

Chapter 7

Negative Customer Experience in Lifestyle Hotels: A Netnography Perspective

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ABSTRACT

The primary purpose of the present research is to develop a methodology which can accurately analyse online public reviews on Google using Netnography studies combined with text mining analyses. By analysing the current techniques applied to a lifestyle hotel brand in nine properties in different countries and carefully studying how negative reviews are expressed online by costumers, this study aims to create a pattern of lifestyle customer complaints. This research seeks to demonstrate patterns of consumer behaviour that are not fully satisfied with the hotel service and how it can negatively affect the brand. This study identifies the areas that five stars lifestyle hoteliers and hotel managers need to pay attention to improve services, considering online reviews on online platforms, such as social networks and other tourism sites. Today, online reviews and customer experiences have a significant impact on the choice of a hotel.

INTRODUCTION

The tourism and hotel paradigm is changing. After years of standardisation, in which brands provided consumers with products that were consistent across the marketplace, there is growing attention to more differentiated products offering in the lodging sector (Kosar, 2014). Nowadays there is a concern on the part of the hoteliers in providing unique and unforgettable experiences to their customers. It is in this

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context that the boutique and lifestyles hotels emerge, being one of the trends with higher growth in the area of tourism.

The concept of lifestyle hotel is frequently used as a synonym for a boutique hotel, even though they refer to two distinct hotel typologies. Therefore, it is imperative to differentiate a boutique hotel from a lifestyle hotel. Studies have demonstrated that some of the main attributes of boutique hotels are related to their visitor's preferences, namely to their location, their personalised services, their quality and the uniqueness of the hotel itself (Aggett, 2007; McIntosh & Siggs, 2005). Furthermore, some other characteristics of this typology of hotels are related to the focus on the customer experience and the interior design, not being necessarily small and independent hotels, since they have several properties with different types of capacity (Kosar, 2014).

Nevertheless, the entrance of global hotel brands within the boutique hotel sector ended up imposing the need to distinguish small, independent, classic, original – real boutique hotels. Therefore, brand hotel operators started to use the concept of lifestyle hotel to refer to new specific chains under their portfolio. According to the Boutique and Lifestyle Lodging Association (BLLA) (2011, cit. in Kosar, 2014), a lifestyle hotel is a subcategory of a boutique hotel, the term of lifestyle referring to a property that combines activities and living elements into functional design, allowing customers to explore the experiences that they truly desire. With a classification that is valid to date, Day et al. (cit. in Kosar, 2014) defined the concepts of boutique hotels and lifestyle hotels as follows:

- 1) Boutique hotels are frequently small hotels with high-quality services, providing authentic cultural or historical experiences, as well as exciting services, being considered as unique hotels;
- 2) Lifestyle hotels are often small to medium-sized hotels, providing innovative services and features. These hotels also tend to present some contemporary design features, providing highly personalised service to their customers, what truly differentiates them from larger hotel brands.

Still, lifestyle hotels imply more than just a small or medium-sized contemporary designed property, given the fact that they suggest the integration of parts for an entirely meaningful live-work-play environment. Overall, these hotels include design, dynamic, art, fashion and colourful environments, which are related to an entire demographic segment. They are frequently focused and specialised, aiming to provide a differentiated quality to their customers, making them feel very exclusive and essential. Moreover, lifestyle hotels tend to offer a very full-balanced stay, since they use experiential branding as a component of positioning strategies, providing their customers with a pleasurable experience and promoting the customer interaction with the hotel brand itself (Kosar, 2014).

In sum, lifestyle hotels include all types of hotels that are genuinely able to manage the experience of distinct market segments successfully, and at all levels of the products. Such ability is achieved through uniqueness, especially by monitoring consumer behaviour and lifestyle, since it recognises what constitutes their uniqueness. In other words, lifestyle hotels combine their uniqueness with the consumer's individuality, providing them with the best experience they can ever have when visiting such hotels. According to Kosar (2014, p. 48), “(...), the hotel will harmonise its services to the guests' lifestyles and thus acquire the attributes of 'lifestyle' hotels”.

Even though lifestyle hotels are generally 5-stars and are based on the quality of service, what are the main issues that can lead this consumer to make a complaint on a public review platform? Is it possible to identify and catalogue such complaints in an organised and secure manner to improve services?

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