

What are the differences and similarities between boutique and lifestyle hotels for professionals, consumers and students?

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<p>Lifestyle hotels are a current topic of interest in the lodging industry. As they continue growing rapidly, this phenomenon raises the question: if there is a difference between boutique and lifestyle hotels. Hence, the objective of this study is to investigate if consumers' and students' interpretations of boutique and lifestyle hotel match professionals' opinions.</p> <p>The scope of this paper involves three stakeholders, specifically industry professionals the creators of both concepts, guests consuming either products and students who can adapt to the two perspectives. To create the foundation for the comparison experts' opinions are discussed over various channels including results of previous research, individual opinions of current hotel representatives as well as collective viewpoints shared during panel discussions or on online lodging platforms. Furthermore, additional experts from related professions, such as hospitality lecturer, architects or consultants are considered.</p> <p>Moreover, a combination of two qualitative methods is applied to gather data by using the desk research technique and conducting a focus group interview. When executing the desk research method content analysis tools are appointed to detect professionals' viewpoints, which form the foundation of this study. The same principles are used when presenting consumers' associations with both hotel types by analysing Trip Advisor reviews of two representative properties in Helsinki, Hotel Haven and Glo Kluuvi. Additionally, a focus group interview is conducted with eight Haaga-Helia students, who can adapt to professionals' as well as consumers' roles.</p> <p>The findings gathered suggest that on a superficial level all three parties involved share the same understanding, but when analyzing those characteristics more closely it can be seen that those factors are very basic and therefore can be applied to any accommodation establishment. Those elements are location, service, design and facilities, which are physically presented in every property. Also, when analyzing the emotional response from all stakeholders involved similar results can be recognized. These attributes comprise comfort, a peaceful atmosphere as well as if the experience is recommendable, which apply to any accommodation property and cannot be merely used to determine boutique or lifestyle hotels. Consequently, the outcome of this study is that the stakeholders involved are not particularly aware of the differences between boutique and lifestyle hotels.</p>	
Keywords Boutique, Lifestyle, Characteristics, Trip Advisor, Consumer behaviour, Trends	

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1 Introduction

Currently boutique and lifestyle hotels experience a rapid growth in the hotel industry, yet there is no clear definition available of either. This led to the core question of this paper, namely if distinct parties involved associate the same characteristics with each term. The stakeholders involved are represented by hotel industry experts, consumers and students. Moreover, those attributes are compared to extract similarities and differences between both hotel types.

To create a base for the comparison opinions of hotel industry professionals are analysed to extract their original purpose and identify typical characteristics. When displaying the experts' views on both hotel types different approaches are applied, such as identifying trends and describing their impact as well as establishing a historical overview, which provides background information covering topics like original idea and first properties. Additionally, this paper refers to previous established studies and their findings, as some form the foundation of this study. Moreover, it includes current panel discussions of chain hotel representatives as well as various opinions shared on online platforms, where both concepts are discussed.

The consumer perspective is examined by analysing Trip Advisor comments of two properties in Helsinki, where each of them is representing either the boutique or lifestyle sector. In this process previous established characteristics of lodging experts are compared to consumers and additional attributes added.

Further, a focus group interview with students is executed to bridge the gap between professionals and consumers, as all students involved can adapt to both perspectives. Moreover, own attributes as well as all characteristics formed by professionals and consumers are argued and their importance is acknowledged. After highlighting all perspectives and extracting their associations with both hotel types a comparison is made to present similarities and differences.

The structure of this research consists of three main sections, of which the first provides a general overview by introducing the topic of interest, highlighting its objective and scope. The second part focuses on describing and justifying methods used to answer the previous set research question. Whereas the final section displays all results extracted and forms the conclusion.

1.1 Research problem and objectives

While the whole lifestyle phenomenon is a current topic of interest in the lodging industry, as it continues to grow rapidly, it also illuminates a challenge, which is a clear differentiation between boutique and lifestyle establishments. Therefore, the main research problem of this thesis is that both hotel types have never been clearly defined before entering the market and consequently now exist on a blurry level.

The objective of this study is to investigate if experts' associations with boutique and lifestyle match consumers' and students' interpretations. Those results are firstly used to see if all groups involved have the same understanding and if so some identifying characteristics can be extracted to form a baseline of comparison, which could help further research to clarify and differentiate the two hotel types involved. Moreover, it will also highlight if there is a need to establish a clear differentiation between both hotel categories, as one outcome could also be that they are clearly different for all parties involved and as a result there would be no need to investigate further.

1.2 Justification

There is still no accepted definition of either hotel type and therefore generally speaking it should be of best interests for both to find points of differentiation to set each other strategically apart in this increasingly competitive market place. Especially here in Helsinki where the majority of hotels are clearly positioned in the same field and therefore are in danger to compete on price. But as this study is not tackling this general question, it will focus on providing an insight on how three stakeholders involved, namely industry experts, consumers and students, picture both hotel forms by identifying their main characteristics. All opinions made are compared and analyzed to see if the parties' individual understanding shows similarities or is completely different.

Should those three main opinions not be inline it will create at least the necessity for the industry to work on clarifying both terms. If the opposite applies it means that both terms are obviously clear to all parties involved and that there is no need to invest in clarifying them.

1.3 Research outline

As previously mentioned this study represents three viewpoints, which is visualized in figure 1, to compare if the general understanding of boutique and lifestyle hotel is identical or to see if there is a need to establish a clear definition of both terms.

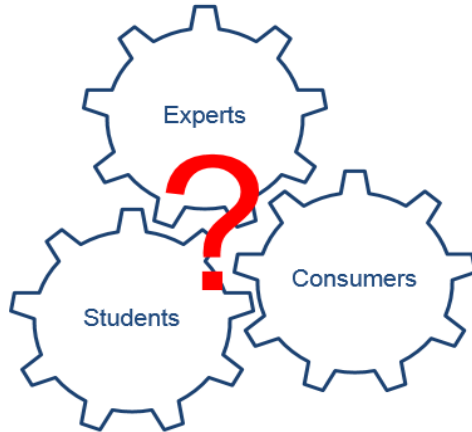


Figure1. Outline sketch (Götz 2015)

The lodging experts, who are the active creators and developers of both hotel concepts, are firstly stating their original idea and characteristics, which are used as the foundation throughout this study. Those results are based on secondary research, which includes previous studies conducted in this field, panel discussions and interviews published on various online hotel platforms.

To be able to measure the coherence between the intended messages drafted by professionals, the consumer side is consulted. Therefore, Trip Advisors comments from two representing hotel properties in Helsinki are chosen, namely Hotel Haven indicating the boutique sector and Glo Kluuvi representing lifestyle hotels. Those are analyzed according to the previously set criteria, formed by experts. Also, more factors are added to highlight the consumers' perspective and emphasize their needs. The results generated are visualized in diagrams to facilitate the comparison.

To breach the gap between industry professionals and consumers a focus group interview with students is conducted. As a wide spectrum of students is participating some of them can be called future experts, as their major is Hotel Management. The other students with a different course of studies are more drifting to the consumer side. The data collected is primary, which means that the researcher can actively control the process and ask questions to ensure all topics are covered, which is rather impossible in the previous parts. Towards the end all findings are compared and final conclusions drawn.

2 Boutique and lifestyle hotels

The Boutique and Lifestyle Lodging Association (BLLA), a leading hospitality industry association dedicated to represent independent boutique and lifestyle properties made the first effort to develop universal standards and criteria to define both concepts in order to give them the opportunity to better advertise themselves. Their first attempt discovered that both types were defined by particular physical attributes, which are exhibit in the table below.

Table 1. Physical attributes based on BLLA research

Physical attributes:
Culture, history
Independent (no chain)
Many, high-quality-in-room features
Social space, such as living room and libraries, with social events
Innovative
Personal, unique
Contemporary, modern

(HN hospitalitynet 2012)

The final outcomes, however, illustrated that guests do not mainly define those hotel concepts based on physical characteristics, but also consider the experience. Therefore, emotional responses such as discovery, curiosity, intrigue and amazement, were added to the mix. After establishing this general rules, which was applicable for both concepts an additional study was conducted to identify differences. The result suggests that boutique hotels are more contemporary and highly technological orientated featuring unique design and architecture. Further, they are often represented by small historical properties. Lifestyle hotels on the contrary emphasize more ancillary services and focus more on wellness and life - enrichment. (Jones, Day & Felitti 2013.)

When discussing the emotional experience guests encounter in both properties different emotions are associated with each category. Boutique hotels for instance are described as personalized, customized, unique and individual. Their essential features comprise authenticity, history and culture, providing interesting, unique services and do not belong to a chain. Moreover, social spaces such as living rooms and libraries are of high importance as well as high quality in-room features. Lifestyle hotels on the contrary are characterized as innovative, personal, contemporary and modern. (Jones & al. 2013.)

2.1 Influence of trends

To better understand the whole lifestyle phenomena, one needs to familiarize more with the customer behavior change and its consequences. According to Mooney and Rollins (2008, 12 - 40) this major change in consumer behavior was caused by the digital world, which forms a social ecosystem, where consumer create, control and own, turning them to "Icitizen". Due to the internet empowerment consumers' expectations continue to grow, enabling them to dictate marketplace dynamics. Brands can no longer control consumers' created online space and therefore have to embrace a new perspective to stay in business, by putting the customers first and adopting their perspective. This would mean forming multidimensional relationships with consumers to allow them to participate by creating, sharing and influencing the brand as well as others. In order to successfully engage with consumers brands they have to pursue an O.P.E.N strategy. This means being on demand, personalized, engaging and offering a strong network. When trying to understand and embrace the innovative reality this O.P.E.N metrics system by Mooney and Rollins offers new ways of nurturing innovative thinking, where Icitizen's powers lie in being the medium and message. (Mooney & Rollins 2008.)

Technology plays here a significant role as it is an intrinsic part of those individuals, creating constantly new options, which initiated and revolutionized consumer's behavior. As a result a human network was created, where collective intelligence serves each individual as a database. According to Brian Solis (2012, 117) collective intelligence describes "the impact of the Internet on the cultural production and consumption of knowledge". Through the open, rapid and global exchange of data the human network mobilizes and coordinates the intelligence, which is formed by sharing experience, skills, wisdom and imagination. This on-demand knowledge network is rich in displaying the knowledge of peers, always open for consultation and easy accessible. The connected consumers make their decisions by consulting their human network and relying on people's experience within their trusted network. But at the same time they can influence other participants by sharing their own viewpoints. As each individual can embody both roles those connected consumers can be seen as "hybrid individuals". All information shared automatically invites reactions, creating a conversation on which individual decisions are considered, made or abandoned. (Solis 2012, 118-119.)

Referring to Nielsen's latest Global Trust in Advertising report (2013) online evaluations are with 68 percent the third most trusted source of brand information, right behind word-of-mouth recommendations from know people (84 percent) and brand.com (69 percent), which refers to company's official website. The same survey further reveals that already 70 percent of participants indicated their trust in online reviews. Also an increase of 15

percent over the next four years is predicted. As reviews seem to have a growing impact on individuals' purchasing behavior, this study will illuminate evaluations of both properties' on one particular review platform, Trip Advisor.

Trip Advisor is the world's largest interactive travel site, which specializes in user generated content in form of travel related reviews. This travel community reaches around 315 million visitors monthly and offers more than 200 reviews covering accommodation, restaurants and attractions (Trip Advisor 2015). It involves three parties: consumer, venues and advertisers. The network becomes more valuable with the growth of all parties involved, as consumers provide content; venues offer new access to vacation options and advertisers arrange for more convenient bookings and great deals. Therefore, all parties are directly influencing each other, as they are in a cycling movement. (Bussgang 2012.)

Erik Qualman (2012) categorized the changing behavior in society based on the extensive internet use, into two opposite directions the preventative and braggadocian behavior. Preventative behavior represents the social network, which is powerful enough to cause an adjustment in personal and corporate actions, as companies and individuals have experienced pitfalls. It supports the theory that cameras document everything and new technologies allow everyone to publish faster, causing damage. While this behavior still tries to fight the whole movement, by adopting cautious ways to navigate oneself out of the virtual danger braggadocios embrace the movement and use it for their personal advantage. Braggadocian behavior was developed and natured by social platforms, where people can microblog about their lives. In its basic form it describes the cycle where individuals have a constant strong desire to share instant happenings on social media platforms. This process is either perceived as bragging or fuel, which stimulates different ongoing completions, such as who can tweet about the craziest thing or post the most beautiful picture on Instagram. Due to this development those individuals have also formed new competencies, including better understanding of their place in the global community as well as being creative and collaborative. They expect a better-work life balance, while they are less likely to understand boundaries, as they live in a 24/7 world. To support this whole construct they demand quick information exchange, where complex context is broken down to second bites. (Qualman 2012, 33 – 61.)

Additionally, to a wide extent more social and demographic changes, caused by globalization, had an impact on this phenomenon. Those implications amongst other things emphasized individualization, where the main purpose lies in finding personal fulfillment to enhance own identity. Supported by higher education, which is easier accessible in the Western world and the transparency enabled by involving technology influence the new

demand consumer was formed. Subsequently, the interest in art, history and culture increased which according to Freund de Klumbis & Munsters (2005) are the direct cause for the creation of lifestyle hotels.

This particular behavior change influences all service businesses not only those two hotel types and therefore has a big impact on the lodging industry as it defines the process involved when people select, purchase, use or dispose of products, services, ideas or experiences to satisfy needs and desires (de Mooij 2011, 20-22). Moreover, social network profiles are nowadays seen as additional insights into different personalities, where information is constantly exchanged and consequently relationships cultivated.

2.2 Historical footprint

In the following chapter briefly the history of both concepts is explained, stating their original idea and purpose. When using the historical approach different trends are referred to and their impact is addressed.

2.2.1 History of boutique hotels

Before all global hotel chains entered this new line of business, boutique hotels were used as an umbrella for all unique independent properties. Originally, those properties captured the particular lifestyle of their location and therefore started out in global capitals in 1980, “where there was wealth, social engagement and creativity”, such as New York, Paris or London (Sullivan 2014).

Perhaps the most important key figure known to the lodging industry is Ian Schrager, an American entrepreneur, hotelier and real estate developer, who is nowadays associated as the co-creator of the boutique hotel category. Together with his business partner Steve Rubell they first opened the nightclub Studio 54 in the 70’s and turned eventually to the hotel business in 1984 when opening their first prototype Morgan Hotel in New York City to introduce the concept of a boutique hotel. Moreover, he continued breaking the industry’s convention by creating and using “lobby socializing” as a signature feature, where the property’s main purpose was to facilitate a gathering place for hotel guests and New York City’s residents. Schrager’s properties become famous for the fact that they embodied a new spirit of “affordable luxury” offering great value in a modern and sophisticated environment by being more than just an accommodation facility. (Schrager Company 2015.)

To fabricate this new setting, where the hotel’s lobby is the center of attention as it is its “heart and soul”, a committee of world’s best creators was appointed. Among them was Philippe Starck, designer and probably the biggest strength behind the original design.

While Starck exclusively designed the lobby with one-of-a-kind-pieces handpicked from an international cast of architects, furniture masters and designers, also other award winning artists were involved such as Jules Fisher and Paul Marantz who were responsible to alter the mood and feel of the lobby through lightning compositions. (Moar 1998.)

With the opening of the Hudson Hotel in 2000 the final piece of Schrager's and Starck's New York trilogy was completed. It did not take too long until Schrager noticed that what started off as a boutique hotel turned more into a new lifestyle, where traditional demographics such as age and economic status did not apply any longer. The concept of "cheap chic" or as nowadays more known as "affordable luxury" was born. It captured the spirit of the new infusion of modern awareness where luxury, convenience and comfort were emphasized but yet affordable for a wider audience. To nurture this new lifestyle where the property becomes the facilitator and guests get the opportunity to gather together in public spaces the entire layout of this property was reinvented, displaying minimal private sleeping space and maximal public space. This new approach suggested a new lifestyle where private rooms serve only one purpose sleeping, while the active living part, which thrives on socializing with others, takes place in the public eye. (Fury 2013.)

This new approach revolutionized the entire hotel industry as it brought a new perspective, formed a new market and offered new options for consumers. In the past 25 years Schrager's and Starck's legacy has been either imitated by the competition like the cooperation between Starwood and Ricardo Bofill & Charles Gwathmey designing boutique hotels for their W Hotel chain or at least been the foundation of many current existing hotel concepts, for instance citizen M.

2.2.2 History of lifestyle hotels

The amount of hotels, which all represent the rapidly growing new segment lifestyle, is getting hard to keep track of, especially throughout Europe, but the original idea behind the lifestyle phenomena was primarily to set up an establishment, which reflects on the owner's personal activity of interest to establish enough income (Burns 2001, 27). The main purpose was to enjoy individually perceived quality of life, by doing work, which mirrors the chosen regime and sustains economic status. According to Peters, Frehse & Buhalis (2009) lifestyle entrepreneurs embodied these whole phenomena, which can be mainly recognized in their motivation and attitude, which is primarily driven by their way of living rather than customer service. Those motivators were centered close to their own desire, which was to work in pleasant surroundings and being their own boss. Ioannides & Debbage (1998) separated this group of individuals into two, namely non-entrepreneurs

and constrained entrepreneurs. While the non-entrepreneurs show a major lack of business know-how, skills and experience, the constrained entrepreneurs set themselves apart through their attitude towards innovation, product development and recognition of customer values and needs, forming the basic approach of nowadays well known lifestyle hotels. (Ioannides & Debbage 1998.)

One of the first officially labeled lifestyle hotel was W Hotel, part of the internationally well-known chain, Starwood, which opened its doors in New York December 1998. Its immediate success provoked four additional openings in Los Angeles, Chicago, Seattle and Seoul within two years. Based on consumer research, where results state that consumers seek to balance style and substance in their life as well the destination of choice, Starwood formed a new modern approach, which main purpose was to satisfy customer needs. The foundation of this new style was built on defining design as “refreshing, accessible and comfortable” and emphasizing “comfort, attentive service and exceptional amenities”. (Starwood Hotels & Resorts Worldwide 2015a.) Each W Hotel launched so far followed the same guideline, which is: reflect on the unique location and have an own personality, which is brought to life by its guests and employees. Therefore, continuous research is done on design, music and fashion to capture the spirit of time. All those elements are mixed to create a welcoming and social gathering place for guests as well as the public. (Starwood Hotels & Resorts Worldwide 2015.a) Nowadays more brands respond to this trend by launching their own lifestyle products. Currently the lifestyle hotels are redefining the traditional economy hotel experience, especially throughout Europe, and are therefore representing the contemporary business concept, where style is unlocked for less.

2.3 Discussion of boutique and lifestyle hotel connection

In the last decades since the opening of the first boutique hotel in 1984 the two terms have been used in mixed ways and hence some blurred understanding is a logical consequence (Maree 2015). Consequently, different professional opinions were formed highlighting possible ways of how boutique and lifestyle hotels can be connected to each other. In total three theories are examined suggesting that both concepts could be exchangeable or that lifestyle hotels are either the new generation or a subcategory of boutique hotels.

Giving the Lifestyle/ Boutique Hotel Development Conference in October 2012 the panel representatives of the lodging industry agreed on that both hotel concepts will remain closely coupled, as they have common characteristics in many key areas such as being

individual, unique, authentic and experiential delivering personalized service from pre-arrival to post departure as well as fostering community commitment. Moreover, many experts believe that both types should display rational as well as an emotional components. Those emotional responses depend on various factors, but one increasingly important attribute is brand authenticity, as reliable and genuine brands can evoke trust, affection and strong loyalty. (Malär, Krohmer, Hoyer & Nyffenegger 2011, 35 – 52.)

According to Sue McKenney's boutique and lifestyle hotel report 2014 the concept of boutique and lifestyle hotels is to primarily add value for its consumers, by not only adding value to the property itself but also to its neighborhood. Therefore, one of the important differentiation factors is the celebration of the local culture. Further, she states that both types thrive for continuous innovations, experience design and value for money. Consequently, quality standards of services and amenities as well as design are involving to develop new standards of excellence. (McKenney 2014.)

Other professionals argue that lifestyle hotels are the next generation of boutique hotels. Schrager's properties for example are evidently advertised as boutique hotels, but at the same time they display typical lifestyle elements by highlighting the increased importance of socializing and creating an elevated experience, which is affordable for a wide audience. Based on those thoughts Schrager formed his own opinion which states that originally boutique hotels generated the lifestyle concept. Afterwards those fundamental ideas were imitated by competitor and developed into an additional concept creating the current phenomena. (Schrager Company 2015.)

Another interpretation of the same theory is formed by a global chain representative suggesting that lifestyle hotels are the new generation of boutique hotels. Referring to Janice Cannon, Hotel Indigo's vice president of global brand management this movement is chain driven, as this properties align all advantages of boutique hotel principles, which is being "small, intimate and modern" and combining it with the advantages of a chain such as loyalty incentives, consistency and economics of scale (Craig 2010). Hotel Indigo was the world's first global branded boutique hotel, which belongs to the InterContinental Hotels Group and was launched in 2004. Hotel Indigo's experts identified the original boutique hotels as small and independent properties, which embody interesting design and intimate service. Those components were used as a foundation and coupled with consumer research resulted into the new lifestyle category, which appeals to the emotional connections and shared values this new segment seeks. Further, it obeys the general rule of a boutique hotel, namely being unique and individual. Therefore, each property is designed to be different focusing on representing a local, unique and neighborhood experience. This new approach could be called "boutique chain", as this term describes the

symbiosis between an independent boutique hotel belonging to a global chain, but to represent the spirit of the time and make it more customer centric it is called lifestyle, as it is designed to cater for the needs of its consumers. (Craig 2010.) While Schrager describes more the evolutionary process of how both hotel types were created the Boutique & Lifestyle Lodging Association (BLLA) debates that lifestyle hotels are a “subcategory of boutique hotels”, which combines living elements and activities into functional design that gives guests the opportunity to explore the experience they desire” (BLLA 2015).

2.4 Definition of boutique and lifestyle hotels

To display hotel industry experts’ opinions on what a boutique and lifestyle hotels are various views of different professionals were collected throughout a wide field of expertise. Some of them related directly to the lodging industry and represented their individual opinion, for instance vice presidents of well-known brands. Others had related industry competencies, while being for example a lecturer, researcher, consulting analyst or architect. In the following discussion those experts are classifying potential characteristics, which are typical for each hotel concept.

2.4.1 Boutique hotel characteristics

Even though different definitions of a boutique hotel exist, a basic set of key components seems to reappear in all studies. Lucienne Anhar, consulting and valuation analyst at HVS (Hospitality Consulting & Valuation Services) International (2001) develops for example a general meaning to explain what a boutique hotel is by three significant characteristics.

The first factor is to create warmth and familiarity through distinction in architecture and design. Gillespie and Vithal (2011), who both share a background in architecture and design, agreed by stating that design is the fundamental element, which is supported by the components of style distinction, warmth and intimacy. Additionally, the core differentiation factor is individuality, which is not only empathized in design, but also spread out through its guests, staff members, location and hotel ambiance. This combination created consequently the properties’ personality and culture, which appeals to be in most cases exclusive. Also, its purpose is to involve guests by inviting them to participate actively in the identification process. Secondly offering personalized service, where the approach and attitude are of importance and the focus lies on guests’ entertainment by creating a theatrical atmosphere to stimulate all human senses through architecture, design, colors, lighting, art and music. These tools are used to expose the property’s own interpretation and expression of the chosen theme (Vithal & Gillespie 2011.) Finally storytelling becomes the fundamental key element where the experience is sold rather than the product itself.

Those stories are usually connected to the historical heritage and form the nature of the

experience. Consequently, they also explain the reason of the existence of the property. Ringer and Thibodeau (Kotler & Keller 2012, 314) describe narrative branding as a connection to people's memories, associations and stories through metaphors.

One of the first investigations made in 2007 by Mandy Aggett, lecturer in hospitality at Plymouth School of Tourism & Hospitality in the United Kingdom, focused also on identifying the key characteristics that attract consumers to the boutique sector. The results delivered were heavily overlapping with the previous one, as she was able to determine five dimensions. The first one focuses on the fact that consumers seek for an individual experience to escape the mass production in the standardized industry. Therefore, according to Aggett (2007) boutique hotels are an excellent example of a niche market, which offer innovative experience, image, design and lifestyle, which appeals especially to this rapidly growing type of customers.

Further, boutique hotels are well-known for their personalized service aligned to each individual, by studying guests' needs and making time for them. She suggests that relatively small sized boutique hotels meet the optimal settings to deliver on this highly focused customer centric service and therefore the amount of rooms should be kept to a minimum. To sustain the tailor-made service the atmosphere was specifically designed to provoke a comfortable home feeling, which is supported by innovative up-to-date high-tech facilities. Due to the high transparency and amount of information, which is easily accessible for each potential guest, quality is of high importance for those smaller businesses. As consumers become more and more educated by either self-experiencing the industry or through shared recommendations they consequently become more demanding and their expectations rise. They know what they want and what they can expect and therefore high quality standards, especially when promised, need to be ensured. Adding extra value by positioning the property at a convenient location and demonstrating local knowledge, which is clearly communicated by the host, increases the experience of guests and adds significance to guest's journey. (Aggett 2007.)

Another periodical element, which is always discussed, is the size equation. Some hotel experts such as David Duncan, President of Denihan Hospitality Group, stated that a boutique hotel should have preferable between 200 to 400 rooms. This concept focuses on each guest's individual experience by delivering tailor-made service, however, this gets more challenging as procedures become more automated and less personal. (Higley 2012.) Other studies argue that a boutique hotel should not exceed 100 rooms to be officially classified in this category (Aggett 2007). While Sue McKenney in general supports this statement in her boutique and lifestyle hotel report 2014, she suggests however, that the actual location has to be primarily taken into consideration. To underpin her statement

she forms an example stating that while a 600-room property already seems too large to be regarded as a boutique hotel bearing in mind the previous statements, it is considered quite normal in metropolises such as Las Vegas.

2.4.2 Lifestyle hotel characteristics

The recognition of the phenomena that the economy tier in Europe represents almost half of the total room supply, while only 20 percent of those are branded, formed the opportunity and is simultaneously the reason why more lifestyle brands are currently emerging (Mayock 2013). The original idea behind this hotel type was to break traditional patterns and reflect on present trends, therefore products and services offered needed to be adjusted. Further, strong focus was laid on offering a memorable experience, while promoting a lifestyle destination (Starwood Hotels & Resorts Worldwide 2015a). The main characteristics analyzed are mainly based on how lifestyle hotels market themselves on their brand.com, own website. The main factors found, were all similar with all current brands on the market.

The key elements of this concept are its public spaces, where different relaxing zones, so-called “plug & play” meeting areas can be found, which are open for the public and guests. The lobby also supports this idea, functioning primarily as a multifunctional space for breakfast in the morning and cocktail bar or lounge in the evening. During the day the area serves the public and guests as a hangout zone, where drinks and ready to go meals can be purchased and consumed. Those areas are also seen as living rooms, where one can feel comfortable and socialize with others. (Shallcross 2014.)

Further, the importance of technology is a fundamental base of this concept, as it is not only used to speed up daily processes, such as the check-in procedure for example, which can nowadays be done using mobile devices. But it is also part of the design, such as the Instagram type of wall in the lobby, on which content from the brand's social media platforms is presented. To support the technological perspective as well as nurture the social aspect high speed Wi-Fi is available throughout the whole property embodying the idea of being connected everywhere. (Watkins 2014.)

Further, the service component is mainly built on guests' involvement, as many “stylish do-it-yourself options” are provided, where all services are basically available 24/7, giving guests access to what they want, whenever they want. This approach additionally sets the backbone for offering affordable prices to consumers. (Olmsted 2014.) According to Indy Adenaw, vice president of brand marketing and sales for Marriott the real essence of a

lifestyle brand is not designing something static and duplicate it, but on the contrary continuously conduct consumer research and constantly develop and reflect on the present spirit of age (Watkins 2014).

Additionally, according to Starwood brands representatives the element of design is of high importance, as it creates the stage for the entire guest experience by setting the right ambiance, which establishes the connecting link between the property and its guests. Therefore, a group of multiple-disciplinary brand design teams is appointed, whose responsibility is to create a global design language, which can be communicated international in the same matters to meet the constantly growing expectations of well-educated travelers, which mostly are based on design, food, music and fashion. (Dan 2012.)

Another component, which all lifestyle establishments have in common, is that they noticed the rising interest of local, regional history and culture as an expression of their own identity. Authenticity is the reaction of uniformity, also referred to as localization, caused by the process of globalization. The hotel industry as well as gastronomy learned to respond quickly to this “back to the roots trend” and not only to reflect on local neighborhood charm, but also to support publicly their local community. (Freund de Klumbis & Munsters 2005.)

2.4.3 Summary of professional characteristics

When collecting all input provided by experts in the previous discussion the following characteristics can be extracted to illustrate how they characterize boutique and lifestyle hotels. The following figure visualizes all attributes mentioned, which is used as a basis to compare all three view points and to draw final conclusions in the end. The following figure suggests dividing all identifying characteristics into internal and external factors. The internal characteristics refer to physical tangible criteria, which are displayed by each property, while external elements capture more the emotional response people have when experiencing both hotel types. Both components, however, relate closely to each other as the physical elements are placed with the intention to provoke certain response

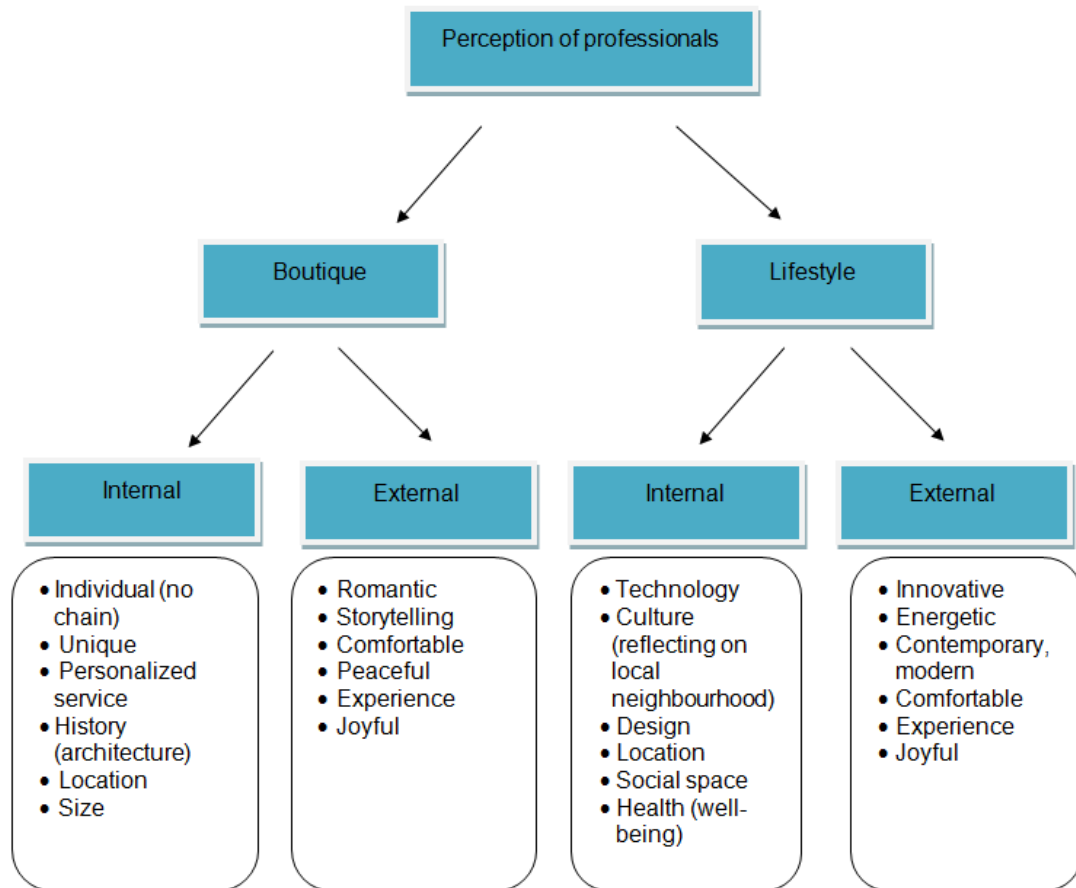


Figure 2. Expert's characteristics (Götz 2015)

3 Research methodology

This study combines two research methodologies desk and qualitative research to investigate if the ideas of different stakeholders align when talking about boutique and lifestyle establishments. The desk research was used twice, namely when putting the framework together by displaying experts opinions, which formed the foundation as well as when assessing the consumer side by analyzing Trip Advisor comments. The qualitative research was performed by conducting a focus group interview with students to emphasize their view. The opinions of all three target groups were confronted to see if some general characteristics can be extracted to classify both hotel types.

3.1 Description and justification of desk research method

The amount of professional opinions as well as Trip Advisor comments left by consumers showed in both cases a wide pool of already existing information and for that reason there was no need to generate data from scratch. Due to that the desk research method was applied in order to be more efficient and save time (Veal 2006, 147 – 170). As there was no clear expert opinion all professionals agreed on, a summary of all different views was exhibited in figure 2. Based on those findings main characteristics were extracted to form the baseline for this study. The data used was systematically divided into two different categories, internal and external. The internal part focused on generating information concerning physical attributes, which encompass anything describable that can be observed with own eyes. This included factors such as uniqueness, personalized service and design. The external side examined the emotional response all three target groups showed towards both hotel types to set them apart based on their experience, which is expressed through feelings.

To be able to exhibit a wide variety of different professional opinions academic and nonacademic sources were used, where nonacademic weight is more heavily, due to shortage of published material. The nonacademic sources were represented mostly by online lodging magazines, panel discussions as well as of successfully well-known international brands' own web pages. When displaying the consumers' side the second desk research run was performed by analyzing Trip Advisor comments of two already existing properties in Helsinki, which represented both hotel types of interest. The process focused on confronting the previous established characteristics, which were based on professional opinions, directly with the consumers' perspectives.

Alternatively also the quantitative research method could have been applied by conducting a survey. Using the same properties current guests could have been asked to fill in a survey. While this approach would have generated probably more conclusive results, as the questions in the survey would have been specially designed to target professionals' opinions and check if consumers' agreed. But at the same time it would have taken too much time. As the process from getting the properties permission to collect enough guests, who volunteer to participate, would have been too time consuming the qualitative approach was preferred.

3.1.1 Preparation for desk research of Trip Advisor reviews

To be able to carry out this study each hotel concept needs to be assigned to a current representative in the industry market in Helsinki. When making this selection the first main attribute was to analyze which hotels in Helsinki brand themselves publicly as a boutique or lifestyle hotel, therefore Google as a search engine was consulted. Based on Google's results each type was restricted down to two properties. For the boutique sector Hotel Haven and Klaus K were suggested and the lifestyle properties came down to Hotel Indigo Helsinki and Glo Hotel Kluuvi. Moving on to the second phase of the selection process all four properties were examined closer by taking on guests' perspectives in form of evaluating their online reviews. Based on those additional findings Hotel Haven was extracted to represent the boutique sector, as it not only claims to be a boutique hotel itself, but this assumption is also supported by guests' feedback. According to those Hotel Haven offers its guests a great experience through outstanding individualized guest service, tangible features as well as a creative landscape. Klaus K would have still be able to compete in this process based on those two criteria, but the main reason for withdrawal was that Klaus K was primary seen as a design hotel and secondary as a boutique. Therefore, this property was no longer applicable for this context. In the lifestyle sector the choice was between Hotel Indigo Helsinki and Glo Hotel Kluuvi. As Hotel Indigo Helsinki is planned to open middle of 2015 it is not yet available and hence cannot be considered for this purpose of the study. Therefore, the official representative is Glo Hotel Kluuvi. While both chosen establishments differ in their concept they both are competing on selling similar products and services in the same market. Consequently, are also influenced by similar demand generators. Those similar factors are location, quantitative features (amount of room, room types and facilities), quantitative features (quality and service) and big events.

3.1.2 Methods used to analyze guests reviews

In total 580 comments of each property were analyzed to detect which characteristics were mentioned and if those corresponded with the previously set categories by industry professionals. Therefore, the content analysis method was applied, which by definition is a set of either “manually or computer assisted techniques to interpret documents” (Mayring 2000). Its purpose was to retrieve meaningful information from various types of documents including written, oral, iconic, audio-visual or hypertexts. In this case as guests’ reviews on Trip Advisor are published in a written form the first type was applicable. To set the foundation of this process a visual documentation was created, which guided the researcher through the entire procedure and formed the foundation of the final results. It included a record of consumers’ responses, exhibited in appendix 3, which displayed a table where all previously set characteristics established by professionals were displayed. Further, the amount of how often consumers responded to each category was measured by manually reading each review and connecting the content of those reviews with the set attributes. In academic research this process was also referred to as a “deductive category application” (Mayring 2000). Afterwards those results were presented in percentage and used to visualize the findings for both properties in a graph by filling in Microsoft Word diagram template to create better comparison conditions and draw conclusions. Parallel when reading each review direct quotations were collected in a separate document. Those were organized by the same categories and later on used in the discussion part to justify researcher’s reasoning. To establish a thorough job of analyzing the process the researcher had to go over the data multiple times to not only eliminate mistakes, but to detect if more attributes were noticeable, which were relevant for consumers, but were not mentioned by professionals. In this case two extra characteristics were added, as they were frequently mentioned by consumers. Those were value for money and if they would recommend the chosen property to family members or friends.

All in all, the content analysis method suited two purposes in this study. For once it functioned as a guideline for the researcher, as all categories were separately displayed and all added information was documented and therefore easily traced back. Secondly, it brought more transparency to this study, which was beneficial for reader’s understanding, as it described the entire development. The main challenge when applying this method was that the researcher was involved when interpreting each guest review, due to the fact that participants cannot be asked additional questions to verify the situation. For instance many individual used either slang or “youth language” when evaluating their experience by saying words such as “cool, hip or trendy”, those were then connected to the category of contemporary or modern formed by professionals.

3.2 Description and justification of qualitative research method in means of a focus group interview

This method has been already used in market research and investigations as well as community studies for a longer time (Veal 2011, 245). In general a focus group consists of six to eight participants, who were chosen because of their characteristics, attitudes or experiences in common and are connected to the topic of interest. The main idea of selecting participants with similar attitudes or opinions towards a certain issue is that they are more likely to influence one another by stating their comments and ideas in the conversation.

The purpose of this interview was to gain inside facts from students' to find out valuable personal information like feelings, memories and interpretations that cannot be observed or discovered in other ways to achieve multiple meanings out of many different opinions shared in the discussion (Carson, Gilmore, Perry, & Gronhaug 2001, 73 -74). The reason why specifically students were chosen was because this particular group represents both previous parties involved. Some students pursue studies directly linked to Hotel Management and therefore they were more likely taken on the professional view, as they are familiar with the industry and its current trends. Other students were for example representing the culinary track and therefore more likely embodying the consumer perspective. Nevertheless, all individuals involved had experience in consuming accommodation products and therefore were able to take on the role of consumers.

Further, it enables the researcher to go under the surface of statistical facts and figures by taking the values and ideas of future industry experts into consideration, as participants were communicating their reality in a more extensive way. Moreover, the researcher is not only the moderator who guides the focus group discussion, but is also able to interact directly with the group members, therefore functions as a facilitator encouraging participants to state their mind honestly and without pressure (Dwyer, Gill, & Seetaram 2012, 354). Additionally this method contributes to an empowerment of the attendees, who play a remarkable role in the development of a community. The success of the focus group discussion always depends on the right selection of participants, including characteristics such as age, gender and social status, the ability of the moderator, the topic related questions, which were prepared in advance as well as the whole setting, including seating arrangements and the availability of snacks and refreshments (Dwyer & al. 2012, 353).

As this method falls into the qualitative spectrum of research it is rather hard to enumerate data, consequently the collection of the data is far less structured, as it is situation specific and conceptual, compared to quantitative studies, which aim to gain a more statistical view (Strauss & Corbin 1990, 17). Further, in this case qualitative methodology combines

rational with the intuitive approach to knowledge and therefore add valuable information to the methodology mix. The rational response is questioned in the beginning of the interview, when every participant exchanges their personal opinion and discusses it in a small group before presenting collective findings. The intuitive part is approached when all participants are exposed to a series of pictures, which visualize different lobbies from both hotel types, to trigger their emotional responses. As both rational and intuitive behavior vary with each individual the general approach mentioned cannot be applied to each participant, therefore, it is here only used as a rule of thumb. After the focus group discussion, it is the researcher's task to analyze the findings to get a clear insight in how a specific area of interest is detected by a certain group (Morgan 1998, 6).

3.2.1 Preparation for the focus group interview

Before the focus group interview was conducted some administrative formalities needed to be arranged. Those included deciding on the group composition and size as well as organizing the physical location and inviting participants. With the right group composition it is possible to gain a lot of useful data generated in a free-flowing conversation, whereas the outcome in a wrong group composition will be limited (Morgan 1998, 55). This qualitative research method makes use of purposive sampling, which emphasizes the fact that group members are chosen corresponding to the purpose of this study (Morgan 1998, 56).

When determining the group constellation compatibility of the group members, obtained by picking homogenous attendees who collaborate in the same focus group, was of high importance. The homogeneity of participants simplifies the discussion because the time needed for explaining their opinions and ideas to each other decreases, consequently more time can be allocated to discuss the actual topic. However, it simply cannot always be clear in advance whether the participants are compatible with each other consequently it can happen that the focus group will not deliver the desired achievement due to a lack of compatibility. (Morgan 1998, 59.) Nevertheless, the most crucial aspect is the selection of an appropriate number of right participants. In most cases the size of a focus group will be six to eight participants, depending on the topic under investigation (Morgan 1998, 71). A group comprising a smaller number of attendees will give participants the feeling of higher involvement and therefore could generate more sincere discussions. Furthermore, it will give every member the chance to respond to questions extensively (Morgan 1998, 75). The target group of this focus group interview was represented by Haaga-Helia students, at the age of 21 to 28 years. Not all students were Haaga-Helia degree students, as many exchange students were involved as well. Additional requirements for selection were that each participant was able and comfortable to communicate clearly in English, as mostly international students were present. Furthermore, the goal was to represent a wide spread

of nationalities to gain a distinct understanding of different cultural backgrounds and personal perspectives. Also, diverse specializations were considered when selecting participants in order to represent diverse viewpoints with a different focus, to increase the knowledge pool. All in all, the main purpose was to select unlike students based on gender, age, cultural background, different study background and majors, who have experiences, show interests towards the topic of investigation and the willingness to reveal their opinions during the interview. (Morgan 1998, 46.)

Choosing the right location for the discussion might not appear as one of the most vital aspects when organizing a focus group interview in the beginning, however, it should definitely not be neglected as it can contribute to the success of the project. The right location should be easily accessible of the researcher as well as for the participants and provide convenient facilities and a pleasant atmosphere (Morgan 1998, 121). In this case Haaga-Helia premises displayed the most convenient solution and therefore the interview was conducted in room A 420. The big advantage of choosing a professional facility compared to public meeting rooms is that no additional preparation needs to be done as those rooms already serve this purpose. Also when planning a focus group interview food and beverages should be provided, as it can contribute to a more relaxed atmosphere and helps to inspire communication between the group members. Good options could include chocolate cookies, popcorn but also small pieces of fruit and vegetables. (Morgan 1998, 128.)

The end result of the preparation phase included that the context of the interview was defined in an interview guide, meaning that the entire process was planned. Moreover, a date and location was communicated to Haaga-Helia's administrative staff to reserve a room. Also, participants were chosen, individually invited and signed all the consent form agreeing to the procedure (attached in appendix 2). Hence, the focus group interview was scheduled for April 24th from 2 pm to 4pm in room A 420. The host was primarily the researcher. However, an assistant was appointed to ensure smooth procedures, especially when it comes to recording the entire interview. The final results are based on the material produced during the session and therefore an additional person was recruited.

3.2.2 Methods used to create focus group interview

The backbone of this focus group interview is the interview guide, which is displayed in appendix 1, as it structures the entire process. It captures the purpose of this interview, which is to gain an insight in what participants associate with boutique and lifestyle hotels and what characteristics they choose to describe them. In general interview guides vary

from being highly scripted to loose. For this purpose it functions as a help for the researcher to direct the flowing conversation with all participants towards the topic to stay on track and making sure all categories are discussed.

This focus group interview consists of total five parts, which are all building up in their importance. The beginning covers a general introduction of the researcher, the topic of interest as well as description of the entire procedure and an introduction of all interviewees. The second part focuses on a brainstorming session to encourage members' participation to share their individual thoughts on boutique and lifestyle hotels on flip charts. In two small groups, consisting of three to four participants, personal experiences, expectations and general ideas are exchanged by completing the pre written sentences on the flip charts. The brainstorming technique was used because it strongly focuses on a specific topic for a certain period of time unleashing individual subconscious knowledge of the presented issue. As a result a lot of ideas are generated in a short time, because participants are not only sharing their individual thoughts but also influencing each other's by picking up already mentioned thoughts and developing them further. The entire process is considered being creative and spontaneous, as it highly depends on member's participation and therefore can be challenging if chosen individuals are not compatible. (Pauhus, Dzindolet, Poletes & Camacho 1993.) Moreover, it was used to create a comfortable environment, where each interviewee was comfortable sharing their thoughts without staying in the spotlight. Also, the group had time to familiarize themselves with the topic by creating a collective understanding before starting the actual discussion. The context generated during the brainstorm was the main foundation of the interview, as all topics mentioned were later on discussed.

After the group created and displayed their current knowledge of both hotel types all characteristics mentioned were arranged according to their importance, hence, the Likert scale was used. For this scenario the Likert scale was very basic as it included three measures, not important, neutral to create a less biased measurement and important. (Matell & Jacoby 1971.) All Likert items, which were simultaneously attributes taken from the flip chart, were individually discussed in the group, written on blue post its and allocated on the Likert scale. In the following analysis chapter those are exhibited in the striped green fields.

The third exercise was designed to appeal to the group's visual excitement to trigger their emotional response. Therefore, a series of preselected lobby pictures of different boutique and lifestyle hotels were shown, which are displayed in appendix 4. When selecting those pictures high emphasis was paid to create similar requirements, hence the first selection criteria was the physical location. This meant that first three European countries

were appointed and afterwards three cities were nominated, as almost all participants were European and therefore could probably rely better to those. As the researcher was interested in representing recent lifestyle hotels W London and Moxy in Milan were chosen, as those capture the current spirit of time. Consequently, corresponding boutique hotels needed to be allocated in the same city to create a comparable situation. Therefore, Google search engine was used to present properties, which labelled themselves publicly as boutique hotels. Moreover, as already two metropolises were already appointed the researcher decided to add Berlin into the mix to show patriotic pride. In the end the boutique sector was represented by Sofitel Berlin Kurfuerstendamm, 51 Buckingham Gate (London) and Borgo Santo Pietro (Milan, Italy). All three properties were chosen because they visualized different aspect of boutique hotels. Sofitel Berlin Kurfuerstendamm for instance highlights the modern aspect to contrast the stereotype of being traditional, which boutique hotels encounter often. The 51 Buckingham Gat on the other side delivers exactly this picture by displaying a lobby offering many little elements, capturing English famous tea-time at grandma's house, provoking instant feelings of comfort and cuteness. Borog Santo Pietro on the other hand emphasizes the luxurious factor promoting exclusivity offering a private place with high class comfort. The lifestyle segment was covered by Berlin Hotel Indigo, W London and Moxy Milan Malpensa in Italy and capturing different ways of living. Berlin Hotel Indigo for example refers to the modern sophisticated Scandinavian ideology of simple but chic, while W London embodies more the "party" lifestyle by providing the corresponding facility such as a club on the top of the building. Moxy Milan Malpensa on the other hand reflects on the local culture by celebrating fashion.

While looking at those the brainstorming session continued, as each attendee was sharing their instant response when being confronted with it. Those were selected on red colour post its (marked in the analysis chapter as a red fields with dots) by the researcher and afterwards their importance was allocated on the Likert scale. To round up the conversation toward the end each participant shared their personal opinion if there is a clear difference between boutique and lifestyle hotels. Additionally, a prediction was formed on how those two hotel types will evolve in the further.

3.3 Strengths and limitations

Probably the biggest limitation of this study is that the foundation of it is mainly built on not academic material, as it displays different professional opinions withdrawn from online publishing lodging magazines and panel discussions. Even though some researchers already scratched the surface with their work, which is also presented in this study, by emphasizing some initial points, the findings also tend to be outdated. Due to the shortage of available academic sources other supporting sources needed to be considered.

When moving on to the consumer perspective the announcement of two representing properties clearly limits this research as it exhibits a minimal sampling to conduct a comparison. Due to this fact the data collected is actually only applicable for the chosen properties and cannot be generalized for the hotel industry. Additionally, only one specific source of information, namely Trip Advisor, was considered in this particular study representing the guest perspective.

Given the fact that the number of participants in a focus group discussion is usually low, it might seem on the first glance as a not very valuable research approach, but the amount of material generated should not be underestimated (Dwyer & al. 2012, 360). Since a transcript for analysis purposes is compiled right after the discussion it is rarely sufficient just to record the focus group conversation, as the researcher will not be able to identify the interviewer and the group members only on the basis of the tape. In order to represent all the issues generated in the discussion accurately it is advised to listen to the recording not only once but several times. Further, another person should approve the accuracy of the analysis. Moreover, a major aspect regarding focus groups is the disclosure of underlying power relations, which is a main reason why this kind of research method is used so often. The moderator is responsible to ensure that the discussion is not led by individual talkative participants but rather make sure that all group members are equally involved and have their say in the conversation (Dwyer & al. 2012, 361). Also, the qualitative part concentrates only on a few situations and specific opinions and therefore can be seen as subjective. The researcher is involved as an integrated component of the study, as substantial inductive reasoning is required and therefore is guiding and developing the research process, hence consequently manipulating it (Carson & al. 2001, 63 – 65).

4 Analysis of results

The following chapter exhibits the outcome of the conducted research, which is divided into two sections according to the research method applied. The first part displays the result of the Trip Advisor analysis, where comments from Hotel Haven and Glo Hotel Kluuvi were investigated using the desk research techniques. The entire process is separated in two parts highlighting internal and external attributes. The second section is illustrating the qualitative research results extracted from the focus group interview identifying boutique and lifestyle hotel characteristics and their importance.

4.1 Presenting desk research results of Trip Advisor comments

To highlight the consumer perspective and to determine how they perceive both hotel styles, Trip Advisor reviews were examined. Even though previously established characteristics (see 2.4.3 summary of professional characteristics), which were extracted from industry professionals' opinions, form the foundation of this study, more topics were added to integrate customers' needs. The additional criteria focused on the importance of price versus value perception and if they would recommend this property to family and friends, as those two topics were repeatedly mentioned throughout the total amount of comments. Moreover, as the component referring to guests' experience was not explained in details in their comments those added two elements could support indirectly guests' mentioned experience, as people do not tend to recommend or compare bad notes. The properties under investigation were Hotel Haven, representing the boutique sector and Glo Kluuvi the lifestyle. The same amount of comments, namely 580 were analyzed from each property, however, the time span varies, as each guest posts their comment individually. Hotel Haven's reviews covered the time frame from March 22nd, 2015 to August 13th, 2009, while Glo Kluuvi's starting point is April 7th, 2015 and goes back to November 24th, 2010. As the researcher analyzed the content of each comment left on the Trip Advisor platform manually, the amount of possible factors mentioned per statement were impossible to quantify beforehand and therefore the total amount of the final responses, exceeded 100 percent. The entire research process was divided into two different fields of interest. The first part, which is displayed in figure 3, highlights the internal physical attributes guests perceive when staying at Hotel Haven and Glo Kluuvi, while figure 4 emphasizes their emotional responses towards both properties.

4.1.1 Results of internal attributes

When confronting both diagrams (exhibit in figure 3), which highlight the physical characteristics, the most outstanding finding is that out of eleven factors only four were of importance to consumers. Even though the amount of actual votes, which are allocated to each criteria, varies each establishments rank order is identical. Those four features were firstly location, personalized service, design and finally the importance of social spaces.

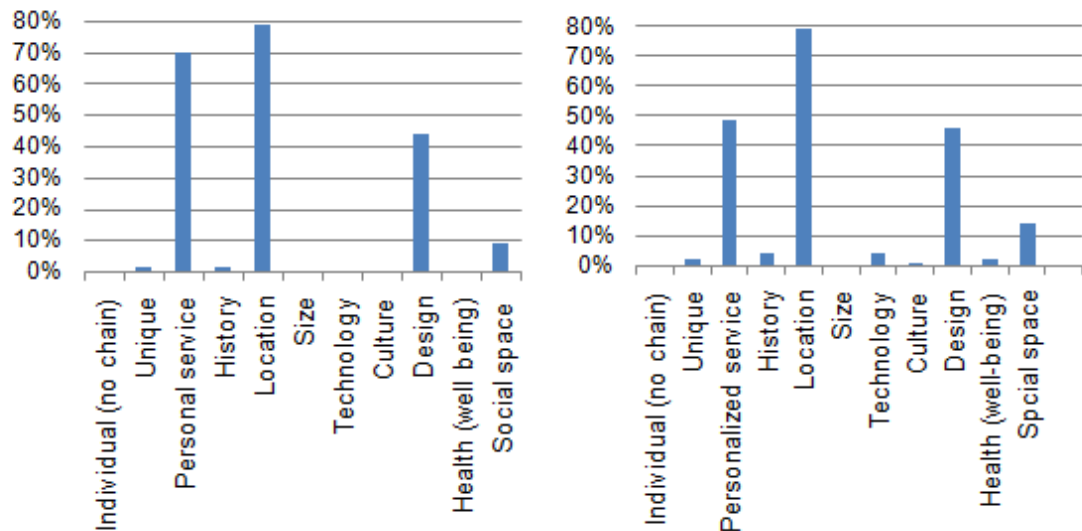


Figure 3. Comparison of internal physical attributes (n=580) of Hotel Haven (left) and Glo Kluuvi (right) (Götz 2015)

The top characteristic, which was mentioned most frequently in reviews of both properties, was the importance of a central location. In this particular comparison both establishments benefit from a strategic location in the city center of Helsinki, as they are “[...] situated right in the pedestrian heart of Helsinki [...]” (Lecterit 2015), and therefore it is of no big surprise that guests are satisfied with this point.

The customized service component, which is one of the characteristics all experts seemed to agree on during various discussions is also clearly of importance for guests. The results displayed evidently suggest that Hotel Haven offers a better personalized service than Glo Kluuvi, as the difference rests roughly at around 20 percent. When generalizing this finding and speaking of boutique and lifestyle hotels in broad again an agreement can be found with the professional opinions, as tailor-made service is the core competence of boutique establishments, while current lifestyle hotels, especially those which belong to big chains, are more focused on offering do-it-yourself services. In this specific context the more likely reason can be traced back to some major renovations, which were performed

from November 8th, 2012 to April 2013 (Onhotels 2015). This refurbishment program incorporated different areas such as the lobby, Glo Bar and partly guest rooms and were probably the source for some service deficit, causing guest dissatisfaction. Service wise complimentary marks were made for both establishments, for instance Glo Kluuvi's employees were entitled being "[...] very professional, service minded, nice" (Nina Pia 2015). Moreover, "they treat their guests with respect and [one] can tell by their attitude that they value their guests" (Mia 2014) and therefore the "staff deserve gold medals for helpfulness" (Ballauya 2012). Hotel Haven on the contrary also collects its own set of compliments as its working force is mainly described as "extremely helpful" and famous for being attentive and putting guests first to satisfy their needs (Martha 2015). The "great local knowledge" of what events are currently happening in Helsinki is a factor that has often been mentioned throughout the reviews and therefore consequently can be the unique touch to Hotel Haven's service experience (Jean 2015).

By examining the importance of design from the guests' perspective it can be noticed that 40 percent of investigated reviews state that design plays a significant role for both hotels. Glo Kluuvi's design is mostly described as "stylish, young and dynamic" (Chris 2015) and even "funky" referring "to a toy tiger on the bed, who could have been taken home for an additional charge" (Wildguy2 2012). All in all, Glo Kluuvi has been described as a "refreshing, innovative design" (Tom 2013), which is "very comfortable and quirky in a good way and as far as style hotels go it has drawn from cues of the best. Hotel Haven in comparison was mostly described as an "intimate and stylish" hotel (GourmandAus 2015), which "feels like home" (Espergaerde 2014). Rooms were mostly described as "spacious, comfortable, warm decorated" and some of them had "a wonderful view of the South harbor" (Martha, 2015). The bar was characterized as the jewel piece of this property, as it offers its guests "a very prominent wine and liquor assortment and a surprisingly number of local brewed beers" (Terrence T 2014), as well as a "legendary selection" (Roman 8635 2014) of "well aged whiskies" (Lars 33 2014).

Though the difference when evaluating the impact of social spaces is rather minimal, Glo Kluuvi tends to perform slightly better, as it exhibits a relevance of more than ten percent, whereas Hotel Haven is positioned lower. While the amount of votes might be too low to transfer it to the whole lifestyle hotel population, a clear parallel to the lodging industry experts' opinion can be drawn, as those state that a lifestyle hotel is more than just a simple accommodation provider, but more a place where people gather, interact and create. To support this concept social spaces are the core elements and consequently of high significance. In Glo Kluuvi's case the "nice atmosphere at the lobby, where the bar attracts a young and happy crowd in the evening" (Riccardo 2012) could be one of those places "where [one] could sit at the end of the day and watch the world pass by" (LC 2012). The

same area was also mentioned in Hotel Haven's guest evaluation, where the bar seemed to be the most popular spot to meet, as it offers a massive selection of different spirits, especially appealing to "whiskey lovers" (Rob W 2015). The most attractive component of this bar was described as "warm, welcoming, cozy and intimate" (Carolyn S 2015), reminding more of a "living room with a bartender" (Terrence T 2014). All in all, the low amount of votes mentioning the need of social spaces in both hotels is still rather low, which suggests that it is still no priority for the consumer and therefore has not quite yet reached the point, where it is considered to be of high relevance for consumers.

Moreover, when contemplating the results more precisely one difference can be noticed in the amount of total factors mentioned. Out of eleven characteristics Hotel Glo Kluuvi's guests evaluated overall nine, while Hotel Haven assessed only six. For Hotel Haven the two additional characteristics mentioned were architecture and uniqueness. In both cases the amount of responses is so low that it is inconclusive. The same rules apply when analyzing Hotel Glo Kluuvi's lowest response factors, which are the influence of uniqueness, culture and well-being. Even though no real results can be extracted some tendencies can be clearly seen, which separates both hotels from each other in the eye of the consumers. This opinion goes hand in hand with the one of the professional experts mentioned earlier. A higher response rate, however, was measured when evaluating the components of architecture and technology for Glo Kluuvi. This aspect was not much of a surprise as it reflects on the consumer's technological addiction, which is the consequence of the current spirit of age. But the fact that it was barely mentioned when guests left their feedback for Hotel Haven was more of a surprise.

The only point where the consumers seemed to disagree with the experts is when discussing the influence of architecture. The experts stated that the importance of architecture, especially associated with the building history, should be of high relevance for boutique hotels to differentiate themselves from others. The results withdrawn from this study though propose the opposite. According to Louise Philippe (2012) "everything in the hotel [Glo Kluuvi] is photo-worthy, if [one] enjoy design and architecture". This statement underlines the importance of architecture also for the representative lifestyle sector and shows first discrepancies between experts and consumers. Additionally, more indirect inconsistencies can be interpreted when comparing the above displayed results with the professional opinion previously stated. The fact that two characteristics, namely the importance of independent recognition versus chain belonging and storytelling are not even mentioned once showed that they can consequently be classified as irrelevant in the eye of the consumer.

All in all the most remarkable finding when analyzing online reviews of both hotels is that buyers have a habit to lay their focus more on core elements, which are applicable for all accommodation facilities immediately and for that reason weigh them with high importance. Those principles include primarily location and service. At the second glance design seemed to be also successfully communicated throughout both properties, as many individuals picked up on it and in both cases mostly refer to it as “stylish and modern” (TripAdvisor 2015). However, also when analyzing consumers’ descriptions of both designs some words stood out. For Glo Kluuvi it was refreshing and innovative and for Hotel Haven intimate, cozy, stylish and the feeling of being home. Adjusting consumers’ language to the professionals’ one could say that stylish refers to modern or contemporary. Creating a cozy intimate atmosphere on the other hand could be maybe linked to a certain degree to professionals’ romantic association. However, this interpretation strongly depends on individual interpretation of what a romantic ambiance is and therefore cannot be generalized.

All supplementary characteristics added, differentiated by experts in the field, could have not been extracted from the reviews in significant quantity and therefore those findings do not have the means to corroborate the previously set hypothesis by researcher and professionals. However, the noticeable tendencies, which were stated by consumers, mostly correspond with previous agreed criteria besides when discussing the importance of architecture.

4.1.2 Results of external attributes

The second part of this study focuses more on capturing guests’ emotional responses towards their experience, which is mainly based on a previous conducted research by Jones, Day & Felitti in 2013 engaged and supported by the Boutique & Lifestyle Association, therefore seven out of ten criteria were adopted. Additionally comfort was added based on previously addressed experts’ opinions. Further, two more components, which seemed to be of high relevance to consumers, as they were regularly mentioned, were added to represent their interests. Those covered their perception on value versus price and if they would recommend the establishment of choice to their family or friends. The findings were extracted from the same amount of total guest reviews published on TripAdvisor and are exhibited in the figure below.

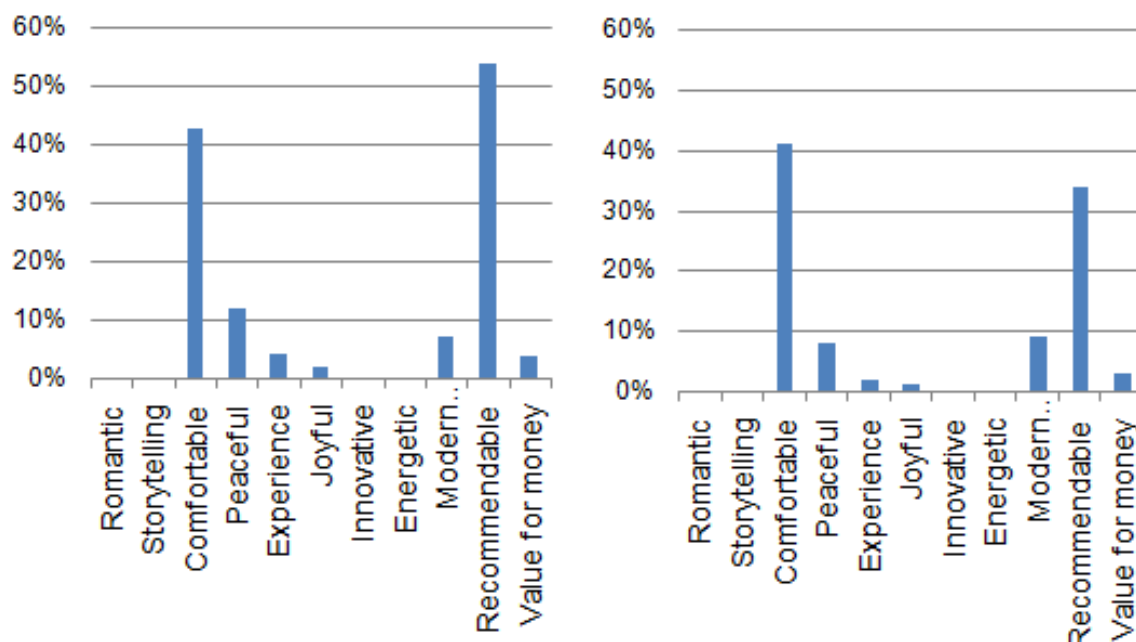


Figure 4. Comparison of external emotional responses (n=580) from Hotel Haven (left) and Glo Kluuvi (right) (Götz 2015)

At the first glance it is noticeable that consumers mark each property with eight out of ten characteristics. Again the top four consist of the same factors, this time the sequence though changes. The desire to recommend Hotel Haven, as it is “still terrific after so many years” (Carolyn 2015) and enjoying the high comfort form the top factors for Hotel Haven. Exactly the opposite applies for Glo Kluuvi, where comfort claims the top position and is followed by the desire to recommend this establishment. Roger (2013) calls it even the “accommodation to go in Helsinki, [he] has stayed their numerous times and will keep going back”. Others even visit Glo Kluuvi up to several times in the same year and it is “always worth it” (Johanna_180213 2014). The same rule relates to Hotel Haven’s third factor quietness and fourth being trendy and cool, which outlines the exact opposite of Glo Kluuvi.

In both cases the aspect experience is described rather vague. In general guests tend to describe their experience with Hotel Haven for example as “memorable, excellent, highly enjoyable, and positive” or even call it their “dream stay” (Collection of Trip Advisor comments 2015). As none of these adjectives is explained further no real analysis can be provided. The fifth place is occupied by the perception of value for money, where Hotel Haven’s guests state that their stay was worth the price. Again the opposite applies for Glo Kluuvi, as the importance of delivering value for money is ranked over their experience, which is mostly characterized as “extremely good, fantastic, pleased, delighted, wonderful or even very impressive” (Collection of Trip Advisor comments 2015).

The only factor which, varies completely is the feeling of discovering something new on their journey throughout the property, which is slightly considered for Hotel Haven, while Hotel Glo Kluuvi sets itself apart by being recognized as energized and upbeat. In both cases the amount of responses is so minimal that neither final conclusive results could have been drawn for the properties involved nor be compared with previous established results by experts as it cannot be generalized.

All in all, Trip Advisor comments are not the most appropriate method to investigate consumer's emotional response, as those tend to happen more subconsciously and people usually do not document them, as they happen. Consequently, those results are rather incomplete, as all participants were not directly approached, nor were their emotional response measured during their journey. To generate more valued information in this field, each guest's journey throughout the whole process should be somehow monitored and afterwards evaluated.

4.1.3 Summary of consumers' characteristics

When consulting the consumer to investigate their ideas of boutique and lifestyle hotels, the most eye-catching fact is that they do not significantly differentiate between those two hotel types. Based on their individual comments in general consumers are mainly interested in physical attributes, at least those they tend to share in public. Four main characteristics that are of relevance are displayed in figure five, specifically location, personalized service, design and common area, also referred to as social space.

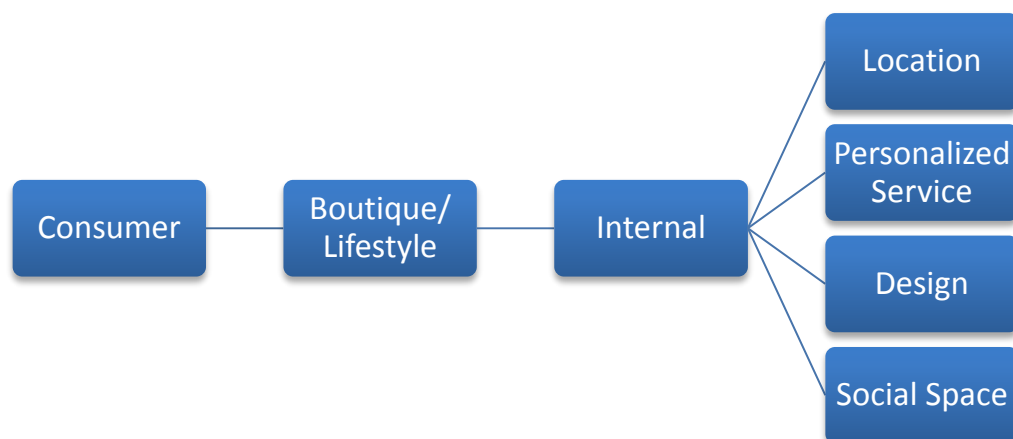


Figure 5. Consumers' internal characteristics based on Hotel Haven and Glo Kluuvi Trip Advisor comments (Götz 2015)

Also, when analyzing their emotional responses towards their stay the results are rather similar, as they only vary at little in their rank order, as displayed in figure six. For both hotel styles four elements are identified as important when discussing guests' emotional response towards those establishments. Those attributes depend on the fact if their stay is recommendable, comfortable, peaceful and if the establishment is reflecting on modern features.

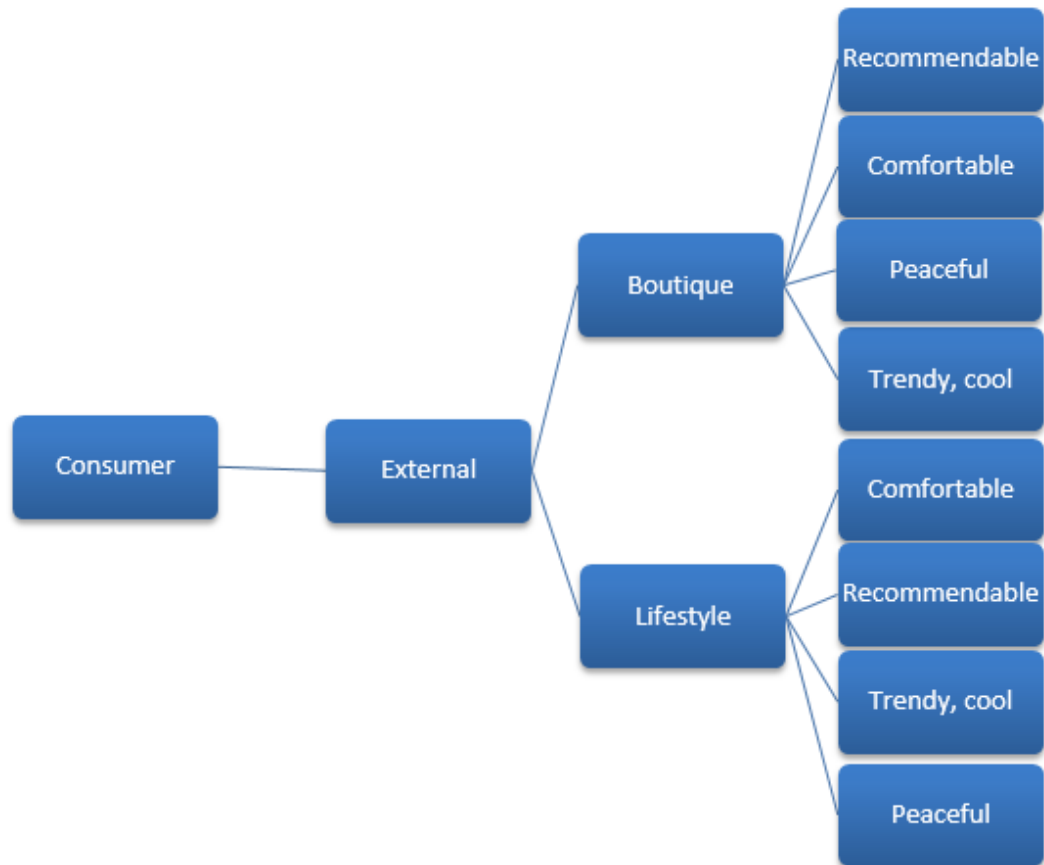


Figure 6. Consumers' external responses based on Hotel Haven and Glo Kluuvi Trip Advisor comments (Götz 2015)

4.2 Presenting qualitative research results of focus group interview

In smaller groups of three to four members all participants involved initially brainstormed about their association of boutique and lifestyle hotels based on their individual knowledge and experience. The table below states all characteristics mentioned.

Table 2. Results of brainstorming

Boutique	Lifestyle
Independent, not belonging to a chain	Chain possible
Luxury	Concentrates on a topic
Unique, individual	Healthy lifestyle hotel
Ability to adapt to its location	Wellness, spa
Traditional or modern	Design
Storytelling (USP, differentiation factor)	Cool, trendy, modern, hip
Small or medium size	Good facilities
Demanding, high–end consumers	Vast offers
Exceptional, personalized service (culture)	It's about what you can do in there
Expensive	Cheaper/ bigger than boutique but still up-
Goof location	per upscale

(Götz 2015)

In the following step those characteristics were explained and discussed within the group and finally their importance for the hotel type identification was established by ranking each factor on a Likert scale from not important to very important. The following figure of both hotel types displays the Likert scale, where two different color codes were used, namely green and red, to assign the characteristics. The green marked (striped) attributes reflect on the participants' first associations when thinking of boutique or lifestyle hotels. The red ones (dotted fields) indicate the missing characteristics, suggested by industry professionals, which were added afterwards.

4.2.1 Results of boutique characteristics

At the first glance when evaluating the Likert scale of boutique hotels, which is exhibited in figure 7, one can clearly see that almost all characteristics were mentioned by students, as ten out of twelve factors were determined during this session.

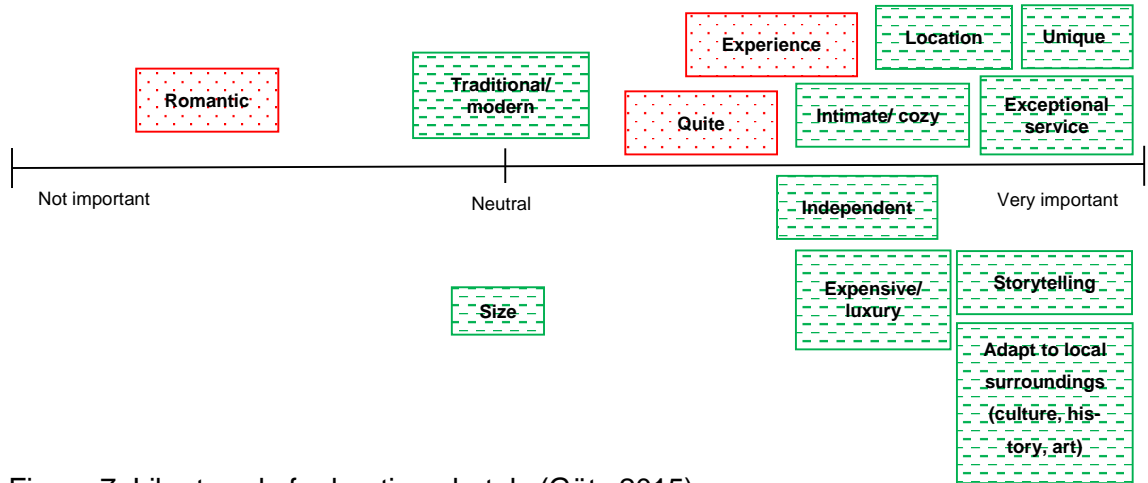


Figure 7. Likert scale for boutique hotels (Götz 2015)

Examining all attributes more closely the most remarkable finding is that predominately physical attributes (external factors) were mentioned, which strongly correspond with the original ideas formed by professionals. Further, it seemed that the respondents had a quite clear vision on how a boutique hotel should look like and what the most significant characteristics are. The center component of those important factors was formed during the discussion by emphasizing uniqueness, which can be determined in different ways, such as offering tailor-made service and adapting to local surroundings. This adaptation, however, can focus on different elements for instance on local art, history or any other local influences depending on location. All those rather tangible essentials are then connected by using storytelling as a tool to create an exclusive advantage. In this case a coherent story is the final product, which is noticeable for guests through displayed art, design as well as the appearance of the building or local history like “it is done with the story of Finland in Klaus K” (P5).

To support this picture further, emotional attributes were added highlighting the importance of creating an intimate and cozy atmosphere to set the ambiance, which was mostly instantly connected with the actual size of the property, where smaller-sized establishments were clearly preferred. While discussing the importance of size all participants seemed to agree that this factor was not significant to identify a boutique hotel and therefore it was marked as neutral. Nevertheless, it gained importance when discussing the emotional response of feeling cozy or creating an intimate atmosphere.

Whereas almost all attendees held the view that a smaller-sized establishment is more likely creating a cozy and intimate setting one candidate argued that this statement is heavily based on stereotypes. According to this participant it does not need to be small to be comfortable, as coziness is “determined by the layout, furniture and the usage of colors” (P7) for example. This connection, however, seemed to be severely anchored when thinking of boutique hotels not only with students but also with experts, which was previously argued when presenting boutique hotel characteristics in chapter 2.4.1. The dispute between categorizing the factor size as neutral, but at the same time pointing out the importance when discussing the elements of coziness leads to the conclusion that size in the end is relevant. Nevertheless, it is denied when addressed directly. Maybe it is not an obvious factor for the focus group members, which needs to be pointed out, yet the affect seemed to be noticeable.

Moreover, luxury was added into the core idea to promote exclusivity, which can be combined with the uniqueness component, as they complement each other nicely. Furthermore, being independent over belonging to a chain was preferred to emphasize the one-of-a-kind principles. Also, the location itself plays a relevant role, as the property like others needs to be easily accessible, but at the same time could appeal mysterious to maintain the exclusive feeling. All in all, according to the focus group interviewees those eight attributes formed the essential identifying character of a boutique hotel, which separates it from other accommodation styles.

Furthermore, being traditional versus modern was acknowledged as a typical characteristics, which was marked as neutral. Officially no clear statement could be withdrawn in this conversation, as some boutique hotels are more traditionally orientated and others choose a more modern approach. As this attribute could not be clear categorized the result of this group discussion showed that this component is treated rather neutral in the process of identifying boutique hotels, because it does not generate clear results.

After showing different lobby pictures from different boutique hotels all participants shared their first impression and what came to mind when seeing them. First their emotional response was noted and afterwards missing attributes suggested by industry experts' were discussed. In general it was noticed that there was a strong overlap in their response to the displayed pictures and their previously asked opinions on boutique hotels, as they mentioned attributes such as super expensive, fancy, sweet, girlish, cheesy, pop artish, trendy and cozy.

When mentioning all missing characteristics based on professionals' opinions three factors were added, specifically quite, experience and romantic. To confirm the previous established boutique hotel image, according to participant 4, those establishments need to be calm and cozy to create this home like feeling. Laying the focus on experience over providing only facilities was graded in both cases as important and therefore should be added as a general rule, which could apply to all accommodation providing properties. However, was still marked as important for boutique hotels as it corresponds with the uniqueness focus previously mentioned. While a romantic atmosphere was strongly associated with boutique hotels, as those often tend to appear cozy and intimate, it was rated rather not important by this group, as "some people might share the same opinion and others do not" (P7).

While the participants impressions all in all were strongly overlapping with professionals' original ideas, they at the same time displayed a new angle by developing bigger clusters and connections to create a coherent story, where all components add up to a whole picture. While this boutique hotel image is strongly engraved by typical stereotypes, it still exhibits a logical idea of what a boutique is and what makes it so different. After comparing the results of the focus group discussion with the consumers some similarities can be noticed, as both focused primarily on physical aspects. When confronting the group with this observation their instant feedback was not too surprising. Participant 1 stated that "people need something to kind of touch or see [...] they can hold on to". Further, the choice nowadays is simple to big in fact "it is really confusing and maybe that is the reason why they stick to known characteristics" (P7).

4.2.2 Results of lifestyle characteristics

When evaluating the Likert scale of lifestyle hotels, which is exhibit in figure 8, the most eye catching aspect is that out of ten characteristics only six were mentioned by students during the brainstorming session and almost all of them, except being trendy and cool, were physical attributes (external).

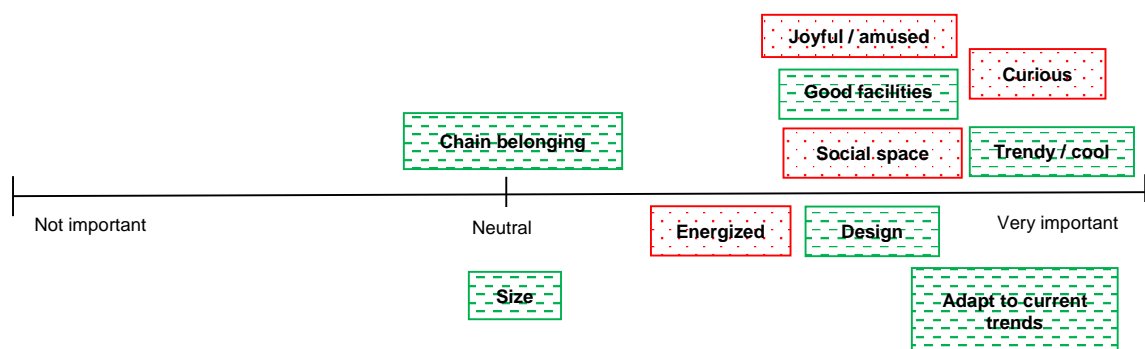


Figure 8. Likert scale for lifestyle hotels (Götz 2015)

The result of analyzing the very important segment on the Likert scale above combined with the discussion, where all factors mentioned were justified, illuminates that the lifestyle concept consists of four components. The core element, which is the driven force is the ability to adapt to current trends. Afterwards facilities and design are adjusted according to it. Moreover, those factors also serve the purpose to visualize the particular trend and transfer it into tangible material, which can be seen and touched by people, to make the idea tangible. Consequently, constant consumer research is required to identify the current trends to be able to deliver up-to-date products to match consumers desire (P1). Therefore, the ability to reflect on current trends is as important for lifestyle hotels as being unique is for boutique hotels (P4).

To be able to create and communicate the chosen lifestyle to its consumers corresponding facilities are required, according to participant 2. "Without good facilities [one] cannot supply the trendy trends" and therefore complementary facilities might be one of the most important factor, when talking about lifestyle. Design on the other hand is used to visualize the chosen lifestyle by mirroring their principles, for instance "[...] an eco [friendly hotel should not display] plastic or black leather item [as it does not reflect on their original values]" (P4).

Analyzing the neutral part the same components can be found as with boutique hotels, which are size and chain belonging versus being independent. As both factors do not provide a deeper understanding when classifying this hotel type, all participants categorized them as neutral. However, their tendency laid more towards bigger properties and being chain representatives. The bigger size was justified due to the fact that "more people are following [...] mega trends [...] so [one] need to have space to accommodate those people" (P4). Also, members' pointed out that in comparison lifestyle hotels tend to belong to chains, at least it is something that is really popular nowadays as all chains launch their own lifestyle brands (P8).

After introducing the trigger pictures of lifestyle lobbies from different properties their first impression included attributes such as: cool, trendy, modern, have kind of a theme (in this case fashion) and crazy lightning. Again, some conformity can be withdrawn when comparing the results from the brainstorm session with their picture associations. Additionally, four components were added, when displaying professionals' view, explicitly the importance of social space and the emotional responses being curious, joyful and energetic.

The importance to focus on creating social space, where internal hotel guests can interact with external guests was not mentioned in the individual session by participants, but when

confronting them with the aspect it was rated as an important, as it highly response to Millennial' needs and can be linked to current consumer behavior and the phenomenon of togetherness. Moreover, participants agreed on the fact that guests should feel joyful and amused, as it might give them a reason to return, because they are curious about what is happening next. Nevertheless, as both emotions are referring to the actual experience made it should be relevant for all accommodation types to please their guest by delivering a positive journey, which people enjoy. Discussing if all participants felt curious while looking at the pictures brought in different opinions, some thought it would be more appropriate for lifestyle hotels others beg to differ. For instance participant 4 state that the picture "[...] with the manikins [provokes curiosity especially to] see what is on the wall and what it is all about". Further, the connection according to participant 4 is stronger to lifestyle hotels than boutique, but should be in general applied to all hotels to keep the guests' attention. Others argued the opposite, as one can "[...] constant discover stuff in boutique hotels too and probably sometimes it can be even the reason to come back" (P8). As more participants agreed with participant 4 the democratic approach was applied.

The feeling of being energetic was mainly classified to belong to lifestyle hotels, as "[...] there are so many places with [...] crazy lighting, [which is] one of the super clique" thinking of lifestyle hotels (P4). Even though it seems to be typical it was considered not as important as it had more the tendency to be neutral, as it is not applicable for all lifestyles.

All in all, the collective picture created by the focus group focused mainly on mirroring current trends and therefore being cool and trendy were the core characteristics in identifying a lifestyle hotel. To create and support this image two components were essential, specifically design and facilities. In their opinions design was used to visualize and consequently communicate the chosen lifestyle to its consumers. This entire process also included providing facilities, which pulled the picture together by delivering tangible products to its consumer.

4.2.3 Future and prediction

Toward the end of the focus group interview all participants were asked to share their professional opinions on how the future of boutique and lifestyle establishments will develop. Additionally, it was asked if the difference between both hotel types is clear to all members.

Participant 1 opened this conversation by sharing a new theory, which focuses on clarifying boutique and lifestyle hotels. This new approach describes lifestyle as an umbrella,

turning boutique into a subcategory. As lifestyle is the topic of interest in this theory, various sub topics are embedded such as “[...] boutique, crime or design”. Moreover, according to participant 1 boutique hotels “[...] will disappear in the future, because [...] it is a lifestyle, but new lifestyles are coming up” [for replacement].

Participant 2 left the conversation after the first part and therefore was not able to share their personal opinion.

Participant 3 strongly agreed with participant one’s theory of connecting boutique and lifestyle together and taking lifestyle as the main topic, which integrates boutique. Additionally, it was stated that no big difference could have been noticed when discussing both concepts, however, the prediction included that boutique hotels might disappear, “[...] but it will take a while”.

While participant 4 could not predict the future for both hotel types the difference between both was very clear, which was mainly based on two components. The first differentiation was based on the fact that boutique hotels represented more the luxurious side, while lifestyle focused more on “[...] normal people” and adapting to the current trends. Boutique hotels on the opposite focus more on the aspect of storytelling.

Participant 5 approved that there is basically no clear difference noticeable, as both exist “rather blurry”. While a boutique hotel is described as “[...] rather small” it also has the image to be one of a kind, as the “[...] same hotel [does not exist] anywhere else” and therefore corresponds also well with the idea of being independent. Lifestyle on the contrary “[...] is more general” concentrating on reflecting on current trends. But as previously mentioned no direct differentiation factors could be determined by this member and therefore no foundation exists to form a prediction, however, a bold statement was generated suggesting that both concepts could disappear, as new trends are constantly developing.

Participant 6 elaborated on the fact that new trends are constantly shaped and therefore the future is hard to predict, however the difference between boutique and lifestyle was to some extent clear. The main characteristic used to differentiate was size, as boutique hotels had the tendency to be small to medium-sized and lifestyle hotels were rather bigger in size. Further, boutique hotels follow more the storytelling path, while lifestyle establishments embody more the current spirit of age.

Participant 7’s prediction for the future seemed to be clear when talking about boutique hotels, as those “will stay and it will stay long [...], because whatever happens there are always rich people”. Further, speculation included that the boutique concept will move

more towards “the east side of the world, because they get more developed”. The image of a lifestyle hotel on the contrary focused on younger customers, who “want to get something else then just a normal hotel, like some other offers and the price should not be so high, but it is risky business wise”. Additionally, the danger of following trends was pointed out, which could bring great threat as extra costs could be attached, when adjusting facilities to keep up with the current trends.

Participant 8 emphasized that there was basically no “[...] super big difference” between those two hotel types. It is more like a spin of words. But, some general guidelines could be applied “[...] by saying that boutique hotels are set to the more expensive side like Hotel Haven and Fabian [...]. Lifestyle hotels on the opposite could be something less posh, [...] corky or more hipsterish”.

4.2.4 Evaluation of the process of the focus group interview

Even though the entire interview was conducted successfully there were a few factors, which made this whole process a little challenging. Starting at 14:00, right after everyone had lunch, was maybe not the best time to kick off a group interview, as everyone was already a little tired when getting into the room. Moreover, the room A 420 was extremely hot, as it was facing the sunny side of the building. Due to the massive construction work outside it was further noisy, so the windows could have not been opened. The consequences of the noise were also mainly shown in the recordings. But at least the drinks provide were cold and therefore refreshing. Things started off really well when in smaller groups each participant discussed what they were associating with both hotel categories and afterwards all components were collected and discussed in the entire group. As each bullet point was discussed this part of the conversation was maybe even too long, as some members were struggling to keep their focus. But after displaying some pictures and asking for their first impression it seemed like they woke up. The discussion continued and some interesting aspects were mentioned. All in all, it has been a valuable experience for this study as well as the researcher.

4.3 Reliability & validity of results

The principles of validity and reliability are fundamental cornerstones of all academic methods and in this study consist of four criteria, such as credibility, transferability, dependability and confirmability.

Credibility confirms that the generated results are credible and reliable from the perspective of participants in this research. Consequently only participants can legitimately judge the credibility of the results. Transferability refers to the degree to which results can be

transferred to another context or bigger population. As the generated results are mainly showing only tendencies, due to an inconclusive amount of response, those results cannot be generalized nor transferred to the entire lodging industry. Dependability is based on replicability and repeatability. Essential in this process is whether the same results can be reproduced when conducting the research again. To be able to do so the researcher was responsible to describe, document and justify the entire process (see methodology chapter). Confirmability measures the degree to which other researcher could confirm or corroborate on the results made. In qualitative research the researcher brings in a unique perspective to the study, but at the same time is considered being a manipulator. To add value to the conducted study and gain better reputation in the field the results should be traceable by documenting the procedure. (Trochim 2006.)

5 Conclusion

The purpose of this research was to investigate what the differences or similarities are between boutique and lifestyle hotels for professionals, consumers and students. As the basis of this research was formed by experts' interpretations of both hotel types further question asked was if consumers' and students' shared the same understanding.

As mentioned professionals' opinions shaped the foundation of this comparison, however, it seemed that they did not agree always on all matters. Nevertheless, the literature consulted when forming the professional view suggested a clear structure, where two measures were applied, external and internal. The internal characteristics referred to the physical tangible attributes, while external factors reflected on the emotional response each hotel type was trying to provoke. Applying those measures the following vision of a boutique hotel was created, which internal attributes were identified as independent (not chain belonging), offering personalized service, reflect on local history, central location, size and being unique. The external factors included storytelling as well as being noticed as a romantic and peaceful property. On the contrary internal attributes of a lifestyle hotel should highlight technological aspects, the local culture, design, location and health. The emotional response, which professionals' associated with this hotel type emphasized being innovative, energetic, contemporary and comfortable. Even though not all professionals' shared the same opinion on all identifying characteristics a clear vision of the original idea of each hotel type could be established.

When consulting the guests' perspective it can be noticed that according to them there is no big difference between both hotel types, as they reflect in both cases on general characteristics, which can be applied to all accommodation types. The internal factors were not only identical, but were also rated in the same order explicitly location, service, design and social space. While the external attributes varied a little in their rank order consumers still chose the same factors such as comfort, contemporary and if the atmosphere is peaceful. As there is literally no difference made on the internal nor external level the result can be ambiguous. It either states that consumers are really not able to distinguish boutique hotel from lifestyle or that the type of research conduct was not appropriate to generate significant data to answer this question, as participants were not directly asked. Consequently, this could be a great starting point for further research to investigate basically the same phenomena, but use maybe different methods and compare findings to generate more conclusive results.

However, as the second opinion is not proven yet this paper will adapt the view that consumers cannot identify specific characteristics for either hotel type and therefore their

opinion is represented by identical characteristics, which are location, personalized service, design and social space on the internal level. The external aspect refer to comfort, quietness and if the properties are modern and the experience made recommendable.

The student focus group, as predicted, connected both perspectives by positioning themselves between both presented viewpoints. On the one hand they strongly corresponded with the original ideas formed by experts, by naming almost all identifying components and discussing their importance. But on the other hand they were also able to take on the role of a consumer and speak from their standpoint, pointing out that some factors might be irrelevant in the consumer eye, while it is important for the industry. While some individuals were not able to clearly identify a difference between boutique and lifestyle hotels, in both cases a collective group picture was created for each. Those pictures were separating both hotel types, but at the same time were strongly engraved by typical stereotypes. A boutique hotel for instance had the image of being rather small, independent, one-of-a-kind and luxurious offering exceptional service. Further, it was described as being a cozy place with a mysterious location, which brings in the feeling of exclusivity. A lifestyle hotel on the contrary is a themed hotel, which is currently very popular and therefore mostly represented by chain hotels. It reflects on the current trends mainly through its design and facilities, as those transfer the concept into tangible products for its consumers.

All in all, the previously presented results suggest that on a superficial level all three parties involved share the same understanding, but when analyzing those characteristics more closely it can be seen that those factors are very basic and therefore can be applied to any accommodation establishment. Those factors are location, design, services, and facilities, which are physically presented in every property. Also, when analyzing the emotional response from all stakeholders involved the same general result can be generated, as all seemed to agree with the attributes of comfort, calmness and if the experience made is recommendable, which indirectly could refer to a personal great stay.

Finally the answer to the main question, which asks for the differences and similarities between boutique and lifestyle hotels is that there is no official universal answer, which can be transferred to the lodging industry. However, all parties involved agree that the difference between boutique and lifestyle hotels lays mainly in their design. Boutique hotels for instance provoke more the cozy, intimate and maybe even romantic emotional response, while lifestyle hotels focus more on appealing fresh and innovative by representing the current spirit of age by reflecting on recent trends.

But as many counterexamples already exist proving that there are already boutique hotels, which also focus on mirroring current trends and revers that there are lifestyle hotels designed to charm with romantic decor, the difference between boutique and lifestyle hotels is maybe not to be found in the quantifying measures such as interior decoration, but rather something more psychological or even the way they are marketed. Following this line of thoughts would also be the recommendation for further studies. For now this research mainly showed that currently the difference between both hotel types is not totally clear for any stakeholder involved.

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Appendices

Appendix 1. Focus Group Interview Guideline

GENERAL TOPIC	Associations with boutique and lifestyle hotels
Main research questions	What do participants associate with boutique and lifestyle hotels? What characteristics do they choose to describe both hotel types?
Sub-questions	How did boutique and lifestyle develop (origin)? How will the future for both hotel types look like?

Date: Tuesday, 21st April 2015

Time: **Beginning:** 2pm **End:** 4 pm

Moderator: Irina Götz & Michaela Tiefenbacher (assistant)

Participants: Mixed group of seven students

Location: Haaga-Helia University of Applied Sciences, Helsinki, Finland

(1)	Welcome and introduction of facilitator
(2)	Overview of the topic
(3)	Guidelines + declaration of consent for recording
(4)	Introduction of participants and consent for using generated statement anonymously
(5)	Data will be used confidentially and only for the purpose of this research paper
(6)	Create a comfortable atmosphere

A	Opening questions/ warm up	15mins
1	A boutique hotel for me is ... A Lifestyle hotel for me is ...	Brainstorming: Flip charts - use these findings as a basis for discussion
	Expectations, experience	
	What are your expectations, experiences?	

B	Base of opinion	15mins
1	What is your opinion based on?	
2	Which factors influence your point of view?	

C	Emotional trigger boutique	15mins
1	What do you associate with those pictures?	

D	Emotional trigger lifestyle	15mins
1	What comes into your mind when seeing those pictures?	
E	Characteristics (importance)	15mins

	<p>Individually extract possible characteristics of previous established writing on flip chart and mark their importance</p> <p>If more (additional) factors come to mind add those with a different color!</p> <p>Based on literature review and guest comments more characteristics were found, which importance needs to be discussed</p>	
1	<p>Professionals (Boutique/ Lifestyle/both)</p> <p>Internal attributes (physical features):</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Individual (no chain) - Unique/authentic - Personal service - Design - Social space - History/ architecture - Storytelling - Culture - Technology <p>External attributes (emotional response):</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Experience - Romantic - Peaceful - Energized, upbeat - Amused, joyful - Discovery, curious - Trendy, cool 	5 mins
2	<p>Guests</p> <p><u>Internal:</u></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Location - Service - Design Social space <p><u>External:</u></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Comfort - Value for money - Peaceful Modern 	5 mins

F	End
	<p>Final statement:</p> <p>In the beginning XXX was important for you - would you like to add anything to that?</p> <p>Future significance/weight?</p> <p>How will the future look like for boutique and lifestyle establishment? (Merge together, co-exist, one will vanish?)</p> <p>Thank and summarize</p>

Appendix 2. Student Consent Form

Title: Perception of boutique and lifestyle

Researcher: Irina Götz
(International Hotel management, Bachelor)

Objectives: The purpose of this study is to gain an insight into young, future professional's minds by sharing their personal associations towards both hotel types to establish a foundation for comparison.

Procedure: In this focus group interview you and your group members will be asked several questions by the facilitator and requested to discuss your experiences and opinions with the other participants.
The focus group discussion consists of one session, lasting about two hours and involves no anticipated risks to you.

I, _____, agree to participate in the Focus Group Interview entitled *perception of boutique and lifestyle*.

- 1) There will be one focus group interview taking place on Tuesday, April 21st 2015 at 14:00 and it will last for approximately 2 hours.
- 2) The participant will be recorded on audio-tape during the focus group discussion describing their understanding and experiences of boutique and lifestyle hotels.
- 3) The participant has the right to withdraw their assistance from this project at any time without consequence, even after signing the letter of consent.
- 4) The participant will be entirely free to discuss issues and will not be in any way forced into providing information that is confidential or of a sensitive nature.
- 5) Audio-tapes and transcripts will be kept confidentially.

I, _____, agree to the conditions stated in this letter of consent and certify that I have received a copy of the consent form.

(Signature)

(Date)

For inquiries, please contact Irina Götz on +358 [REDACTED] or via email on [REDACTED]
[REDACTED]

Appendix 3. Record of consumers' response on Trip Advisor reviews

External (physical) characteristics:

	Amount of response for Hotel Haven	Percentage %	Amount of response for Glo Kluuvi	Percentage %
Individual (no chain)	-	-	-	-
Unique	3	0,5	6	1
Personalized service	406	70	284	49
Design	255	46	267	46
Social space	55	9,5	76	13
Architecture	3	0,5	23	4
Storytelling	-	-	-	-
Culture	-	-	3	0,5
Technology	-	-	23	4
Location	462	79,5	459	79
Health	-	-	3	0,5
Size	-	-	-	-

Internal (emotional response) characteristics:

	Amount of response for Hotel Haven	Percentage %	Amount of response for Glo Kluuvi	Percentage %
Romantic	-	-	-	-
Comfortable	244	42	232	40
Peaceful	64	11	47	8
Innovative	-	-	-	-
Energized/ upbeat	-	-	3	0,5
Contemporary/ modern (trendy, cool)	41	7	53	9
Amused/ joyful	12	2	3	0,5
Experience	29	5	12	2
Recommendable	307	53	191	33
Value for money	23	4	18	3
Discovery	3	0,5	-	-

Appendix 4. Chosen pictures for intuitive part for the focus group interview

Boutique hotels are represented by:

- Sofitel Berlin Kurfuerstendamm (Berlin, Germany)
- 51 Buckingham Gate (London, United Kingdom)
- Borgo Santo Pietro (Milan, Italy)



Figure 9. Sofitel Berlin Kurfuerstendamm (ACCOR Hotels 2015)



Figure 10. 51 Buckingham Gate (TAJ Hotels Resorts and Palaces 2015)



Figure 11. Borgo Santo Pietro (CharmingTuscany 2015)

Lifestyle hotels are represented by:

- Berlin Hotel Indigo (Berlin, Germany)
- W London - Leicester (London, United Kingdom)
- Moxy Milan Malpensa Airport (Milan, Italy)



Figure 12. Berlin Hotel Indigo (IHG InterContinental Hotel Group 2015)



Figure 13. W London - Leicester (Starwood Hotels & Resort Worldwide 2015)



Figure 14. Moxy Milan Malpensa Airport (Marriott International 2015)