



THE WORLD FIRST CROWDSOURCED HOTEL: THE AMBERLAIR

8th Semester Project



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I. Introduction

In the recent years the global trends and challenges transformed the tourism practices and the habits of the travellers. The increased role of the social media in the tourists' decision making processes resulted in the more conscious attitude of the travellers, and nowadays it is easier than ever before to share the negative and positive experiences about certain places. The term itself social media refers to the phenomenon that with the use of the Internet and social networking sites, the people not just "consume" content, but "produce" as well, when they share information with pictures, blog posts etc. Therefore the social media means a huge potential for the tourism businesses in the promotion of their products and services, and in the engagement of possible guests (Leung et al., 2013). According to Dellarocas (2003), "social media provide tourism companies with unprecedented opportunities to understand and respond to consumer preferences" (Dellarocas, cited in Leung et al., 2013, p. 4).

I.I. Problem Statement and Introduction of the case study

The greatest challenge for the travel industry and the marketing of the tourism products has always been to overcome the perceived risk felt by the consumers, during their decision-making process regarding a certain service, product or destination (Nusair et al., 2013). The use of online platforms opened a new frontier for the tourists in order to maximize their travel experience and minimize the risks of purchasing an intangible product, on the other hand, for the travel businesses it also can be beneficial, as it enhances the travelers' commitment toward organizations and brands. Fullerton (2003) indicates, that the shared values lead stronger customer commitment and loyalty, than temporary price reductions. The shift of the marketing campaigns, from attracting attention, to the building of customer trust can be observed as well in the recent years (Nusair et al., 2013).

The change of attitude of the travelers was accelerated by the Internet, but it was not the only factor. The economic recession, competition between tourism businesses, low-cost airlines etc. also affected the decision-making of the tourists regarding the length and destinations of the travels. People started to seek closer destinations for long weekends, instead of one or two long vacations per year, and their demand increased for the "see more, spend less" kind of offers, however at the same time a tendency toward high quality and personalised services also can be observed.

The appearance of the boutique hotels are dated back in the late 1980s, in huge cities like London or New York. The main characteristics of these hotels are that they are small

(cannot consist more than 150 rooms), their design is unique, their services (restaurants, bars) are outstanding and they usually owned by private investors (<http://blog.stayful.com/boutique-hotel/>). The main mission of the boutique hotels to give the guests personalized service and unique experience during their stay. The limitation in the number of rooms enable this kind of small-scale tourism. However it seems that the effects of social media give a unique twist to this sector in the travel industry. With the appearance of the world's first crowdsourced boutique hotel, a new era could begin in the history of these hotels.

The Amberlair is the world's first crowdfounded and crowdsourced boutique hotel, created by Kristin Lindenberg and Marcus Orbé. Actually, the hotel is not opened yet, the planning process is still going on, whereas the fund raising can start next year and hopefully, in 2018 the hotel can receive its first guests.

Both Marcus and Kristin had worked in the travel industry, before they came up with the idea of the Amberlair. During their travels, they realised how impersonal and similar the hotels are everywhere in the world, and this led them to take a twist not just to establish a boutique hotel, but through the practice of crowdsourcing. The birth of the Amberlair is strongly connected to the online community of Boutique Hotel Lovers, who are unified under the hashtag #BoHoLover. The Amberlair has about 1300 followers on Twitter from all over the world, with their help the aim is to create "a hotel for the people, by the people" and empower the hotel guests to take part in the planning process and have a say in every detail of it. Even the name for the hotel was chosen through the German crowdsourcing platform, 12designer, Anyone can join the movement, the members do not necessarily have to work in the travel industry, the important connection between them is that they are passionate and concious travellers. There are three ways to be part in the project: being a partner, an ambassador or a guest.

The main reason why I chose this topic, is that I think the concept behind the Amberlair involves many innovative ideas, and there are many aspects and questions related to it. I aim to focus on the role of the online community in the Amberlair project, and I mainly organize my study around the question of service quality and quality management. As a person who has already worked in the travel industry, I find the quality of the service extremely important and I think that in today's world this is among the key components which makes a turism business sucessful, yet in many cases it is a low estimated factor. Since I got involved in the tourism industry, I always had very high expectations towards myself regarding the quality of my work and the impression I made on the guests but this is also true when I'm going on a vacation, as I became more critic regarding the services I get. I am

sure, that everyone is familiar with the feeling when they arrived somewhere and got disappointed because their expectations did not meet the received services, and they thought about the things they would have done differently. Nowadays it is easier to express these critics than ever before, and what makes the case of Amberlair extremely interesting for me, is that it empowers the people of the online community of #BoHoLover to express their opinion about the hotel and form together it into a visitor friendly location. Most of the people are not professionals and do not work in the tourism industry, and this is the greatest thing in this project. The members share their enthusiasm and passion about travel and boutique hotels, the Amberlair can be regarded as the materialization of it.

1.2. Research question

Taking my personal experiences I aim to analyse the Amberlair through the following question.

What are the critical points of quality management in the case of hotels and how crowdfunding can offer a solution them in the future?

To answer this question, I will introduce and analyse the standards of the Sofitel, a luxury hotel brand, and discover the crucial points in quality management. This will lead me to the analysis of the role of Amberlair and the online community in the tourism businesses.

1.3. Research objectives

1. Explore the relationship between the Amberlair and the community – how their commitment can be strengthened towards the brand.
2. Explore and analyse the difficulties the project might face with in the future.
3. Explore and analyse the limits of the online community of #BoHoLover.

2. Literature review

Tourism has always been a field of innovation, as the emerging new technologies and changing demands of the travelers has challenged it constantly. In the following chapter I aim to introduce and discuss the theories related to the quality management, in addition, place the case study within the framework of managerial innovations. I also aim to clarify the terms like "crowdsourced", "social media" and "online community" in the context of the tourism.

2.1. Crowdsourcing

The term "crowdsourcing", based on the contribution of the users and their networks, is a description of a web-based business model. In this model, the different individuals offer solution to the problems given by different companies. The crowdsourcing appeared first in the creative and design industries, the iStockphoto was among the first examples of the model. Anyone could become a photographer for the website, who made technically acceptable photos, regardless their content, then these photos can be purchased for credits (1 credit equal to 1 USD). This drastically decreased the prices of the stock photos, however the photographers get 20% everytime when their photo was purchased. The crowdsourcing heavily affects the labour market, as beside reducing costs, blurs the lines between the professionals and non-professionals. Crowdsourcing gives an opportunity to part-time workers and amateurs to discover their abilities and invest their free time into certain activities in exchange for some money. On the other hand this means, that this fee is much less than paying for professionals (Howe, 2006).

Other, traditional industries, such as corporate research and development also adopted this model. Experts can receive financial benefits in return solving specific problems, regarding R&D. Summarizing, the group of motivated individuals can come up with solutions faster and even cheaper, than professionals. Being a member of such community not only involves financial benefits, but also gives the individuals the impression that they do useful and enjoyable work at the same time. However, critics addressed to the crowdsourcing indicate, that the financial benefit paid to the crowd is only a small proportion compared to the profit gain by their ideas. Another serious concern is that the diversity of opinion cannot be guaranteed, as there are still many people who are the lack of the proper assets to join, or not even want to take part in these kind of activities. The demographic characteristic are also important, as the most active users are under 30, thus they more likely take part in the crowdsourcing as well (Brabham, 2008).

2.2. Social media

As in the introduction I already depicted, the social media can be defined as an overall term for platforms where the users not just consume, but generate content as well. The first social media platforms appeared in the middle of the 90s and they were the so called weblogs, these contained short notes and references to other webpages. Nowadays, the different types of social media web sites can be divided to 5 categories: blogs, content communities, social networking sites, virtual game worlds and virtual social worlds (Kaplan & Haenlein, 2010). The extreme attention, that the social media gets, indicates that we are in the middle of a new communication age (Kietzmann et al., 2011). The greatest opportunity, what social media means to businesses is that it can reach much more users with lower costs than with traditional ways of communication. Being or not being on social media is a crucial question both as a private person or a business. As a private person, it can be said that the social expectations are to take part in it, and use at least one of the big social networking sites, as for a lot of people being trendy is equal with the usage of social media, whereas for businesses it is essential to catch up with the trends and gain information about the market and consumers as fast as possible. Nowadays the likes and shares mean the preferences of consumers and businesses can build their marketing campaign around it (Kaplan & Haenlein, 2010). Social media enables to the users not just to communicate with the companies, but with other users as well, thus share their information, experiences etc. The social media multiplies the so called "word-of-mouth" effect and empowers the users. Few years ago people told about their experiences to their family members and friends, but now their word can reach more people than ever (Mangold & Faulds, 2009). According to Weber (2010), "one clever blog post, one devastating video – forwarded to hundreds of friends with a click of a mouse – can snowball and kill a product, or damage a company's share price" (cited in Kietzmann et al., 2011, p. 242) For example a few month ago a picture blew up the Internet. On the picture a note could be read which was found in a hotel room, under the bed sheet, and stated if the following guests found it, they could be sure that the bed sheet had not been changed. Even the hotel name was brought to public, however it could not be proved whether it was a fake photo, or a true one, yet it gain so much attention that the story was shared several times. This is one extreme example, however clearly illustrates the power of the social media and how fast negative contents can destroy a reputation of a business.

Although the power of the social media, there are still many businesses who have not recognized yet the importance of it, however for a successful social media presence strategies for monitoring, understanding and responding should be introduced (Kietzmann et al., 2011).

2.3. Online communities

Before I give the definition of the online community, I need to define what is the community itself. In the physical world, the community is a group of people, who live in the same place and share the same values like culture, economic activity, or the land and its ecosystems (Zalamea, 2014). According to Cohen (1985), being a member of a community means to share the same interests, solidarity, collective identities; and it is also characterized with 'collective responsibility' (WWF, 2001, p. 2).

The definition of the online communities has been debated, since even the fact "whether communities can exist online or not" (Malinen, 2015, p. 229) is discussed by many scholars. According to Cohen (1985), the community is a symbolic construction, which is mostly based on the feelings of the individuals. This is exactly what online communities are about, the sense of belonging somewhere, with people who understand us. The appearance of the social networking platforms also helped the individuals to create smaller groups based on the same interests, values and preferences (Mangold & Faulds, 2009). However, the success of an online community depends on the dedication of the community members. The members can be active participants, who generate the content, whereas there are passive members, who "consume" this content, and benefit from it, or they are also referred to as posters and lurkers (Lai & Chen, 2014). This creates a favourable, back and forth situation, as the passive users/lurkers, who are in the majority, contribute to the popularity of the community and motivate the active ones to generate more content. Of course, being a lurker does not mean that they never post anything, but less frequently than the average posters (Lai & Chen, 2014). With time, even shifts can happen from being a passive to an active user, as they develop their engagement towards the community. According to Kollock and Smith (1996), lurkers are "free-riders", however, many scholars argued with this, stating that they are passive because of personal reasons (being shy, busy, lack of knowledge about community tools, etc.) (Lai & Chen, 2014).

Motivations of the members are different, from volunteering for a "greater good", to more personal motivations, like building self-esteem and reputation. However, at the beginning stage, every member needs to build trust towards the community and then they can develop within it. The trustbuilding process can happen through discussions and comments and depends on how useful the information is provided by the community (Malinen, 2015).

2.4. Managerial innovations

We reached the age of knowledge based society, and innovation became the basic element for the development of businesses. The driving forces of the innovation are usually identified with new technologies, environmental and economical changes. New technology can improve significantly the productivity of tourism enterprises, and this even can be more effective, when it is combined with i.e. Human Resource Management (Hjalager, 2010). Hjalager (2010) named 5 categories of the innovation: product/service innovation, process innovation, managerial innovation, management innovation and institutional innovation. In my study I focus on the category of managerial innovation as it involves the questions of flexibility and labour force are the central problem of crowdsourcing businesses. According to Damanpour & Aravind (2011), "Managerial innovations are new organizational structures, administrative systems, management practices, processes, and techniques that could create value for the organization" (Damanpour & Aravind, 2011, p. 424). The challenges that tourism businesses need to face with are usually derive from the high fluctuation that characterizes the labour force of the whole industry, thus they need to find solutions to be flexible, retain the staff and control costs. Many companies aimed to implement this kind of innovation in their business culture, and include human feelings in their products as well, "building team spirit is also described as ... a prerequisite for further service improvements in companies" (Hjalager, 2010, p. 3). Managerial innovations can be implemented not only in the case of the paid employees, but in case of volunteers as well. In the recent years new targets of managerial innovations also appeared, for example the "managed customer", which means that the consumer take part actively in the production of the experience. However it is also emphasized that the so called lifestyle entrepreneurs are usually innovative on a small-scale (Hjalager, 2010).

2.5. Quality management

The empirical research of quality management is hindered by the difficulties of the measurement of reliability and validity of the topic. Even the definitions of quality are not homogeneous (Flynn et al., 1994). According to the definition of the Oxford Dictionary, the quality is a "degree of excellence of something", the www.bexcellence.org listed the several characteristics of it, such as quality is meeting with the expectations of the costumers or even exceeding them. Even distinguish the quality characteristics of products and services. In my case the focus is on the quality of the services, which is characterized with credibility, reliability, security, communication, and the understanding of the costumers. The drivers of

the quality are the followings: customers, products/services, employee satisfaction and organizational focus (<http://www.bexcellence.org/What-Is-Quality.html>). However the nature of the services makes it difficult to determine what is good quality. Services are characterized as intangible, heterogeneous and inseparable (Parasuraman et al., 1985).

According to the definition of the quality management, it is „an integrated approach to achieving and sustaining high quality output, focusing on the maintenance and continuous improvement of processes ... in order to meet or exceed customer expectations” (Flynn et al., 1994, p. 342). Many enterprise realized the real importance of quality management as it helps to achieve advantage in the competitiveness, thus the quality improvement must be a continuous activity (Flynn et al., 1994). In the tourism industry the quality of the service provides the competitiveness of businesses as the positive tourist experience is the key for success. The holistic quality approach aims to improve the process of the production, integrate the employee’s values and instead of producer-oriented quality management moves towards costumer-oriented perceptions. In addition, this approach emphasizes the role of the employees and their contribution to the quality (Muskat et al., 2013). The development of quality systems already occurred in big tourism companies, however the smaller businesses usually cannot afford those systems, however, they are constantly trying to improve their facilities (Augustyn, 1998).

Unfortunately, despite the importance of the quality management, in many tourism businesses the absence of it can be traced back to insufficient knowledge, unconcern and the lack of ability, which factors can occur both on the organizational and individual level (Muskat et al., 2013). However, others argue with this, stating that the main problem derives from the use of inappropriate quality systems (Augustyn, 1998). The difficulties regarding the quality management systems in the tourism also occur due to the complexity of the tourism product. The big companies use the benchmarking technique (which measures the performance), thus they can follow up their rivals, but not enough to gain thorough information about the costumers. In fact, the benchmarking indicates "the difference between the company and its best competitor" (Augustyn, 1998, p. 150). In a long run, this leads to dissatisfaction among the costumers, as the management conclusions about their satisfaction might be false. This is the so called tourism quality perception gap, and tourism businesses should start to use the same quality view as its costumers to solve this problem (Augustyn, 1998).

The GAP model is consisted of 5 components:

- Gap 1 – customer expectations vs. management’s perceptions about those expectations (knowledge gap)
- Gap 2 – management’s perceptions about the customer’s needs and specification of service quality (design gap)
- Gap 3 – service managerial quality specifications and the actual delivery of the service (performance gap)
- Gap 4 – service delivery and the company’s promises to the customer through external communication (communication gap)
- Gap 5 – the result is all the previous gaps (Dixit, 2013, p. 128)

Most research focus on Gap 5, however the other four gaps should be examined individually (Huang & Hsu, 2016).

Although, it must be noted, that not every guests share the same views on a certain product or service, as they have different motives and preferences. Thus, it is more and more difficult for the hotels to fulfill the guests’ demands and compete with its rivals at the same time. (Dixit, 2013).

3. Methodology

My task in the research is to analyse a trend that has appeared in the tourism industry recently, through an example of a hotel which has not opened yet. I used netnography and qualitative research methods for my study. The analysis part of the project is based on qualitative research, as I interviewed Kristin and Marcus, the owners of the Amberlair. Besides this, to answer my research question, I used my own experiences alongside with some data, extracted from the Internet. The netnography provides to collect data freely, as the participants do not even know about that what they posted, would be used for research, whereas in surveys for example, they might give different answers as they know that they are under observation. I aim to introduce and analyse the quality management system of a multinational hotel, namely the Sofitel Budapest Chain Bridge, which is a five star luxury hotel and belongs to the AccorHotels group. I chose this special hotel, because I worked there 1,5 years and I faced with guests’ complaints on a daily basis. From a certain period of time I realized a recurring patterns in the complaints, and since then I became really interested in the improvement of quality in tourism businesses. I intend to reveal the weaknesses regarding the quality of the hotel with the help of the GAP model, then compare

it with the aims of Amberlair, and examine those critical points where the crowdfunding can be the solution to these problems. I extracted data from the TripAdvisor feedbacks, where users can choose between 5 options, excellent – very good – average – poor – terrible. I listed the feedbacks of those guests who gave average, poor and terrible qualifications to the hotel, and summarized the most frequent reasons of the complaints. These reasons became the crucial or critical points, where improvement is needed, and based on these, I examined where crowdfunding hotels can or cannot mean solution to them. I collected data between the period of 7th-8th of July, 2016, so more negative feedbacks might be posted after this period.

The interview I made with Kristin and Marcus took place in June, 2016 via Skype, as the couple lives in Hamburg at the moment. I had approached them through the website of the Amberlair, where an e-mail address was provided. Our conversation based on my questions, which regarded the establishment of the hotel and quality management topics of course. They were very helpful and kind, and tried to answer my every question as much as they could.

The main difficulty of my research was the fact that the Amberlair itself has not opened yet, so I mainly focused my research on the answers of Marcus and Kristin, and the examination of the online community. The other difficulty was that being summer, everything slowed down and everyone went to summer holiday, which made my research slower than I wanted. Beside this, the other huge part of my research regarded the Sofitel, because it is an existing hotel, where I worked, which made the situation easier as I had exact datas and own experiences.

4. Analysis

Before I start to analyse, I would like to give a brief description about the Sofitel history. It was opened in 1964, Strasbourg, France in 1964. When in 1997 joined to the Accor Group, it had about 100 properties in 40 countries. After the Accor took over control, the immediate step was to reposition the brand, and create a luxury brand, which gives more appreciation to the whole group. Robert Gaymer-Jones, who at the time was the CEO of the Sofitel, and his team had to take all of the 206 properties separately and evaluate them, based on a "luxury index". By the time they finished with this procedure, only 89 properties remained in the brand, and they also created new standards. The most important aim was to give a French style, to each property, both in the design and in the gastronomy. Today with 120 properties worldwide, the most important target for them is to expand on the Middle and

Far East (<https://skift.com/2013/12/15/sofitel-ceo-recalls-whats-hes-learned-in-repositioning-the-brand/>).

4.1. The Sofitel standards

The standards of the Sofitel affect every segments of the hotel. Not just the design and the equipments are installed due to standards, but more importantly the service as well. Each job position has its own standards, that the employees need to memorize. There is even a position of Quality and Training manager, who's task is to monitor and make sure, everyone follows the standards, they also hold trainings for the employees. The aim of the standards were to introduce a unified quality for the brand, so when the guests travel around the world, it does not matter, whether the hotel is in Paris, Dubai, or Bangkok, they have to get the same experience and same service everywhere. From the very first day at work, they are not called anymore employees, but ambassadors, who represent the brand. Also, the most basic standards, that everyone encounters with on the first day are the grooming and the greetings. Everyone needs to wear brown suit, and the girls need to make their hair in bun. The other basic standards was the greeting, which meant that being a French company, as employees, we had to represent the French style and elegance in the eye of the guests. For the greetings, we used "Bonjour – Good afternoon, Bonsoir – Good evening" formulas. It was a nice idea, however, in reality it did not work so well. I was a receptionist, which meant that I had to learn many different standards for my position, and use them every time, when I talked with the guests. First of all, let me describe the problems, what the use of the basic standard, the greeting caused. Despite being a French company, most of the employees could not speak French, however everyone had to use the "Bonjour – Bonsoir" prefix. In reality it seemed, that when a non French guest arrived, they were surprised by the greeting. They did not really understand why we greet them in French, when the hotel is situated in Hungary, or simply they just felt this unnecessary. The situation was different, when a French guests arrived, and it happened really often. Most of them did not speak good English, however when they heard the greeting they supposed that the employee can speak French. This caused uncomfortable moments for the employees, as they had to explain, that they cannot speak French, and confusion for the guests, as they did not understand the situation, that why it is necessary then, and when they were explained that this is a standard for the brand, they still did not understand it. In reality, instead of creating the French atmosphere from the very beginning, this standard was regarded by the guests as unnecessary, confusing and sometimes even ridiculous.

Being a receptionist I encountered more difficult standards as well, as during the check in and check out different standards had to be used. Again, it was a good idea on paper, however in reality it was often simply impossible to apply them. As a busy hotel in the center of Budapest, the hotel was fully booked most of the year, which meant that there was a big amount of departures and arrivals almost every day. This caused huge queues in front of the reception desk, and there was simply no time to use the standards during the check in or check out procedure. For example, during the check in, there was a standard to accompany the guests to their rooms. However there were 8 floors, and when a lot of people were waiting for check in, there was physically impossible, to show all of them the way to their rooms. The check out was similar, as every time we should have left the reception desk and "break the barrier" with this gesture, and say farewell to the guests, handing them their receipts. However, again, when a lot of guests were waiting, this was just a waste of time and impossible to apply.

Another aspect of the standards was the constant stress to keep them. Beside the Quality and Training manager, there was someone else, who monitored their proper application: the mystery guest, who was hired by the company, to control the hotels and the employees. Most of the year it was a constant fear of the appearance of the mystery guest, as making a mistake was equal to the downgrade of the quality of the hotel. This often caused unnecessary stress for the employees, especially during the period when the supposed mystery guest finally arrived, and it happened usually during the most busiest weeks of the year. This put an extra tension on the shoulder of the employees, and every guest became a possible mystery guest. In my opinion it deteriorated the quality of the relationship between the guests and the employees, as a simple conversation became a threat.

Another situation which caused a constant stress was called the "Signature Call". This happened monthly, usually 4 times, when someone from the company called the hotel, and wanted to book a room. As this was an another alternative for the mystery guest, during each call a set of standards had to be kept as well, and everything was scored, even the response time, if it took so long, the quality was downgraded again. This often caused an inconvenient situation again for the employees, as these calls usually happened during the busy hours, when most of the guests standing in front of the reception desk.

With these examples I would like to emphasize, that the idea behind the standards are good, as they were meant to secure the quality of the brand, but in reality the application of them is impossible. For the employees they cause unnecessary stress, and for the guests there is no additional meaning behind them, so the real aim of the standards often does not reach the guests.

4.2. The Tripadvisor feedbacks

I summarized and analysed the feedbacks about Sofitel Budapest on Tripadvisor, ranked between average-poor-terrible and I found 213 out of 2744 ratings, it is 7,7%. The feedbacks were from 2005 to 2016 June, and as I moved back in time, there were fewer and fewer findings, in 2005 I only found two. This indicates how the importance of the online platforms and communities increased in the past 10 years. I created three categories for the negative feedbacks and I also listed the most commonly used adjectives, paired to those complaints. I summarized them in the following chart.

Type of complaint	Service	Condition of the rooms	The previous expectations did not meet with the experience
No. of complaints	107	78	28
Most commonly used adjectives	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Poor • Disappointing • Impersonal service • Long waiting time everywhere • No flexible employees • Impatient/rude employees 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Old/tired/small • Disappointing • Poorly equipped • Uncomfortable • Maintenance problems • The rooms looked different on the pictures 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Overpriced • Assigned to a different type of room than booked • The room type was booked had lower quality than the same in other hotels

Most of the complaints (107) regard the service of the hotel, especially the attitude of the employees was objectionable. I would identify this problem as performance gap (gap 3), where the service managerial quality specifications and the actual delivery of the service was different. The high number indicates the importance of human factor in the tourism industry, and the demand for a personalized service. Obviously, in a hotel that has above 300 rooms and where the guests stay for such a short period, it is impossible to give it to everyone. On the other hand, these feedback give more knowledge and understanding for the company about how the guests perceive the service they get, during their stay, so it makes easier in the future to eliminate them. Being able to recognize, that which department of the hotel they had inconvenient experiences (restaurant, front desk, reservation etc.) the management can focus on those specific areas and train the employees according to it. As Parasuraman et al. (1985, p. 45) noted, „employee performance cannot always be standardized”. The complaints regarding the long waiting time and not flexible employees,

may derive from those standards that had been laid down by the company, however this generalisation of a service cannot be applied in every situation.

The other big category of complaints regarded the condition of the rooms. Most of the critics were addressed to the old fashioned design, small and uncomfortable rooms. This represent a communication gap (gap 4), as the hotel offers a more favourable picture about the rooms on the internet, than in reality. For example, most of these complaints could occur, because there are two room types under the same pricing: classic and superior. In this case superior rooms mean renovated rooms, which situate above the 4th floor. This differentiation is not emphasized anywhere, however the clear differences are experienced by the consumers. On the other hand, many complaints arrived even for the superior rooms, as they still were condemned to be old fashioned. The design of the rooms mostly depends on financial resources, which the hotel lacks, yet there are many other issues, that could be improved by only a little investment. For example many guests missed the electronic sockets, usually found that there are only a few of them in the rooms, and those are also hidden. The wifi also a recurring object of complaints, in many comments it was mentioned that in the rooms it did not work properly. Maintenance problems for example with the aircondition also seem to be a long-time problem, yet nothing has been done yet to improve the system. All in these cases the external communication of the management leads the costumers to negative perceptions about the delivered service, and it leaves them in doubts which in the long-run leads to mistrust. Another aspect of the communication gap is the third category, when previous expectations did not meet with the experience. This category is very similar to the second one, yet I intended to examine it differently, because here the perceptions of the guests are influenced by their own knowledge. Out of the 28 complaints, the main problem of the guests were that they had previously already stayed in other Sofitels all around the world, however what they experienced here was below their expectations. Many of them emphasized that the certain type of room they stayed had low quality and uncomfortable compared to the same one in a different hotel. Other guests were complaining that they were assigned to a different type of room than they had previously booked, but most of these cases they expected higher quality and that is why they perceived their assigned rooms to be lower type. This is also the reason why they called the hotel and its services overpriced, as their perceptions did not meet with their previous expectations, and they felt that the management could not overcome this communication gap.

4.3. The analysis of the Amberlair

My own research about the Sofitel and the interview with the founders of the Amberlair strengthened my previous assumption, that there are certain critical points of the quality management, which should be improved, however the traditional hotels cannot cope with them efficiently. In this section I aim to highlight how the crowdsourcing can be the solution for them.

The most typical problem regards the service and during the interview it became clear for me that the general result that I get from the analysis of the TripAdvisor feedbacks is absolutely true and gives an overview about the whole industry. Kristin and Marcus not just exposed their own experiences, but they shared with me, that they made interviews with the members of the #BoHoLover community, and they also get the same answers from them. The service is based on human work and of course it means that there is a high emotional surplus that cannot be controlled every time during work, however the most common complaint regarding the service was that the guests did not feel important during their stay. The staff members did their work, but did not put any plus into it, they did not care about the well being of their guests, and their interaction with the guests was restricted to the very basic services. It both happened in the luxury hotels and in the normal ones. In many cases the guests become room numbers, which is inevitable for example in the case of the Sofitel, where there are c.a. 360 rooms, yet the guests want to have more attention during their stay. A regular guest just want to be listened, this is more important to them, than the standards which are not even familiar to them in a lot of cases. The solution that crowdsourcing can offer to eliminate this performance gap is that the aim of the Amberlair first listen to the possible guests, consider about their needs, their ideas and then after implement it in the reality. In my opinion, the key for a good service is always to consider what sounds nice on paper, and work there, and then to examine whether these ideas can work in reality as well. The intentions of the creators of the Sofitel standards were good, they wanted to differentiate the brand from the other brands, that many other hotel chains do the same practice, however what they did not consider was that how these standards work in the reality. They also did not think about that there are different situations, and these standards cannot be applied in all of them. When a hotel runs on such a high occupancy, there are other priorities than the standards and their applications. Behind the huge hotel chains and the regular hotels there are an investor, who do not really know what the guests really needs, and do not ask their opinion. The Amberlair has a totally opposite practice, they interviewed people, who are regular travelers, and asked them about their needs. They do not necessarily come from the

tourism industry, but as people who loves to travel and passionate about it, their ideas are very important and they have meaningful insights to the shortcomings of the services. With asking these travelers directly, means that a link between the customers and the and the stakeholders are connected, and they can quickly react to the problems, listed in the GAP model. As Kristin and Marcus emphasized, they are making a hotel with the help of the people, for the people. The #BoHoLover is a relatively small community, but they represent that growing layer of the travelers, who are concious about their travel decisions, looking for unique experiences and personalized services. Their passion for the boutique hotels and travelling connects them, and this also led them to the owners of the Amberlair. The social media made it possible to overcome the distance and create a virtual space, where these people, who live remote from eachother, can share their ideas with eachother, and the whole project is not restricted to only one certain area, but anyone can join from all around the world. Of course not every demand can be fulfilled and as everyone is different, not the same things are important to us, however the critical points of the quality management means general problems, which can be eliminated with focused efforts.

The design and the condition of the rooms was another critical point in the Tripadvisor feedbacks. In the crowdsourcing the people cannot only invest with money but with ideas and knowledge as well. For example is someone an interior designer, they can offer to invest with their knowledge and design the hotel. In addition the other members of the community can vote about the style and the design of the hotel, this way they are also involved in this process as well. This helps the competition, because gives the opportunity to anyone to invest with their own hidden talent and show what they know. The communication gap would also be eliminated this way, because the hotel and the rooms would be designed and equipped to serve the best the costumers' comfort, as they have a say in the design.

Another aspect of the crowdsourced hotels is that the community has the chance to get contact with the founders and have a talk with them. The hotel and the company get faces behind it, which can enhance the costumers connection towards the brand. The owners will not be anymore mysterious, faceless men, but ordinary people, who can be approached easily by their possible guests. The guests also can feel that their opinion is important, and someone listens to them. They can feel closer the brand to themselves if they can contribute to the development of the hotel with their ideas. They will feel that they can form the hotel and the brand themselves and this brings stronger emotional connection and commitment. This will also enhance the 'word of mouth' phenomenon, as the members will

share their experiences with their friends and family and might get their attention to take part in it.

Beside the positive characteristics of the crowdsourcing, I need to talk about the negative points as well. For example the question of that how can be assured that all the members are satisfied with the process and think that their opinion is important. The biggest threat for this online community is that there might be members, who will be always let down by the results of the votings and might feel that their ideas are left behind. At the moment the number of the members is managable, but later as more and more people would join, the ideas and the opinions would be multiplied. Another threat is that being a member of the #BoHoLover community, does not necessarily mean that they would visit the hotel itself, there is no such a guarantee for that. On the other hand the target group of the hotel is anyone, who is looking for unique experiences, not just necessarily the members of the community. The community works as a control group, who later might become a visitor, but at this stage their role is to form the hotel.

The greatest challenges, the Amberlair faces at the moment is to find the right property, which could be used as a hotel, despite the country had already been decided, Italy will be the home for the first Amberlair. The another great challenge is to organize the work and find the right people for the right positions, who can later be the part of the staff and the management team.

5. Conclusion

Being part of a huge international chain or a small local hotel, typical problems can be observed regarding the quality management. Through the example of the Sofitel Hotel I identified and analysed these critical points and I examined how a crowdsourcing hotel such as Amberlair can cope with these problems. I identified three main problems, each represent a gap in the quality management. The service, condition of the hotel and the expectations of the guests are all critical points, where most complaints occur. These gaps can be identified as performance and communication gaps, and the main problem is that often behind these hotels there are investors, who do not know much about how to fulfill the demands of the guests.

The Amberlair offers unique experiences, for the more and more concious visitors, who are looking for personalised service. With the help of the social media, the people can be brought together from different countries and they can express their opinion about the creation of the new hotel. The owners also can be reached easily which gives face to the hotel

and enhance the commitment towards the brand. However there are crucial points which should be launched for further research, such as how the growing of the community might influence the perception of the members and how they can validate their own ideas and opinions. Certain voices might loss in the crowd, which lead discontent.

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Appendix

Interview with Kristin Lindenberg and Marcus Orbé

1. How did you come up with the idea?

During our travellings we were searching for these particular boutique hotels, however we could not find so many, there were really beautiful destinations but they lack boutique hotels or small individual beautiful hotels, so we came up with the idea that we should do one. This has been in our mind for a long time, and during this period we talked with other travelers, and asked them what they like what they do not like. Normally a hotel is always built by one investor and he decides how it looks like inside, but they never ask the travelers what they really want or what they are missing. There are certain basic things, for example the wifi, which never works properly. Another thing is that many traveler mentioned that they are fed up with the traditional, conservative business things, like every hotel tries to sell something to them, such typical things they used to in hotels, but now they are looking for experiences and not for like an old-school luxury hotel. This is totally reversed now, what is important for the guests, the wifi, the nice atmosphere, what is cosy and charming, where they can work and meet, so all in all a nice design, not the old-looking one. Sustainability is also a huge issue today, you have to combine everything, so when we came back from our travels we were thinking that how could we apply all of these things, we knew that we would like to involve a lot of people, we were looking for some nice crowdfunding project, and this is how we decided that this could be a nice idea to create a crowdfunded hotel with the help of social media. We had to learn everything from the beginning, we had to find out how to build a community and ask the people whether they ever dreamed about their own hotel, how should it look like, what they are missing from the hotels. This is one of our main goals, to pull as many people in this process as we can, to design with them. This is what we are doing right now, we are creating a hotel with the people, for the people.

2. Tell me more about the #BoHoLover community

The hope of Amberlair is to let it crowdsourced and then the second step is to let people to invest in the company with their ideas etc. However it is not like a tiny project anymore, it is a huge investment that we are looking at the moment, we need the funds, so that is why we want to find as many people as we can. We already have a nice community, with very passionate supporters, who are engaged with us and with the brand. We don't want to do everything by our own, we hope that we can pull more people into the project, this is nice

and very interesting that we have supporters from all around the world and we can consider their ideas. These ideas are not listed, but they are in the posts we submitted online. In our #BoHoLover community, we already have 60 people, we interviewed them and posted these blogs online. This is the majority of our community at the moment and this is a good way to know how the members are really engaged in our project. This is also a nice characteristic of the crowdsourcing that you never know what comes next, sometimes you feel that the whole world is your company, you can pull anybody who is really interested in what we are doing. We are trying to tell the people what we want to accomplish, at the beginning we were asking for support but it is now a little bit reversed, people come to us and ask about our project, and they support us. Anyone can contribute to our hotel, there is no need to come from the tourism industry.

3. How do you want to accomplish the fundraising?

It will probably be launched in September or October and everybody can invest. There will be a platform I can't talk about right now, but everybody can login there and put a certain amount of money, as much as they want or as they can. Basically you can buy a share and then after you will get an interest rate and get the dividend annually. This is what we are working on right now.

4. Could you please name positive and negative experiences in hotels?

The service is the most important regarding the hotel, and it can depend on only one person, who can destroy everything. Of course we are talking about humans, and we are all emotional and sometimes it is really hard to do your job. The guests always feel great when the hotel staff remembers their name, because it creates an intimate relationship between them. However regarding the negative experiences, the guests experience them so many times, as they are usually the same typical problems, but the hotels are just unable to stop or eliminate them. Maybe some of these hotels don't care about them, or maybe in reality the guests' perceptions are that the hotels don't care. Everybody wants to be treated like a special guest, not like a number who gives the money for the services. When you are a returning guest of course it is important to you to be welcomed friendly, even recognized, because you give your respect to the hotel, but when the staff doesn't care about it, you might feel that you are not important. You might get your welcome upon check in, but later just nobody cares about you. Or after you paid your bill, you won't be important anymore, nobody will

help you, because you are not a guest anymore. In reality these tiny little things make the difference, when the guest can feel that they are special, for example listen to the guests, what they really want or what annoys them and then just stop it. These are all the things we would like to apply in our case, and figure out with our community, we listening to them, we are still collecting as many things as possible and implement in reality. If something is not organized you will feel uncomfortable, and that the hotel doesn't really care about its guests. For us the interior is also really important, and if something doesn't fit in the picture it can ruin the whole atmosphere, it can be a little piece of furniture, etc. Also, the bad or too good photos on the internet can be misleading. In the first case you just won't book it, in the second one you will be let down by the too good pictures, because it doesn't reflect the hotel in reality. The websites are also important, however most of the hotels miss a very good one. For example it can be difficult to make a booking via the website, and this means that they are losing money, because they are chasing people away from direct bookings. On the Expedia, and booking.com it is very easy to make a booking, but the hotels have to pay those fees after each booking, made on these websites. Even big hotel chains have nightmarish booking engines. In fact, there are a lot of things to consider about.

5. What are the most challenging things you face right now?

10 years ago the hotel industry just didn't exist to us from that perspective we are in right now. Our community chose Italy as a location for the first Amberlair, and we have a favourite property there right now. The issues we are facing there right now are connected to the region where it is located, because it is a very interesting part of the country, however not yet discovered by many. Although it could be booming in the next 5 to 10 years. For us it is very nice and we love it, but there are still many issues we have to solve. It is the first hotel we want to open, so it makes the things even more difficult, and we have to rely on our community, though we know that we have really good people and we can trust them. In addition we have to organize everything we have to get the right people on the right task, It is a new experience now, nobody has done a similar thing before. Some people said that we close the gap between AirBnB and the traditional hotel business. What we would like to do is to create an atmosphere which is cosy and charming and very local, that feels like home away from home, not the hotel feeling. Yet we are closer to the hotels as we will have hotel service, that you would not get in AirBnB. Maybe yes, we close the gap, but there are boutique hotels, existing all over the world they already offer kind of unique experience, but what we distinguish from these already existing hotels is that the guest has a say, which the

guest doesn't have neither in traditional hotels nor in AirBnB. This is the revolution in this project, we would like to as many oppinion and ideas of the guests as many we can. A boutique hotel itself can be an attraction, like a destination in itself, however it is really important to us, that the region we choose is interesting and charming as well. At the end, we would love to see that the people identify this hotel as a brand with their ideas in the center, and they will love it. We are open on Twitter and other social media platforms, so we hope that people can engage themselves easier, as they can chat with us, etc. This is not a complicated high level business, the future guests can approach us.

6. How will you organise the management of the hotel?

We won't do all the organisation and management things, but we would love to do as much as possible. However we can't do everything on our own, so we would like to appoint the right people with the proper skills. If a startup want to do everything on its own, it's a really bad startup. We need to rely on other people as well.

7. How would you like to advertise yourself in the future?

At the beginning we wouldn't spend money on advertising through traditional channels (television, newspapers etc.). For a startup like us, it is too costly. At the moment we fully concentrate on online marketing and social media and take the advantages of it. The targeting is easier on the social media, here you can easily identify a group of people, who are really interested in boutique hotels, but in the normal traditional media this is not going to happen. On the traditional platforms you never know who can be reached, maybe they are interested in the topic, maybe they are absolutely not, and that is a lot of money to waste for this kind of advertising.