.
- Litvin, S., Goldsmith, R. E., & Pan, B. (2008). Electronic word-of-mouth in hospitality and tourism management. *Tourism Management*, 458-468.
doi:10.1016/j.tourman.2007.05.011
- Lockyer, T. (2000). A New Zealand investigation into the factors influencing consumers' selection of business hotel accommodation. *Australian Journal of Hospitality Management*, 7(2), 11-23.
- Lockyer, T. (2002). Business guests' accommodation selection: The view from both sides. *International Journal of Contemporary Hospitality Management*, 294-300.
doi:10.1108/0959611021043
- Machin, D., & Mayr, A. (2012). *How to do critical discourse analysis*. SAGE Publications.
- Manning, C., Raghavan, P., & Schütze, H. (2008). *Introduction to Information Retrieval*. Cambridge University Press.

- Marcus, S.-R. (2015). Picturing' ourselves into being: assessing identity, sociality and visuality on Instagram. *Presented at the international communication association*. Puerto Rico: San Juan.
- Mellinas, J., Maria-Dolores, S.-M., & Bernal García, J. (2015). Booking.com: The unexpected scoring system. *Tourism Management*, 72-74.
doi:10.1016/j.tourman.2014.08.019
- Mohd Ghazali, R., & Cai, L. (2014). Social media sites in destination image formation. In *Tourism Social Media: Transformations in Identity, Community and Culture*. Emerald Group Publishing Limited. doi:10.1108/S1571-5043(2013)0000018007
- Morgan, D. L. (1996). Focus Groups as Qualitative Research. In *Qualitative Research Methods Series* (Vol. 16). SAGE Publications.
- Munar, A., & Steen Jacobsen, J. (2014). Motivations for sharing tourism experiences through social media. *Tourism Management*, 46-54.
doi:10.1016/j.tourman.2014.01.012
- Mussio, M. (2017, Jan 12). *White Sheets in Hotels: What's the Big Deal with Changing Them?* Retrieved from Les Roches: <https://www.lesroches.edu/blog/white-sheets-in-hotels-whats-the-big-deal-with-changing-them/>
- Mutinga, D. G., Moorman, M., & Smit, E. G. (2011). Introducing COBRAs: Exploring motivations for brand-related social media use. *International Journal of Advertising*, 13-46. doi:10.2501/IJA-30-1-013-046.
- Narangajavana, Y., Callarisa Fiol, L., Moliner Tena, M., Rodríguez Artola, R., & Sanchez Garcia, J. (2017). The influence of social media in creating expectations. An empirical study for a tourist destination. *Annals of Tourism Research*, 60-70.
- Neelamegham, R., & Jain, D. (1999). Consumer choice process for experience goods: An econometric model and analysis. *Journal of Marketing Research*, 373-386.
doi:10.1177/002224379903600306
- Nelson, P. (1970). Information and consumer behavior. *Journal of Political Economy*, 78(2), 311-329.

- Obar, J. A., & Wildman, S. S. (2015). Social Media Definition and the Governance Challenge - An Introduction to the Special Issue. *Telecommunications policy*, 39(9), 745-750.
- Öğüt, H., & Onur Taş, B. (2012). The influence of internet customer reviews on the online sales and prices in hotel industry. *The Service Industries Journal*, 32(2), 197-214. doi:10.1080/02642069.2010.529436
- Oliver, R., & Swan, J. (1989). Equity and disconfirmation perceptions as influences on merchant and product satisfaction. *Journal of Consumer Research*, 372-383. doi:10.1086/209223
- Park, D.-H., Lee, J., & Han, I. (2007). The effect of on-line consumer reviews on consumer purchasing intention: The moderating role of involvement. *International Journal of Electronic Commerce*, 11(4), 125-148. doi:10.2753/JEC1086-4415110405
- Park, S., & Nicolau, J. (2015). Asymetric effects of online consumer reviews. *Annals of Tourism Research*, 67-83. doi:10.1016/j.annals.2014.10.007
- Pieters, J. (2018, Feb 5). *Rotterdam tourism sets new record with massive visitor influx*. Retrieved from NL times: <https://nltimes.nl/2018/02/05/rotterdam-tourism-sets-new-record-massive-visitor-influx>
- Pizam, A., & Milman, A. (1993). Predicting Satisfaction Among First Time Visitors to a Destination by Using the Expectancy Disconfirmation Theory. *International Journal of Hospitality Management*, 12, 197-209.
- Qazi, A., Tamjidyamcholo, A., Gopal Raj, R., Hardaker, G., & Standing, C. (2017). Assessing consumers' satisfaction and expectations through online opinions: Expectation and disconfirmation approach. *Computers in Human Behavior*, 450-460.
- Reichheld, F., & Schefter, P. (2000). *E-loyalty: Your secret weapon on the Web*. Retrieved from <https://hbr.org/2000/07/e-loyalty-your-secret-weapon-on-the-web>
- Schneider, B., White, S. S., & Paul, M. C. (1998). Linking service climate and customer perceptions of service quality: Tests of a causal model. *Journal of Applied Psychology*, 83(2), 150-163. doi:10.1037/0021-9010.83.2.150
- Schoop, M. (1999). A theoretical framework for speech act based negotiation in electronic commerce. In S. Klein, *Negotiations and Interactions in Electronic Markets, Proc.*

- 6th Research Symposium on Emerging Electronic Markets (pp. 79-89). Münster, Germany.
- Senecal, S., & Nantel, J. (2004). The influence of online product recommendations on consumers' online choices. *Journal of Retailing*, 159-169.
doi:10.1016/j.jretai.2004.04.001
- Sheldon, P., & Bryant, K. (2016). Instagram: Motives for its use and relationship to narcissism and contextual age. *Computers in Human Behavior*, 89-97.
doi:10.1016/j.chb.2015.12.059
- Sotiriadis, M. D. (2017). Sharing tourism experiences in social media: A literature review and a set of suggested business strategies. *International Journal of Contemporary Hospitality Management*, 29(1), 179-225.
- Sozer, E. G. (2019). The effect of message valence on e-WOM spread: A moderated mediation analysis. *Business and Economics Research*, 10(2), 541-555.
doi:10.20409/berj.2019.184
- Statista. (2019). *Most popular social networks worldwide as of January 2019, ranked by number of active users (in millions)*. Retrieved from Statista:
<https://www.statista.com/statistics/272014/global-social-networks-ranked-by-number-of-users/>
- Stringam, B., & Gerdes, J. (2010). An analysis of Word-of-Mouse ratings and guest comments of online hotel distribution sites. *Journal of Hospitality Marketing & Management*, 773-796. doi:10.1080/19368623.2010.508009
- Sundaram, D., Mitra, K., & Wenster, C. (1998). Word-of-Mouth communications: A motivational analysis. *Advances in Consumer Research*, 25, 527-531.
- Sweeney, J. C., Soutar, G., & Mazzarol, T. (2008). Factors influencing word-of-out effectiveness: Receiver Perspectives. *European Journal of Marketing*, 42(3-4), 334-364. doi:10.1108/03090560810852977
- Tactics, I. (2017, Sep 30). *Business models compared: Booking.com, Expedia, TripAdvisor*. Retrieved from <https://www.innovationtactics.com/business-models-tripadvisor-booking-com-expedia/>

- Wang, L. (2010). Wang, L. 2010. The individuals disposition to trust as a moderator of the relationship between electronic words-of-mouth and consumer brand attitude. *Proceedings of the 5th International Conference on Cooperation and Promotion of Information Resources in Science and Technology*, (pp. 700-704).
- Wang, Y., & Fesenmaier, D. (2004). Modeling participation in an online travel community. *Journal of Travel Research*, 261-270. doi:10.1177/0047287503258824
- Welcome to Rotterdam. (2019). Retrieved from Rotterdam tourist information: <https://en.rotterdam.info/about-rotterdam/welcome-to-rotterdam1/>
- Westbrook, R. A. (1989). Product / consumption-based affective responses and postpurchase processes. *Journal of Marketing Research*, 258-270. doi:10.2307/3151636
- White, L. (2010). Facebook, Friends and Photos: A Snapshot into Social Networking for Generating Travel Ideas. In *Tourism Informatics: Visual Travel Recommender Systems, Social Communities, and User Interface Design*. doi:10.4018/978-1-60566-818-5.ch007
- Whiting, A., & Williams, D. (2013). Why people use social media: a uses and gratifications approach. *Qualitative Market Research: An International Journal*, 16(4), 362-369. doi:10.1108/QMR-06-2013-0041.
- Williams, R., Wiele, T., Jwaarden, J., & Eldridge, S. (2010). The importance of user-generated content: the case of hotels. *The TQM Journal*, 117-128. doi:10.1108/17542731011024246
- Yap, K., Soetarto, B., & Sweeney, J. (2013). The relationship between electronic word-of-mouth motivations and message characteristics: The sender's perspective. *Australasian Marketing Journal*, 21(1), 66-74. doi:10.1016/j.ausmj.2012.09.001
- Ye, Q., Law, R., Gu, B., & Chen, W. (2011). The influence of user-generated content on traveler behavior: An empirical investigation on the effects of e-word-of-mouth to hotel online bookings. *Computers in Human Behavior*, 634-639. doi:10.1016/j.chb.2010.04.014
- Yoo, K., & Gretzel, U. (2008). What motivates consumers to write online travel reviews? *Information Technology & Tourism*, 10(4), 283-295. doi:10.3727/109830508788403114

- Yoo, K.-H., & Gretzel, U. (2011). Influence of personality on travel-related consumer generated media creation. *Computers in Human Behavior*, 27(2), 609-621. doi:10.1016/j.chb.2010.05.002
- Younhee Ha, E., & Lee, H. (2018). Projecting service quality: The effects of social media reviews on service perception. *International Journal of Hospitality Management*, 69, 132-141. doi:10.1016/j.ijhm.2017.09.006
- Zeamer, V. J. (2018). *Internet killed the Michelin star : the motives of narrative and style in food text creation on social media*. Retrieved from <https://dspace.mit.edu/handle/1721.1/117899>
- Zhang, Z., Ye, Q., Law, R., & Li, Y. (2010). The impact of e-word-of-mouth on the online popularity of restaurants: A comparison of consumer reviews and editor reviews. *International Journal of Hospitality Management*, 29(4), 694-700.

7 APPENDICES

7.1 Appendix 1. Focus groups Topics

Hotel experiences of the participants

1. How often do you travel?
2. Do you mostly travel for business or of leisure purposes?
3. What type of accommodation do you prefer when travelling abroad and for what reasons?
4. What are the accommodation attributes that you value the most when looking to book a hotel room? (cleanliness, hotel view, location etc.)
5. When was the last time you stayed in a hotel? Where and which hotel was it?
6. Do you remember something specific concerning your stay at the hotel? Something good or bad, that really caught your attention. What was it?

e-WOM in hotel industry and trustworthiness

1. How do you search for and book your accommodation when planning a trip? Do you use online platforms? Which ones and why?
2. Do you prefer the official websites of the hotel properties or the content that is generated by previous guests (e.g. online review, blogposts, photos, etc.), and for what reasons?
3. Do you search for online reviews or other posts concerning the accommodation before booking it?
4. Are you likely to read the comments on an **online review website** such as Booking.com before booking the hotel room?

What if the negative reviews are more than the positive ones? Do you still book the hotel room you were interested in, or do you search for another hotel?

On the other side, if you see a lot of positive reviews about a hotel room, do you trust them and book the room? When you actually stayed at the hotel, did it meet your expectations?

Can you describe any relative experiences you had with online reviews when booking a hotel room?

5. Do you also consider **social media** (e.g. Instagram) as an efficient way to obtain information about a hotel property?

Have you ever used a social media platform in order to find more information about a hotel and eventually booked a room?

Was it a recommendation of a friend, or someone you follow / an influencer?

6. For you what is more **trustworthy**: A written online review about the hotel or an image? Have you ever visited or booked a hotel because of a beautiful Instagram picture or a post that you saw on a social media website?

If **yes**, how did you feel after your visit or stay there? If **no**, why? Do you think that Instagram pictures / or social media generally don't represent reality?

7. **Showing content from the two platforms-**

First example: *Hotel Staff*

Reviews about the staff members on Booking.com VS Instagram photo posted by a staff member on personal social media account the same day.

How do these pictures make you feel? Which one do you feel is closer to reality? Would these comments affect your choice?



Reviewed: 2 January 2019

Such a Comfortable Stay.

😊 · The room and hotel is great for our stay.
Bathroom is just perfect. View from our room is amazing.
Location is not bad although not in center, but metro is just walking distance.

😞 · I notice that the ladies in the reception area are not exactly the most friendly customer service.



Reviewed: 2 January 2019

Great view, have to hire new staff

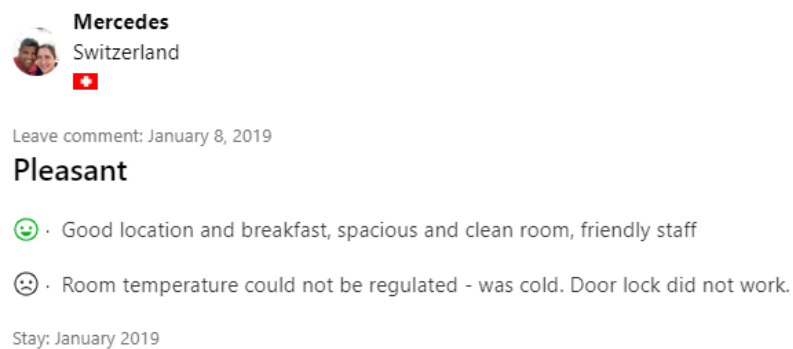
😊 · View from the bar terras.

😞 · Staff not up the par at 31-12. Grumpy and not paying attention. No desk in the room.
Most staff at 1st and 2nd of January also not very welcoming.



8. **Second example: *Breakfast***

Does the picture of the breakfast meet the expectations created when first reading the online reviews? Why / Why not? What did you expect?



9. So, according to your point of view, amongst online review sites (e.g. Booking.com) and social media platforms (e.g. Instagram), which one provides more accurate information about the hotel and why?

Willingness to share UGC

1. Why do you feel that people might want to share either positive or negative experiences?
2. Are you keen on **sharing** your personal hotel-room experiences online after your stay?
If yes, on which platforms (personal account or online review site) and on which form (photo, video, recommendation etc.)?
3. What are your **motives** for sharing your personal online experiences? Why do you do it?
4. Do you usually share positive or negative content regarding your hotel experiences?
5. What did you expect from sharing your comments, thoughts or pictures with the online community?
6. Can you describe a time that you shared a positive / negative experience online, and a reaction to that, either from the hotel or another guest?

7.2 Appendix 2: Visual Analysis of Instagram Pictures

Selective Codes	Axial Codes	Open Codes
Interior Design	Furniture	Office desk, sofa, bed, office-style chair, table,
	Art pieces	Lamps, mirror, posters, wall art, paintings, candles, photographs
	Special Decorations	Christmas tree, Christmas decorations, balloons,
	Color Palette	Black wall, white, wall paintings, red, dark lighting
Food & Drinks	Food	Bread, butter, rice, meat products, vegetables, yogurt, cheese, chocolate
	Drinks	Beer, wine, cocktail, bottles of alcohol, orange juice
Outside Views	Rotterdam Landmarks	Erasmus Bridge, Old town hall, River Maas, Skyscrapers
	Nature	Sunrise, sunset, canal, clouds, sky, park
Hotel Amenities	Public spaces	Bar -restaurant area, elevator, lounge area, pool
	Private amenities	Bedroom, bathroom, bathtub, jacuzzi, hairdryer, coffee machine, towels, TV

7.3 Appendix 3: Thematic Analysis of focus groups

Thematic Analysis		
Selective Codes	Axial Codes	Open Codes / Quotes
Hotel aspects	location	we usually sacrifice the budget thing in favor of the location / I would not book something cheap that's far away from the city center / I prefer to get the right location /
	value for money	the money is really a priority for us. / we are with friends our first priority is just to maintain a certain budget /
	facilities	The things that I prefer are usually like terraces, balconies. / the fact that you got the breakfast /
	service	so the guy went to the shop and he bought it and bring it to my room, I gave him a good tip he deserved it / that chef, that was a French chef and uh, every night he was asking us what we want to eat /
	cleanliness	His priorities. sanitary policy, very clean
	positive feedback	you consider it next to your demographics
Sentiment	negative feedback	I would either figure it out myself rather than have a bad review say about it / if I saw a bad review and I still chose to go to the place, I would arrive there open minded / if I see lot of negative reviews, I might consider booking the hotel if it's the last resort and I really need to stay somewhere. /
	Sharing positive /negative feedback	I share my experience only on the websites that request. / I write a review when there's something very exceptional to say, either it's very good or very bad / if there is something like really bad or really good and you want to let them known, and the other people. / I don't really share a good experience to be honest /
Platforms	credibility of online review websites	Even these reviews are not objective. When I see reviews for the staff, I think that there is always a cause because you know that the staff is not always their fault. / I prefer to go to specialized websites and then you will get like proper information /
	credibility of social media content	I don't go to social media to get any advice or any information about what people see about that / everything they will be a perfect version of reality. /also what you see on social media all the comments you see underneath they never have to do with the hotel / It has to do with personality.