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Trust Between Customers and Hotels:

Through the Expression of Trust of Customers

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The world is changing fast.

It is the best of times and the worst of times. Best wishes to all!

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Alicia Liu

Abstract

The thesis aims to explore the customers' attitude and perception about trust between customers and hotels through the expression of trust of customers. Hotels nowadays interact and build relationships with customers frequently where there are many possible terms evoking expression of trust customers. In order to study the dynamic feature of trust, a qualitative approach is used. A netnographic approach is conducted on Tripadvisor and qualitative content analysis is chosen to collect and analyze empirical data. The themes are identified regarding trust between customers and hotels which are "customer trust in hotels" and "Hotel trust in customers". Several terms evoking customers' expression of trust under the two themes are also discussed. The thesis is able to contribute to gaining understanding on trust where hotels can take the contribution as the practical implication when employing trust to deal with customers.

Keywords: Trust, Customer Trust, Hotel Trust, Hotel Sector, Hospitality, Tourism, Service Industry, Tripadvisor, Netnography

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1. INTRODUCTION

1.1 Phenomenon of Trust

Trust is a word appearing frequently in our daily lives and it is treated as the fundamental element regarding social interaction and relationships (Grönroos, 1994; Lovell, 2009; Kantsperger & Kunz, 2010; Parasuraman, Zeithaml & Berry, 1985). Who do we usually trust? We trust our partner, families, friends and those who have close relationships with us. The intimate others trust us as well to form stable relationships with mutual reliance. Furthermore, trust happens not only at the interpersonal level but also at the business context. People trust those who have professional skills, such as doctor, scientist, researcher or lawyer. Customers choose the companies they trust to do the consumption and companies find their cooperative partner involving the consideration of trust. When people express " I trust you/xxx ", it usually presents a positive perception. Trust is complicated to describe and measure since it is a rather abstract concept. However, trust works remarkably for people to overcome the uncertainty and establish stable relationships regardless of its ambiguity and intangibility (Colquitt, LePine, Piccolo, Zapata & Rich, 2012). It serves as a mediating role to deal with relational exchanges, including individual to individual, individual to organization, and organization to organization. The establishment of relationships happens every day, and even the relational exchanges based on business and market are still socially embedded. Therefore, the norms of social setting still play as a force to regulate the behavior of two sides in the business aspect (Cruz, Gómez-Mejia & Becerra, 2010; Lovell, 2009; Singh & Sirdeshmukh, 2000).

Regarding trust applied in the business aspect, trust has been commonly discussed in different contexts, for instance customer trust, trust within organizations, trust

between companies and the suppliers (B2B). The trust between customers and service firms is an interesting topic to explore since nowadays firms highlight trust to deal with customers and promote themselves. With the consumption patterns changing over time, the service industry becomes the major sector nowadays. Service providers establish the relational exchanges with their customers through service encounter moments. Trust is frequently applied by service providers as the critical factor to stabilize relationships. Moreover, unlike traditional companies promoting visible and physical goods, service companies sell services which are relatively difficult to be depicted. Service, with special IHIP features including intangibility, heterogeneity, inseparability, and perishability (Zeithaml, Parasuraman & Berry, 1985), is ambiguous to imagine until customers really experience the service themselves (Wang, Law, Hung & Guillet, 2014). Customers may feel unsure and hesitate due to the uncertainty and intangibility where trust is able to reduce customers' fear and build confidence in their choices. Trust can serve as a decisive cue for customers to judge and choose the desired service providers. Service providers nowadays aspire to gain competitive advantages (Wang, et al., 2014) to maintain regular customers and build new/potential customers (Grönroos, 1990; Grönroos, 1994). Trust also plays a significant role in contributing to above issues (Setó-Pamies, 2012; Sirdeshmukh, Singh, & Sabol, 2002).

As mentioned above, service providers apply trust to deal with the relationships between customers; thus, to understand trust from customers' perspective is essential. How can service providers know the thoughts of customers regarding trust? Besides observation or conjecture, it is possible to hear from customers themselves. Customers nowadays also talk about trust when sharing their experiences with others and communicating with service providers. They are aware of how important trust is

and how service providers emphasize trust so that they use trust to highlight the issues. The expression of trust reflects and conveys the feelings of customers where service providers can recognize what raises the concerns. It is helpful for service providers to learn from the expression of trust of customers so that future negative outcomes can be avoided as far as possible.

1.2 Research Issues, Aim and Question

Among different sectors of service industries, the hotel industry raises my interest the most since hotels frequently build relationships with customers. Hotel sector is a subdivision of the hospitality industry of tourism which specializes in accommodation. Meanwhile, hotels often provide other services besides lodging, including restaurant (food and drink), wellness and so on. Is trust critical to hotels? The answer would definitely be “YES”! Almost every service involves the interaction with customers that the establishment of relationships is inevitable. Hotels use trust as an effective mechanism to maintain a stable relationship. Moreover, tourism products and services need to be especially informative to the customers due to its intangibility, price and variety (Zillifro & Morais, 2004). Hotel services also need trust to serve as an invisible cue for customers to make their decisions since customers will not know the how is the service until they visit and experience the hotels (Wang, et al., 2014).

Trust has attracted attention in tourism and hospitality fields since the 1990s where customer/consumer trust is the main focus (Rousseau, Sitkin, Burt & Camerer, 1998; Wang et al., 2014). However, besides customer trust, I am also curious about the trust from hotels towards customers which is less emphasized and leaves room to discuss more. Furthermore, in previous researches regarding the field of hotel/hospitality,

customer/consumer trust is mostly treated as a variable to examine the relations with other concepts, for example customer loyalty, service quality, satisfaction, purchase intention, etc (Lin & Lu, 2010; Tabaku & Kruja, 2019). Customer trust relates to online booking, online reviews, eWOM and so on is also often discussed in recent years due to the rise and prosperity of the internet (Ladhari & Michaud, 2015; Sparks & Browning, 2011). Quantitative methods are mostly employed to study trust regarding previous studies. However, it would be beneficial to introduce another angle to understand trust since trust has complex and dynamic features. Therefore, I argue that to use a qualitative approach to get more details of the trust between customers and hotels. Customers' expression of trust can serve as a useful base to understand the perspective of the customers. Moreover, trust is a floating and changing value rather than remaining the same (Rousseau et al., 1998). Trust between customers and hotels can change due to different events; thus, to study customers' expression of trust is also of great interest for gaining better understanding of how they treat trust.

The thesis aims to explore the customers' attitude and perception about trust between customers and hotels through the expression of trust of customers. By examining what can evoke the expression of trust and how customers feel can lead to better understanding on the topic. The both directions of trust between customers and hotels and the change of trust will be studied in the hotel context. Interaction happens frequently between customers and hotels which are even more complicated than before since customers may expect hotels to provide all-inclusive or customized services. Hotels start the interaction with the customers even before customers purchase or experience the services and there are various possible factors that can have impact on trust. The findings can add insights to the issues to enrich the general

understanding of trust in the hospitality sector of tourism. Furthermore, to gain the knowledge of trust can further serve as practical implications for hotels to follow. The hotel industry becomes increasingly competitive for firms to win the heart of guests when customers have diverse options to choose from nowadays. It is surely worthy for hotel firms to understand trust since they are in need of trust to deal with customers. Other firms of tourism sector and service industry can also use the knowledge as the reference to prevent negative outcomes regarding trust. To acquire valuable data from the real cases of customers who experience the hotel services, I propose to use a netnographic approach to study the expression of trust of customers online. Trust can be sensitive to discuss sometimes and the discussion can be easily led to specific directions. However, there are channels and platforms nowadays for customers to express their experiences and thoughts online where customers also talk about trust in their posts.

Therefore, the following research question is proposed to study the topic and can be used to achieve the research aim:

What are the terms that evoke the expression of trust of customers regarding the interaction between customers and hotels?

1.3 Structure of the Thesis

The thesis has been divided into five main sections including introduction, literature review, methodology, findings, and conclusion. After the introduction is the literature review section which provides background knowledge of previous studies. Third, the methodology chapter presents the methods chosen that a netnographic approach is used to collect data and qualitative content analysis is used to do analysis. Research

approach, research design, ethical considerations and limitations will be further discussed in this section. Fourth, it will move on to the findings part that empirical findings of the topic are presented and discussed. Lastly, the conclusion part is the final part which summarizes the analysis and findings of the research. The research limitations and future research directions are also outlined in this section. Furthermore, the possible managerial implications derived from the thesis will be also presented.

2. LITERATURE REVIEW

2.1 Concept of Trust

2.1.1 Definition and its Components

To understand trust, it is helpful to first examine how it evolves. The concept of trust comes from psychology and sociology since trust is a core concept in social settings. Researchers from the psychological field mostly emphasize on the personal attributes regarding the two exchange partners, while sociologists relate trust to the relationships and interaction in a social setting that involves people and organizations (Lovell 2009; Rotter, 1980; Wang et al., 2014). The idea of expectancy based on interpersonal trust from psychology (Rotter, 1980) has strongly influenced the following studies. Social exchange theory of sociology field is often employed as well to conceptualize trust (Aulakh, Kotabe & Sahay, 1996; Ganesan, 1994; Morgan & Hunt, 1994; Wang et al., 2014). Under the social exchange process, trust is inherent and plays a key role to increase dependence and interaction (Cropanzano & Mitchell, 2005).

Trust is further studied through different disciplines including political science, economics, management, interorganizational topic, marketing, service and so on (Beccerra & Gupta, 1999; Cruz, et al., 2010; Delgado-Ballester & Munuera-Alemán, 2001; Seppänen, Blomqvist & Sundqvist, 2007; Swift, 2001). The multidisciplinary basis constructs trust with the richness; however, it also adds the difficulty to integrate or to find the consensus on trust (Delgado-Ballester, Munuera-Alemán & Yagüe-Guillén, 2003). Scholars agree that a universally accepted definition of trust still could not be reached in spite of great interest in researching trust (Andaleeb, 1996; Chen & Dhillon, 2003; Kantsperger & Kunz, 2010; Ndubisi, 2007; Rousseau et al., 1998; Singh & Sirdeshmukh, 2000; Wang et al., 2014). It is difficult to come up with

the agreement on trust since trust is often examined with different perspectives regarding the topic and the field studied. Lovell (2009) indicates the trust is usually understood and explored through a problem-centred lens regarding the specific aspect. Therefore, instead of a more general concept, different definitions emerge and are developed where trust is treated differently according to respective topics. However, there are two approaches often discussed by the researchers that reflect key elements in trust (Gefen & Straub, 2004; Moorman et al., 1993; Wang et al., 2014).

The first approach is taken by considerable research and it views trust as a subjective belief and confidence (Moorman et al., 1993; Wang et al., 2014). Schurr and Ozanne (1985, p.940) define trust as “the belief that a party’s word or promise is reliable and that a party will fulfill his/her obligations in an exchange relationship”. Proposed by Moorman, Deshpande and Zaltman (1993, p. 82), trust is referred to “a willingness to rely on an exchange partner in whom one has confidence”. Moreover, Morgan and Hunt (1994, p. 23) conceptualize trust to exist when “one party has confidence in an exchange partner’s reliability and integrity”. The positive and confident feeling owned by one party towards another is to expect good outcomes or behaviors. One will trust and rely on another side when he or she has the positive expectation on the partner. The partner’s ability and reliability are trusted to kindly fulfill the promises or obligations instead of operating opportunism.

In the second approach, trust is treated as a behavior intention to put reliance on the exchange partner with a certain degree of vulnerability and uncertainty (Delgado-Ballester et al., 2003; Moorman, et al., 1993; Wang et al., 2014). Mayer, Davis and Schoorman (1995, p. 71) mention trust as “the willingness of a party to be vulnerable to the actions of another party... ” in the study. Rousseau et al. (1998, p.

395) also propose trust as “a psychological state comprising the intention to accept vulnerability... ”. Trust is especially needed when there is a high degree of risk between two parties, for instance uncertainty and lack of knowledge as well as information (Coulter & Coulter, 2002; Tan & Sutherland, 2004). If the relationship is in complete certainty, no risk and without vulnerable position, things can be predicted where trust is unnecessary. That is, one is fully aware of the possible risks and is willing to take the vulnerability to trust the other party in the normal relational situation.

Although the first approach is argued to be more prevailing than the second (Wang et al., 2014), the importance of the behavioral intention aspect is still supported by other researchers. Moorman et al. (1993) claim that both approaches, the belief and behavioral intention, are required for trust to exist and present. Moreover, trust can even serve as a stronger factor on behavioral intention according to Sichtmann (2007). There are also scholars defining trust with the combination of both components (Rousseau et al, 1998; Delgado-Ballester et al., 2003). Both the belief and behavior intention can be shown in trust; however regarding the situations in real lives, the proportion or the highlight part may differ case by case. Trust can be viewed and treated in different ways based on the situations or the people who construct. Thus, it is hard to reduce the concept of trust into a single element in a determined manner considering the complexity.

2.1.2 Dimensions of Trust

The dimension of trust is another major aspect to be discussed that scholars propose different dimensions related to trust based on their specific topics (Svensson, 2005). Both single dimensional and multidimensional perspectives are proposed by scholars

to discuss trust (Chen & Dhillon, 2003; Rousseau et al. 1998; Wang et al., 2014). Compared to the former, the latter is taken by considerable researchers as the main approach (Chen & Dhillon, 2003; Ganesan & Hess, 1997; Svensson, 2005; Tan & Sutherland, 2004; Wang et al., 2014). Regarding the multidimensional perspective, researchers choose different components as the desired dimensions of trust according to their studies (Ganesan, 1994; Mayer et al., 1995; Singh & Sirdeshmukh, 2000).

Although there are divergences regarding the dimensions of multidimensional perspective, a certain degree of similarity on critical factors still presents. Several researchers argue specific dimensions are commonly seen and repeatedly mentioned. Chen and Dhillon (2003) claim that competence, benevolence, and integrity are the recurring themes of trust dimensions. Proposed in the study, competence refers to the partner's ability to fulfill the promises; integrity relates to a consistent, reliable, and honest manner; and benevolence indicates the sincere concern of the welfare when putting others interest ahead of own interest (Chen & Dhillon, 2003, p. 305). Similarly, Gefen and Straub (2004) indicate ability, benevolence and integrity as the typical dimensions where ability refers to the identical idea of competence. Besides competence, benevolence and integrity, Tan and Sutherland (2004) add predictability which considers the continuity of a provider's consistent service in the future. Meanwhile, according to Wang et al. (2014), integrity, competence and reliability are identified as frequently used dimensions in tourism and hospitality studies. Combining the arguments from these scholars, ability/competence, benevolence, integrity, reliability and predictability are claimed to be recurrently identified in different trust-related studies.

2.2 Trust between Customers and Service Providers

To explore the trust between customers and service providers, customer trust in service providers is widely discussed in previous studies. Extending from the concept of trust, customer trust also shares the critical components. For instance, expectation, vulnerability, and the dimensions are reflected. Sirdeshmukh et al. (2002, p. 17) define consumer trust as “the expectation held by the consumer that the service provider is dependable and can be relied on to deliver its promises” where expectation is identified. Moreover, Swan, Bowers and Richardson (1999, p. 94) also highlight the idea of risk by suggesting customer trust to have “a future risk contingency orientation”. Customers may voluntarily expose themselves to undesirable outcomes with risk which indicates the willingness to be vulnerable. Meanwhile, Keh & Xie (2009, p. 733) define customer trust as “the customer’s overall perception towards the ability, benevolence, and integrity of the provider” where the dimensions of ability, benevolence, and integrity are taken into consideration. It shows that recurring dimensions are also identified as the critical constructs of customer trust.

Customers often establish relational exchanges with the service providers they interact with. Regarding customer trust, the customer will be the side as the trustor and the one he or she believes in will be the trustee (Siau, & Shen, 2003; Sichtmann, 2007). The trustee can be the service firms/organizations (Delgado-Ballester & Munuera-Alemán, 2001; Sichtmann, 2007), service employees (Crosby, Evans & Cowles, 1990; Swan et al., 1999), online website or online purchase (Hoffman, Novak, & Peralta, 1999; McKnight, Choudhury and Kacmar, 2002) and so on. The hotel sector is my main focus so that the hotel as a service organization/brand will be the trustee in this thesis. In hotels, all the tangible and intangible resources, including

personnel, technology, system, etc., are devoted to the construction of trust (Grönroos, 1990). Customers view all those resources as the parts of products/services offered by hotels where all those resources are possible to evoke the trust perception of customers. Viewing the hotel as the trustee, trust in company/brand in previous studies is defined as “a feeling of security held by the consumer that the brand will meet his/her consumption expectations” (Delgado-Ballester and Munuera-Alemán 2001, p.1214). The perception of reliability of the brand can let customers feel secure which indicates the existence of trust (Delgado-Ballester et al., 2003). Sichtmann (2007, p. 1001) also highlights the element of belief and risk in that customer puts belief in the partner (company) regardless of the potential risky situations regarding customer trust in corporate brand. That is to say, when the customer trusts a hotel, he or she holds the confident expectation on the hotel, even with awareness that there will be possible uncertain and vulnerable conditions.

As stated, customer trust in service providers is frequently studied; however, the other direction of trust, from service providers towards their customers, is less discussed. The relational exchange needs at least two parties to be involved which indicates a bi-lateral form of relationship. When examining the trust in buyer and seller relationships (firm with firm), it is critical that both parties develop trust in each other (Doney & Cannon, 1997). How about the relationships between customers and service providers? Discussing in the previous paragraph, customers hold confident expectations in service firms to fulfill promises and obligations. Nevertheless, service firms may also have expectations towards customers to behave in a certain manner. For instance, Phillips, Alexander and Shaw (2005) propose that retail companies also hold the expectations on the consumer. Hence, service providers' trust in customers might have existed as well but remains less explored. The terms evoking the

expression of trust of customers may also include the trust from service providers (hotels) in the customers. To explore more about this direction of trust is of great interest to gain understanding of service providers' trust and to help dealing with the relationships of two parties.

2.2.1 Contributions of Customer Trust

Building trust can be time-consuming and need the devotion of plentiful effort as well as resources (Czernek, Czakon & Marszałek, 2017). Despite the difficult truth, why does customer trust still receive so much attention? Overall, customer trust serves as a useful mechanism to deal with numerous issues where trust can be the cause, the direct effect, and even the side effect of various results. Trust is the fundamental element to any relational exchange and customer-service provider relationship is no exception. Containing a lot of human-to-human interaction in services, service employees and service organizations inevitably establish relationships with the customers. A positive and stable relational construction can bring competitive advantages to the service organizations which serve as precious assets (Lovell, 2009; Setó-Pamies, 2012; Wang, et al., 2014). Therefore, relational marketing becomes critical for service providers since relationship marketing aims to develop and maintain long-term relationships with the customers to keep regular customers and reduce marketing cost (Grönroos, 1994; Ndubisi, 2007; Sirdeshmukh et al., 2002; Zillifro & Morais, 2004). Parasuraman et al. (1985) introduce trust as a key factor in relationship marketing, especially in the service industry. It is necessary for service providers to have customer trust to strengthen the relationships (Coulter & Coulter, 2002; Doney & Cannon, 1997; Ganesan, 1994). When customers strongly trust the providers, the relational exchanges between the two sides can continue in a stable way. Furthermore, trust can deal with the opportunistic behaviors regarding the market

uncertainty (Czernek et al., 2017; Kantsperger & Kunz, 2010). The expectation of long-term cooperation can reduce the need to monitor the other party since partners will choose to behave well to maintain the relationships.

Meanwhile, customer trust can contribute to purchase intention, customer loyalty, commitment and other positive side effects from above issues. Keh and Xie (2009) argue that customer trust is positively related to the purchase intention. Furthermore, customer trust also acts as a key factor to enhance customer loyalty (Moorman et al., 1993; Setó-Pamies, 2012). Service providers emphasize customer loyalty since it is more costly to get a new customer than to keep the existing one (Oh, 2002); therefore, it is better to gain as many loyal customers as possible. Trust can help customers to reduce their perceived risk on the service providers and customers are likely to act cooperatively and enhance their loyalty (Sirdeshmukh et al., 2000). The more the customer trusts in the provider, the stronger attachment he or she will have will create a loyal bonding with the service providers. Customer loyalty contributes to the repurchase behavior as well as marketing effect. According to Oliver (1999, p. 34), customer loyalty is "a deeply held commitment to rebuy or repatronize a preferred product/service consistently in the future". Loyal customers are even willing to increase the consumption and to communicate positive word-of-mouth as a promotion to attract new potential customers (Ndubisi, 2007; Sirdeshmukh et al., 2000). Commitment is another critical factor to positively affect customer loyalty where the positive relationship between trust and commitment is also proposed by researchers (Morgan & Hunt; 1994; Keh & Xie 2009; Zillifro & Morais, 2004). Customer trust can further lead to the impact on price perception. Customers may have more tolerance or lower sensitivity on price that they are willing to pay more to the

providers they have trust and commitment with (Delgado-Ballester & Munuera-Alemán, 2001; Keh & Xie 2009).

2.2.2 What Leads to Customer Trust

Scholars propose several factors that can lead to the construction and enhancement of customer trust. Grönroos (1990) suggests that the service provider (seller) needs to operate their resources, for example, personnel, technology and system, to make consumer trust in the provider. Also, when the performance is regarded as high quality and/or better than expectations, it will enhance customer's positive confidence in the service provider's competence (Singh & Sirdeshmukh, 2000). Thus, service providers should keep dedicating to providing high quality services which correspond or exceed the initial expectations of customers. The good service quality and satisfaction are widely recognized as critical elements to lead to positive customer trust by different scholars (Casielles, Álvarez & Martín, 2005; Chen & Dhillon, 2003; Delgado-Ballester & Munuera-Alemán, 2001; Ganesan, 1994; Sui & Baloglu, 2003) where the hotel industry is no exception (Maghzi, Abbaspour, Eskandarian & Hamid, 2011). Apart from the satisfaction brought by high quality of service, satisfaction from previous experiences and recovery satisfaction are also noted. Customer satisfaction from previous experiences reinforces the trust since the customers have faith that expectation will be fulfilled and opportunistic behaviors will not happen based on past results (Casielles et al., 2005; Sichtmann, 2007). Past and current satisfaction also adds to the foundation for future prediction since trust may even affect the future intention of customers (Chen & Dhillon, 2003; Lovell, 2009). Moreover, Ok, Back, & Shanklin, 2005 argue that successful service recovery generates satisfaction which has positive effects on trust as well (Ok, Back, & Shanklin, 2005). Regarding the hotel sector, Kim, Kim & Kim (2009) also claim that

the impact of recovery satisfaction on trust is significant and positive in upscale hotel cases.

Meanwhile, the reputation and/or image of the service providers are suggested to contribute to the establishment of trust. Reputation and image can not only serve as cues to advertise the brands themselves but also to contribute to the construction of trust. Oh (2002, p. 281) defines brand reputation as “customers’ overall evaluation given to the characteristics of a brand”. Positive brand reputation can serve as the key determinant to build greater customer trust (Casielles et al., 2005; Ganesan, 1994; Oh, 2002). Corporate image is related to the vision, the impressions and the feelings perceived by the individual towards the company (Loureiro & González, 2008). It relates to the consumers’ perception and attitude toward a business which helps consumers to gain better knowledge about the services or products (Lin & Lu, 2010). Lin and Lu (2010) present that the corporate image has significantly positive influence on trust. A positive corporate image can demonstrate the ability of service performance and it can allow customers to connect to a favorable perception of the service provider (Loureiro & González, 2008). Overall, service providers should create a high reputation and image to attract customers and win their trust.

Scholars also propose other factors leading to customer trust based on their studied topics. For instance, communication which is linked with the exchange of information can have positive effects on the generation of trust (Casielles et al., 2005; Morgan & Hunt, 1994). Zillifro and Morais (2004) also suggest that the more information exchanged between customers and service providers, the more customers will trust the providers where information investment is stressed regarding the tourism context. Elseways, Gefen and Straub (2004) argue that a high social presence can also build

trust since it presents the personal and sociable contact which displays care to customers. Furthermore, it is noted that there are particular factors affecting customer trust in different service settings. For example, it is critical to pay attention to website and information quality, the privacy policy, etc. in online context (Siau, & Shen, 2003; Wu, Chen & Chung, 2010), whereas the store environment is taken into account in physical retail stores (Guenzi, Johnson & Castaldo, 2009). The potential factors in the hotel sector are less discussed except service quality and customer satisfaction, therefore it would be of great importance to explore.

2.3 Measurement of Trust

Regarding previous studies, a quantitative approach is mainly used to examine and measure trust. Scholars treat trust as a variable to other components or whether the dimensions are related to trust. The survey-based research can effectively test the relationships between trust and other notions which also provides high reliability since the similar results can be repeated (Bryman, 2012). However, it somehow limits how respondents conceptualize trust. Predefined questions and components are given in the questionnaire that was made by researchers. It indicates that respondents can only answer in the limited framework suggested by the researchers based on specific topics where some other factors or events are left and undiscovered.

For instance regarding the customer trust in the hotel sector, questions like "I trust the management of the casino" (Sui & Baloglu, 2003, p. 486), "I trust on service delivered by rural lodging" (Loureiro & González, 2008, p. 126), "This hotel is trustworthy" (Valenzuela & Vásquez-Párraga, 2006, p. 21), "The hotel is reliable" (Kim et al., 2009, p. 57), and other similar forms are asked which use a

likert-scale as the measurement of trust. Also, questions can be related to dimensions or components of trust, for example, “I believe this hotel would be trustworthy”, “I believe this hotel would be reliable”, “I believe this hotel would be responsible”, “I would have confidence in this hotel”, “This seems like a good quality hotel”, and “If I was to discuss this hotel with others, I would probably say positive things” (Kim, Kim & Park, 2017). It fails to identify the possible terms that relate to trust in hotels and some of the new emerging factors can be neglected if the questionnaires do not include.

Furthermore, when studying trust as a variable in quantitative research, researchers and participants usually treat trust as a single element connected with other notions. However, trust has the features of complexity and variability. It is worth noticing that trust could be in different phases, for example developing, building, declining and even resurfacing in relationships which are associated with different outcomes and conditions (Chen & Dhillon, 2003; Lovell, 2009; Rousseau et al., 1998). For instance, after having positive experience with the service provider, the customer trust will become stronger and tighter (Sichtmann, 2007). In reality, customer trust in the service provider will not remain the same all the time so that service providers will try to strengthen the trust and avoid damaging the trust from their customers. Instead of viewing trust as a static and stable phenomenon, I choose to emphasize the dynamic construct of trust as it can change overtime. Trust between customers and hotels is possible to be built, enhanced and even damaged under certain situations

To respond to the above mentioned needs, a qualitative angle is necessary to employ in order to study the complex and dynamic qualities of trust. A qualitative approach provides opportunities to explore attitudes, opinions, behavior, thoughts and feelings

of customers and to discover the terms evoking the expression of trust in hotels (Kothari, 2004; May, 2011). Through a qualitative approach, it is able to reach dynamic data since respondents are not confined to the structured questions. It is possible to explore what really happens between customers and hotels regarding trust without intervention since respondents can share their thoughts and feelings in a more free frame. Overall, the rich knowledge from previous studies serve as a concrete base to explore trust in the hotel sector. A qualitative approach allows to gain deep understanding of the phenomenon and it is possible to reach new insights which can contribute to the field of trust. The qualitative methods taken by the thesis will be further explained in the next methodology chapter.

3. METHODOLOGY

3.1 Research Approach

As mentioned above, trust is a highly social phenomenon which has the abstract and complex features to study. Trust is generally conceptualized and examined empirically (Wang et al., 2014) that the hotel sector is the chosen empirical field in the thesis. In order to understand the attitude and perception of customers regarding trust happening in hotels, qualitative research methods will be the most prominent modes to explore the phenomenon. Qualitative research can gain insight into human attitudes, opinions, behavior and the underlying reasons which explore deeper into the problem (Kothari, 2004). Also, a qualitative approach is suggested to describe, discover, explore and contextualize the social reality which provides deep understanding for the particular concepts or phenomena (Bryman, 2012). Thus, it is able to collect rich and comprehensive ideas from the phenomenon and uncover the stories underneath. Instead of viewing trust as a variable with quantitative calculations to test the effects and the relationships with other components, I propose a more exploratory feature to explore trust between customers and hotels. Overall, since the words and thoughts of customers are more emphasized to discover the terms evoking the expression of trust, the qualitative position is more appropriate in this thesis. The qualitatively empirical data can reflect the naturally occurring phenomenon from real cases and turn into beneficial insights to strengthen academic research. A netnographic approach and qualitative content analysis are performed regarding data collection and analysis where choices will be further described in the next research design chapter.

To identify the terms evoking the expression of trust of customers, a positivism perspective is taken to explore the trust between customers and hotels. Positivism agrees that the truth is consistent as well as observable where it is related to reality and can be reflected through words and numbers (Howell, 2016). Through empirical evidence based on the collected data, it is possible to observe the phenomenon of trust between customers and hotels where the knowledge can be discovered. To explore the recurring terms can contribute to the understanding of the truth of trust between customers and hotels in reality. Hotels are also able to predict and control the potentially occurred conditions related to trust in the future based on the facts. A positivist qualitative research will focus on the regularities and causal relationships between different elements of the reality through the non-statistical methods where patterns can be identified and summarized into generalized findings (Su, 2018). The data collection and data analysis methods chosen in the thesis also reflect the positivist position that the methods work on reducing the interference of the researcher. A covert netnographic approach in the thesis can generate the observational data which is less intrusive. Reviews posted from 2003-2020 are collected which offers the opportunity to find the consistency and patterns of what really happens in hotels. The qualitative content analysis allows to explore the qualitative attributes in a more comprehensive way and meanwhile focus on the quantitative-merit approach to analyze the problem. Meanwhile, an inductive approach is conducted where theory is generated from observations and findings (Bryman, 2012). The methods chosen above intend to identify patterns and regularities regarding the topic to get broader generalizations and conclusions to contribute to the theory.

To sum briefly, qualitative research methods are employed to study the phenomenon of trust where a positivist position and an inductive manner are adopted. To collect the expression of trust of customers in hotels, a netnography approach is conducted on Tripadvisor to collect reviews of customers. 80 hotels in 22 cities are chosen where 397 online reviews from customers are collected. Those reviews containing the expression of trust of customers present the actual cases in real life to be examined. Data is analyzed by the qualitative content analysis to discover the categories and themes.

3.2 Research Design

3.2.1 Data Collection - Netnography

Data collection is conducted through a netnographic approach on Tripadvisor for this thesis. Netnography, according to Kozinets (2015), refers to “the specific sets of research positions and accompanying practices embedded in historical trajectories, webs of theoretical constructs, and networks of scholarship and citation; it is a particular performance of cultural research followed by specific kinds of representation of understanding” (p.2). With the development of the internet and the emergence of web 2.0, the virtual world has become an active place for people to interact which is worthy of exploration. Hence, the netnography is employed as an adaptation of ethnography responding to the online society to study the phenomenon (Kozinets, 2015). In the online world, users nowadays can leave their statements on various online platforms to describe their experiences where the stories and reviews are mostly real cases. The information exists ubiquitously which provides the rich resources for other users to read and serve as eWOM (Ladhari & Michaud, 2015). User generated content is written by the real customers and they share their own experience online mostly based on their own willingness. Moreover, Mkono (2013)

argues that through the use of pseudonymity, online users feel a sense of safety and security under a certain degree of anonymity. They are willing to do greater disclosure online where texts and images reflect the authentic feeling of users. Overall, the internet world contains a significant amount of data which is shared freely and publicly where the netnography provides the opportunity to collect rich and dynamic data from the online base (Kozinets, 2010; Kozinets, 2015). Besides being an expeditious method to collect the data, netnography also offers an easier and direct access for researchers to know the naturally occurring conversations online (Mkono, 2013). In tourism and hospitality studies, it is well recognized as a useful methodology to study customers' perspective (Mkono, 2013; Whalen, 2018) so that it is suitable for studying customers' attitude and perception on trust in the hotel context.

Furthermore, trust is a psychological phenomenon which involves emotion and perception of people. It is possible for people to feel nervous or not to be honest enough when conducting face-to-face interviews, especially regarding the negative criticism on specific brands or companies. Regarding the concern, a non-participant observation position will be more appropriate to prevent interference of the researcher. However, it would be difficult to conduct the non-participant observation to observe trust in hotels. Thus, a netnographic approach in a non-participant observation position serves as a proper method to reduce the undesirable interference of outsiders (Kozinets, 2002; Rageh, Melewar & Woodside, 2013). The online data would be more candid and less intrusive compared to interviews or surveys designed by investigators. Instead of creating an account and interacting with users, I choose the archival type of data collection which is without the involvement of the researcher in creating/co-creating (Kozinets, 2010). According to Burles and Bally (2018), the unsolicited online narratives can present the authentic and immediate depiction of

lives when using a covert role to collect the data. The observational data of online review presents to be more naturalistic and unobtrusive since the experiences of reviews are not affected by the researcher.

Regarding the criteria of choosing the site to conduct netnography, “relevant, active, interactive, substantial, heterogeneous, and data rich” should be considered (Kozinets, 2010, p. 89). Based on the above mentioned criteria, Tripadvisor is selected as the study site to conduct netnography due to its popularity and the huge amount of data. Founded in 2002, Tripadvisor has grown into one of the largest travel platforms and this travel community has more than 859 millions reviews and opinions listed on it from users worldwide (Statista, 2020b). The site provides customer-to-service providers as well as customer-to-customer communication where customers can comment, recommend or share their feedback to warn others regarding different travel categories. The website along with the app has attracted lots of users to actively post or search the information regarding accommodations, restaurants, experiences, airlines and cruises all over the world (Tripadvisor, n.d.). Regarding the hotel industry on Tripadvisor, 1.4 million hotels are listed (Statista, 2020a) where users can leave their comments freely on the hotel page to share their experiences with the public. Through the use of the anonymous and pseudonymous member accounts, users on Tripadvisor can post different reviews ranging from very positive to extreme negative based on their own perceptions (Mkono, 2013). The posts include abundant varieties of text as well as non-text data; therefore, Tripadvisor serves as a valuable base regarding data collection for the thesis.

22 cities (Table 1) are chosen to perform data collection where the selection of cities is based on purposive sampling in order to include cities in different continents. It is

possible to have tourists from different nationalities and backgrounds to visit the hotels and post their reviews. I combine the suggestions on Tripadvisor hotel page (<https://www.tripadvisor.com/Hotels>) and the list of Top 100 City Destinations: 2019 Edition (Euromonitor International, 2019) to select the cities. Top 10 most visited cities are all included since these cities are able to present richful content with diversified visitors posting reviews. The other cities are chosen from the destinations of top 20 to 50 where some cities from top 50 to 100 are selected in order to ensure the coverage of continents. Hotels which are listed as top 10 best value of the Tripadvisor page with over 3000 reviews are chosen to collect customers' reviews. With sufficient reviews commented from the customers, it will be more possible to acquire plentiful sources of data with enough amount. Johannesburg is an exception since the hotels of Johannesburg on Tripadvisor do not have reviews over 3000; thus, the hotel which has near 1000 reviews is chosen as a representative. In order to find the right and related reviews, "trust" is used as the keyword to do search in order to reach the desired data. Different and similar words related to trust are common to see, for example, reliable, credible, honest and so on. Trust is however a concept to include different dimensions and is well recognized in both academic and business fields where customers also talk trust as well. Therefore, "trust" is used as the keyword since it presents an overall perception that adequately reflects the phenomenon. In order to reach the proper data related to the topic, reviews are first examined to filter the conformity. Reviews with only the sentence as "trust me" or "trust us" are eliminated since these contents are not related to the trust between customers and hotels. The data collection process is carried out from February to April, 2020. In total, 80 hotels from 22 cities are examined where 397 reviews posted from 2003 to 2020 are collected (Appendix).

Table 1. Data collection on Tripadvisor (Including the ranking of the city, date of collection, amounts of hotels and the pseudonymised number of reviews)

22 Cities, 80 Hotels and 397 Reviews (Hotels in Top 10 Best Value with over 3000 reviews on Tripadvisor)		
NORTH/CENTRAL/SOUTH AMERICA		
New York (8) 200213	8 Hotels (1-8)	R001-R052
Miami (27) 200331	2 Hotels (9-10)	R053-R061
Los Angeles (29) 200331	2 Hotels (11-12)	R062-R072
Toronto (53) 200331	2 Hotels (13-14)	R073-R088
Cancun (40) 200403	9 Hotels (15-23)	R089-R164
Buenos Aires (85) 200403	2 Hotels (24-25)	R165-R169
EUROPE		
London (3) 200215	6 Hotels (26-31)	R170-R201
Paris (6) 200215	2 Hotels (32-33)	R202-R204
Istanbul (10) 200403	1 Hotel (34)	R205-R209
Rome (16) 200403	2 Hotels (35-36)	R210-R214
Amsterdam (25) 200210	3 Hotels (37-39)	R215-R227
Barcelona (33) 200213	3 Hotels (40-42)	R228-R233
Berlin (41) 200213	4 Hotels (43-46)	R234-R245
ASIA & AUSTRALIA		
Hong Kong (1) 200405	3 Hotels (47-49)	R246-R250
Bangkok (2) 200405	7 Hotels (50-56)	R251-R275
Macao (4) 200405	2 Hotels (57-58)	R275-R281
Singapore (5) 200406	6 Hotels (59-64)	R282-R317
Kuala Lumpur (9) 200406	4 Hotels (65-68)	R318-R341
Sydney (55) 200406	5 Hotels (69-73)	R342-R373
MIDDLE EAST & AFRICA		
Dubai (7) 200406	6 Hotels (74-79)	R374-R396
Johannesburg (54) 200406	1 Hotel (80)	R397
22 in total	80 in total	397 in total

3.2.2 *Data Analysis - Qualitative Content Analysis*

After the data collection step, the data is analyzed through a qualitative content analysis approach. Content analysis can provide the knowledge and understanding of the phenomenon with a systematic and replicable technique to discover the underlying themes (Bryman, 2012). Furthermore, being consistent with the ontological and epistemological position of the thesis, content analysis is able to present a more positivist and objective characteristic since it tries to examine the text data to uncover the reality as it exists (Saraisky, 2016). The data refers to the reality out there and it needs to be analyzed through the coding process to reveal the truth and knowledge. It is able to discover what happens and how people behave when studying the phenomenon. Therefore, qualitative content analysis serves as the prominent method to examine the collected data where the phenomenon of trust can be explored. The clear coding process can provide a more systematic approach to operate where a more reliable and credible result can be present.

Qualitative content analysis is a research method for analyzing documents and texts and it focuses on the characteristics of language regarding the content or contextual meaning of the text where categories are identified to present explicit communication or inferred communication (Hsieh & Shannon, 2005). Both the manifest content of the material and the latent content can be analyzed where the former refers to the apparent content directly seen such as the words and the latter is the underlying meanings lying beneath the words (Bryman, 2012; Mayring, 2000). That is to say, it can be regarded as a systematic method to identify themes or patterns through the process of coding and categorizing. The analysis is able to deal with large amounts of textual information both qualitatively and quantitatively; namely to measure the patterns of the words to discover the trends as well as the frequency (Hsieh & Shannon, 2005;

Mayring, 2000). According to Bryman (2012), content analysis contains two features, objective and systematic, where objectivity refers to the transparency of process regarding the categorization of raw material so that the personal biases can be reduced as much as possible, and systematic feature means the rules are done consistently to minimize the bias. The systematic and replicable techniques can strengthen the reliability and replicability that it is possible to constrain the interference of the investigator and repeat the analysis when the procedure is properly designed (Saraisky, 2016). Mayring (2000) proposes four advantages of qualitative content analysis and those includes fitting the material into a model of communication, rules of analysis, categories in the center of analysis, and criteria of reliability and validity (p. 107-108). The advantages show that qualitative content analysis preserves the positive sides of quantitative content analysis through the systematic process to categorize the data with repeated revision.

Using a qualitative content analysis approach, the data collected from Tripadvisor's reviews are read and analyzed through open coding, creating categories and abstraction. Following the inductive position of the thesis, the codes, categories, and themes to are allowed be generated freely and naturally from the data (Cho & Lee, 2014; Elo & Kyngäs, 2008). Namely, new insight can emerge through the inductive category development where direct information can be reached from the reviews of customers (Hsieh & Shannon, 2005; Mayring, 2000). Therefore, instead having predefined codes, I read through the collected data to mark down the suitable notes. The grounded manner is able to gain the information from the actual data without using preconceived names or theoretical perspectives in this phase (Hsieh & Shannon, 2005; Mayring, 2000). After the examination and arrangement of the codes, it is able to generate categories and themes in the end. Categories are created to classify the

data which helps to describe the phenomenon, to increase understanding and to generate knowledge where abstraction formulate a general description categories on the topic (Elo & Kyngäs, 2008). A data analyzing program Nvivo is used to help the process where different codes and categories (Nodes) are generated naturally during the analysis process. 397 reviews are analyzed in total where 355 reviews are related to customer trust in hotels, 38 reviews are related hotel trust in customers and 4 reviews are about hotel trust in employees. The last theme is not related to trust between customers and hotels; therefore, it would not be discussed in this thesis.

3.2.3 Analysis Results

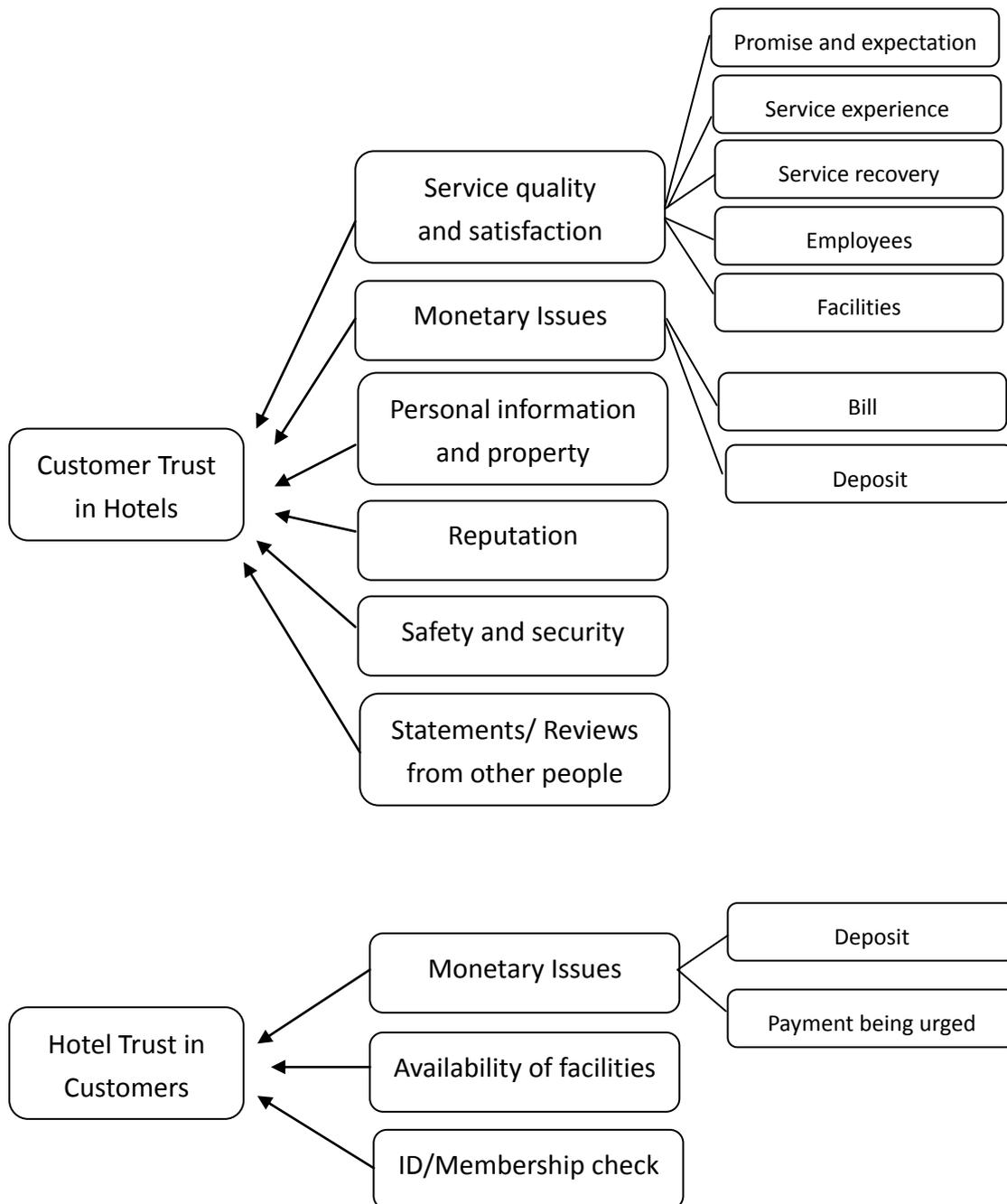
When analyzing the data, there are two directions of trust found in reviews which are customer trust in hotels and hotel trust in customers. Regarding the former one, “Customer Trust in Hotels”, it is the more common direction expressed by customers and discussed in previous studies. In the reviews, texts such as “We gained a full trust”, “I trust XXX's service and facilities”, “Never again will I trust XXX”, and “I had lost my TRUST in this hotel” indicate the trust from customers towards the hotels. It also presents the trust can change in both positive and negative ways. First, the most mentioned things in reviews related to the expression of trust are related service quality and satisfaction. Under this category which includes the building and declining of trust, services, promise and expectation, employees, facilities are identified. Customers talk about the good or bad service experiences and how the hotels fulfill or break the promise and expectation. Also, they mentioned the employees who provide services where the condition of facilities, both hardware and software, can also evoke the expression of trust. Second, the problems of bill and deposit are proposed by customers that indicates mostly the negative expression of trust. The problems include wrong bill, extra charge, unrefunded deposit and so on

which are the events related to money; thus, monetary issue is categorized as a term. Third, the term is about personal information and property including the codes of personal information being misused, property lost/stolen and property returned. Fourth, the term of reputation are those sentences such as “XXX is a brand/name someone can trust” which relates to the positive impression of the hotels. Fifth, the term, safety and security, includes for instance the emergency, food allergy, room safety and personal safety. Those are incidents that raise the concern of customers regarding the safety and security of their lives or health. The final category is the expression of customer trust related to other people’s statements or reviews which lead to mostly the negative impact.

Regarding “Hotel Trust in Customers”, words like “I guess they trust their guests”, “They (Hotel) didn’t trust us”, “There was absolutely no trust in the customer from the hotel's side”, etc. are seen to indicate the other direction of trust. There are three categories generated from the data, including monetary issues, availability of facilities, and ID/membership check. The first is the monetary issue where the deposit requirements and the payment being urged in an aggressive way are mentioned by the customer. The category of monetary issues here evokes mostly the expression of declining hotel trust in customers. Second, the availability of facilities includes the codes of free access and limited access. How the customers access the facilities of hotels, freely or limitedly leads to either positive or negative expression. Last, the final term is about the conditions that customers are asked to have their ID and membership check which can however raise the claim of the decline of hotel trust. Examples of the empirical data of the categories will be explained further in the next chapter of findings.

The analyzed themes and terms are visually presented in Table 2 below where the two main themes “Customer Trust in Hotels” and “Hotel Trust in Customers” are identified and several categories are generated under the two themes.

Table 2. Analysis Themes and Terms (Including the two themes “Customer Trust in Hotels” and “Hotel Trust in Customers” and the terms under the themes)



3.3 Ethical Considerations and Limitations

Regarding the ethical issues of the thesis, the use of internet data should be emphasized since the inclusion of online data in qualitative research is common nowadays but the ethical problem remains unresolved. There are different stances with ethical debates by scholars where some regard online data as public pronouncements and some still consider the right of the authors so the necessity of ethical review is still needed (Burles & Bally, 2018; Mkono, 2012; Rageh et al., 2013). The online world blends the public and private together as a new form where ethical practice in the netnographic approach becomes complicated and difficult to deal with including the issues of informed consent, potential benefits and risks (Kozinets., Dolbec & Earley, 2014). The consideration of informed consent and confidentiality is critical when doing the online research since it is rather easy to trace the internet sources as they are presented online persistently (Burles & Bally, 2018; Kozinets et al., 2014). To protect the individual and community, several issues such as knowing the presence of researchers, quoting the narratives and presenting personal info should be taken into accounts as the ethical practice.

Kozinets (2002) provides guidelines when entering the online community as a participant observer that it is necessary for the researcher to inform the identity, intention and thus get informed consent on quoting, conduct member checks and so on. However, scholars argued that the above mentioned guidelines are practical in the restricted (semi-) private online communication whereas in other situations need to be revised (Heinonen & Medberg, 2018; Langer & Beckman, 2005; Rageh et al 2013). Langer and Beckman (2005) propose that when studying sensitive topics, cosmetic surgery as the case here, the covert netnographic studies can prevent the

negative impact on the research project. In this case, the participants do not know the presence of researchers where no consent is obtained since to inform the identity may destroy the non-participant setting or to influence the flow of discussion. Furthermore, the public communication media which is open to anybody without any restrictions can be regarded as a kind of content analysis similar to the conventional mass media, for example, newspapers and magazines (Langer & Beckman, 2005). Sthapit (2018) also follows the argument and claims that there is no compelling need to reveal research issues or obtain consent when doing non-participant observation through blogs or review sites since they are public and sometimes anonymous.

Thus, the argument is proposed in this paragraph after examining different discussions of the ethical considerations. According to the topic and methodology of the thesis, data collection is conducted through a netnographic approach on Tripadvisor where reviews from customers are collected as a form of archival data without the involvement of the researcher. That is to say, a passive and covert position is used in order to avoid interference regarding the topic of trust so that identity disclosure is not appropriate here. Tripadvisor is a public website open to everyone where users can get access to view the contents even without being a member of the platform. People posting reviews are aware of the publicity of the platform and they are willing to share their narratives to other users. Therefore, I treat Tripadvisor as the public communication media so that the obtaining of consent becomes less necessary regarding the public setting of reviews. However, it is significant to consider the ethical issues regarding the direct quotation with information of the users (original name or a pseudonym ID) even though the archival data is collected as published content. Thus, to follow the method of pseudonymization to protect reviewers' personal info (Kozinets et al., 2014), the use of code name (R001-R397) is used to

replace the real content showing on Tripadvisor. Also, the name of the hotel will be presented if the review is positive but be covered as XXX regarding the criticized reviews to protect the possible harm to reviewers.

Regarding the limitations of the chosen methods, the thesis will discuss the data collection and analysis parts. Although there are various merits of using a netnographic approach to collect data as mentioned above, it has shortcomings that limits the research. For example, Mkono (2013) presents that due to the anonymous and pseudonymous design, it is sometimes hard for researchers to verify the background of the participants, such as age, occupation, area of residence, and gender. Also, netnography relies heavily on written text since the nonverbal communications are hard to access. It is even possible that some sites might generate positive comments and delete negative content in order to manage the image that destroys the authenticity of online data (Mkono, 2013). However, the background stands less influential in this thesis where the terms are first emphasized and culture or age is not the prior focus currently. On Tripadvisor, it is possible to find both positive and negative reviews and most of them share what happened in details where the bogus reviews might exist but the genuine ones still take a larger portion (Mkono, 2013). In order to acquire more authentic and less intrusive data which reflects trust between customers and hotels, the netnographic approach still shows the competitive strengths despite the limitations regarding the thesis. Meanwhile, content analysis has its pros and cons as well when performing the analysis process. It allows the thesis to analyze the data in a relatively unobtrusive and safe process where the manifest and latent content are examined (Maier, 2017). However, the process can be rather time-consuming and labor intensive where the coding issues need to be done carefully with clear operational design. It is necessary for researchers to examine the code

messages all the time to ensure the coding units are not too narrow nor too broad regarding the research aim and question. To generate more appropriate analysis codes, I therefore invites other coders to help examine the categories and themes in order to find the best fit between data and codes.

4. FINDINGS AND DISCUSSIONS

The two main themes from the analyzed results ,“customer trust in hotels” and “hotel trust in customers”, are identified and the terms evoking the expression of trust of customers under these two themes will be presented with the quotation of empirical data in the following paragraphs.

4.1 Customer Trust in Hotels

Customer trust in hotels is a theme commonly seen (355 reviews) where several terms evoking the expression of customer trust are identified, including service quality and satisfaction, monetary issue, personal information and property, reputation, safety and security, and statements and reviews from other people. The quantity of each term is an approximate number since some reviews may contain more than one term.

4.1.1 Service Quality and Satisfaction

Service quality and satisfaction undoubtedly are recognized as the highly critical factors with more than 200 reviews relating to the term. Good service quality is able to bring satisfaction and contribute to customer trust in the hotel. On the contrary, the negative service quality may lead to the decline of trust from customers’ perspective. Different categories under the term are identified and will be further presented below.

a. Promise and expectation

First, promise and expectation are key elements of trust which can be seen in previous literature and recognized by hotels as well. Customers have the expectation on the service provider to fulfill the given promises which indicates the establishment of customer trust (Sirdeshmukh et al. 2002). To keep the promise is the basic requirement for hotels and to meet/exceed the expectation which leads to the

increasing level of customer trust. In the empirical data, the word “expect” is often used to show the expectations from customers.

R243: ” I chose Hilton for my business trip to Berlin as I tend to trust the quality and character of the Hilton chain. [...] Also hotel service is as good as expected and staff is very friendly as well. ”

R322: “ This is why I trust the Hyatt brand. No surprises anywhere across the globe, you know what to expect, yet they still manage to delight with each property’s unique features. Same but different. ”

On the contrary, if the hotels fail to keep what they promise to deliver will cause an expectation gap and pose harm to customer trust. Customers have their imagination of how good the services should be; however, when the actual outcome fails to meet the expectation, customer trust declines, such as the R282 case. Furthermore, the data shows that room issue is frequently mentioned regarding the expression of trust since to provide a room corresponded to the reservation is the essential promise for hotels to fulfill. Customer trust is seriously damaged when rooms get cancelled/overbook or they are offered the wrong type of room, for instance R394.

R282: ” We picked XXX because of the perceived prestige and 5-star service we could expect there. Sadly we were mistaken [...] So, I am intrigued at how (if at all) you will be able to regain my trust”

R394: “ We have just check in and first great dissapointment was that they gave us downgraded room and no breakfast!! What a shok, we paid deluxe superior with breakfast! [...] Be very carefull!!! What you pay you dont get in this hotel!!! Go somewhere else and dont trust this hotel...”

Also, the internet is the prevailing channel nowadays where the expectation gap can be generated by websites, for instance, images, description, advertising and deals. It is normal for customers to rely on images and the description of websites to do online booking where they build the expectation on hotels. The original intention may be to offer information for customers; however, it sometimes leads to negative results. Several customers express “don't trust the photos/website” which indicates a gap between reality and expectation. However, disclosing the small imperfection might be a good strategy to avoid the gap and form an honest image which can enhance trust in the end. R045 presents an example of self-disclosure which makes the customer have a rather positive impression.

R192: “ DON'T TRUST THE PHOTOS! The hotel is dusty and really dirty, the pictures do not represent the rooms at all! “

R022: “Don't trust the website I had what I thought was their romantic package which included breakfast in room. When I applied the AAA discount it deleted the package which I did not notice. ”

R045: “ I appreciated that Yotel made no qualms about having small rooms in their online presence but rather embraced it. It added a level of trust for me as a consumer. I didn't feel like they were trying to dupe me.”

b. Service experience

The service experiences are closely connected with service quality and satisfaction where the positive ones (both current and previous) lead to building level of trust. Successful special events or customized services can also contribute to the reinforcement of customer trust since customers feel satisfied when being treated

sincerely and specially. Those events can be for example the wedding anniversary celebration, customized dinner or gift and so on.

R206: "CLOSE UR EYES AND TRUST THIS HOTEL -- Just Book it I have traveled across the globe but the hospitality and service given were unparallel to anyone. It makes a difference when the staff treats you like a family; gives honest advice and makes you feel home. "

(Current positive experience)

R026: "I choose the crowne plaza because I have stayed with them often in the UK and have never been disappointed. This is a chain you can trust." **(Previous positive experience)**

R307: " We had our first wedding anniversary stay at Grand Hyatt Singapore, and we were blown away with the level of preparation that the Guest Experience Team had put in, to welcome us for the stay. [...] The Guest Experience team went all out to impress us with a personalised blanket embroidered with his name - this was really the icing on the cake for us. Grand Hyatt is definitely the hotel brand that we trust, we had our wedding reception here too, and will definitely look forward to more wedding anniversary stay with the hotel group! "

(Successful special events or customized services)

Negative experiences damage the customer trust and it could be several minor service failures or a more serious service failure to cause the negative feeling. At the same time, it is a big reduction on customer trust when hotels fail to assist the special requirements from customers, such as the proposal or a romantic dinner on anniversary.

R011: " it was really sucks. [...] its the worst hotel Ive ever styed. first, u didnt give me any restroom key at the lobby until my checkin time. And employees are not nice at all. elevator service is slow. too many people crowded. and while I sleep in my room, cleaner service woman kept kncoking. [...] and when I take and get back my luggage, the guy at the door, kept saying me give him a tip. what a horrible expericence !!! [...] no trust. you are not a hotel. just cheap motel. " **(Negative experience)**

R360: Dont trust them to get it right. [...] he decided to take this opportunity to propose. He thoughtfully (and secretly) had the room upgraded and asked for flowers, chocolates and rose petals to be in the hotel on arrival. [...] Ultimately, however, nothing went to plan. [...] he had no choice but to propose then, in order to explain what was going on. Of course I was absolutely delighted, but also devastated that the surprise had been ruined for both me and him. **(Failed special events or customized services)**

c. Service recovery

It is inevitable to have service failures happening; however, the service recovery plays the decisive role in dealing service failures which affects customer trust. As suggested in previous studies, if service providers can offer proper recovery actions, it is possible to have recovery satisfaction which sometimes can be more profound than normal satisfaction. Thus, hotels providing successful service recovery can alter the negative perception and regain trust from customers after experiencing service failures.

For example, in R255, the reviewer does encounter some failures; however the hotel manages to solve the problem and thus lead to a positive result

R255: "Upon arrival, we did experience some hiccups however I was quite impressed as to how expeditiously manage,net resolved our concerns. As all our issues were resolved I choose not to mention details however I would like to thank Benjamin, duty manager and Rolf, resident manager for making the effort to correct things. I am truly grateful. This is what separates this brand from the others. They truly care. [...] Yes, we did experience some issues however I would like to try this property again. Things do happen but I trust that management is always there to make things right "

However, it is noticeable that without a service recovery or with a bad service recovery leads to the opposite result that poses a negative impact on trust.

R013: "No service failure recovery. [...] I always give the hotel a benefit of doubt when I encounter service failures. I often trust front office management to trust but verify to make appropriate recovery measures. In this case it simply is not happening."

R338: "don't trust this place, have a look the general manager said if I sent him a email, would resolve the problem for me. Well no less then what I expected from this place having sent a email to the general manager other a month ago still waiting to hear back, very very poor and very very disappointed"

d. Employees

Undoubtedly, employees are valuable assets of the hotels and they contribute to the operation as well as good performance of hotels. Employees play the critical role to establish customer trust in hotels since they are closely in contact with customers every day. Friendly and helpful staff with professional knowledge can create a positive impression and provide high service quality which leads to customer satisfaction. It is indisputable that good employees will lead to building of customer trust in employees as well as in hotels.

R071: "All the staff, whether they were on the reception desk or house keeping, were extremely polite, friendly whilst remained professional at all times. Any time you need something done you can trust that there is somebody at the other end of the phone who will go out of their way to assist you."

R089: "Now while the resort has incredible amenities and absolutely DELICIOUS food that's not what makes this place so special, it's the people that work there and the service they provide. They treat you like friends, like family. [...] As you can see there is no shortage of absolutely incredible people. I can't recommend this place enough. Trust no where else!"

However, when the employees are dishonest or have a rude or passive attitude, they become the poison to the customer trust. The inability of employees to provide right or consistent services also indicates the decline in trust.

R140: “ Most of staff not friendly. Don't trust any employees.”

R194: “ Concierge tried to overcharge us when they booked a show, I complained and got refund but felt I couldnt trust them after this!! “

e. Facilities

Customers may see facilities or systems as another primary factor since a lot of them come to hotels in order to enjoy the facilities, both hardware and software. Thus, to equip with good facilities can not only attract customers but also strengthen customer trust. For instance in R298 , the swimming pool, the garden and the breakfast area are the stunning facilities which impress the customer.

R298: “ I really recommend this hotel, especially swimming pool and garden, The taste of the breakfast was absolutely stunning, we can see over the Skyline views. Easy access to many attractive places. We trust in Shangri-La Hotel and will definitely comeback to your property for our next trip. ”

However, the defect of the facilities on the other hand undermines the customer trust in hotels. The cleanness and the maintenance or status of facilities are key to customers which evoke the customer trust. Several customers complain about the cleanness of the room or the broken facilities of hotels which may cause the negative impression of customers and thus lead to damage to trust.

R286: *“However, the toilet room upon first arriving, although appeared clean, had a very unpleasant smell to it!! That ruined my entire mood & trust for the quality of the entire bathroom from the begining. The housekeeping staff attended to it as soon as I complained, but.. it quite didn't get me back my trust for the quality of the room.”*

4.1.2 Monetary Issues

Issues related to money are always sensitive where the failures can evoke the decline of customers trust easily. There are more than 50 reviews related to this term where bill and deposit problems are the main reasons to evoke trust.

a. Bill

First, it is important that hotels provide a correct, clear and fair bill for customers to pay. The negative issues, including wrong charge and unclear or additional costs are mentioned by customers which harm their trust. Several reviewers mention that they feel cheated which indicates the doubt about the integrity of hotels.

R187: *“Check your bill for duplicate or wrong charges. [...] I was charged for breakfast on the bill. Disturbing was the fact that I was billed for breakfast in two restaurants on one day. I lost trust with the hotel and while I hope it certainly was an honest mistake as the reception clerk said, I made it clear to her that I could not help but think that that was a deliberate attempt at ripping me off. I lost trust in the brand.”*

R005: *“Turned out additional costs were billed regardless of my attempts to ignore as "Facility Fees + Taxes" were added for use of Wi-fi. Room rate that I booked was for first night only, second night was significantly higher. This information was not disclosed at check-in however, it appears if I paid attention to fine print, I should have noted this possibility. [...] Definitely have a lack of trust and will not stay at this hotel again.”*

b. Deposit

Second, the deposit evokes the decline of customer trust in hotels as well when deposit is late/not refunded or having a deposit requirement. The former is more than the latter and it easily raises customers' negative perception of trust in hotels. Hotels should be careful when designing and dealing with refunds since it can be a critical factor that reduces the intention of the repatronize. Customers also complain about the deposit requirement or the high amount of money asked, for instance in both R348 and R353.

R012: “ However, for a stat of 4 nights, my total SERVICE FEE should be USD 100 and balance USD 100 from my deposit should get returned to my card. Even after repeated requests through phone and emails, this was not refunded to my card in this last three months [...] Hence, advice to all travellers to stay away from this hotel and not to trust this cheaters.”

R348: “ The booking was worth about \$2300 and they took \$3700 off my credit card to confirm the room. [...] At the XXX hotel they said we would have to wait 48 hours to get our own money back. [...] When a business does this I lose trust and that makes me doubt whether I want to stay there again even though the other parts of the time there were very good.”

R353: “We don't trust you! [...]Despite having paid full price, in advance, for a 3 night stay this hotel insists on a \$300 credit card at check in as a security deposit! What a negative signal to a "guest".”

4.1.3 Personal Information and Property

Customers concern how the hotels treat their personal information as well as the property where more than 40 cases are in this term. Customers can build and enhance their trust in hotels especially when hotels keep their property untouched or returned. For instance, R125 mentions that the briefcase was brought back and nothing was missing and R164 shares that no one touches his/her laptop.

R125: " My husband was especially impressed with the staff because he left his briefcase outside the coffee shop late one afternoon and didn't realize he didn't have it until the next morning. When he called the reception about it they asked for a description and immediately brought it to the room. Nothing at all was missing...cash, checks, passport, etc! All was there! How many places can you go anywhere in the world and this happen? Our trust of the staff rose 100% after this event!

R164: " One day I left the laptop on my bed, and when we returned to the room, my husband's bed was made up and mine was not and I think it was because no one would touch my laptop to move it. Thank you for that. We gained a full trust in the services/staff and felt no one would take a thing off us. "

However, there are more reviews reported on the property loss or damage which leads to serious decline of customer trust, such as the case of R236.

R236: "a gold ring was stolen from a closed jewelry case that was inside my suitcase. [...] Still, if I ever return to Berlin, I will never book that hotel again, and possibly never again a XXX network hotel. I just don't trust them."

Furthermore, when employees misuse personal information, including personal details and credit card info, it damages the trust. It is necessary for hotels to avoid this term since it leads to a major decline in customer trust that hinders customers from choosing the hotels again. R064 shows the example of stolen on credit card information and R196 shares the misuse of personal details.

R064: " I have stayed at this hotel various times and have always loved it! Unfortunately, I will never stay there again, because I do not trust the staff. My credit card information was used to make purchases in the local area using my name and credit card information! "

R196: " The staff working at the front desk took my details and set up another XXX membership account without my agreement or knowledge. This, to me, is totally unacceptable

and fraudulent. [...] So how can I trust the brand XXX when things like this happen and get swept under a rug?! ”

4.1.3 Reputation

The reputation of a brand is suggest to lead to customer trust where it also applies in the hotel industry. Over 20 customers mentioned that they trust the name/brand of the hotels due to the reputable perception given is relatively positive. That is, reputation gives a sense of reliability and predictability for customers to gain confidence on service quality and overall experience.

R219: “ I felt the hotel was good value for money and I would have no problems recommending it, without it being spectacular. Hilton is a brand you can trust and you know you'll get good value for money. ”

R278: “ As we trust the Sheraton brand, we chose Sheraton Macao for our daughter's 10th birthday celebrations with a two night stay. ”

Reputation works especially well when customers take their first visit to a destination. When customers are not familiar with the environment, they tend to seek reputable hotels, such as the data of R156 and R224.

R156: “ Was first trip to Cancun so wanted to go someplace I felt I could trust. ”

R224: “ First time in Berlin and Hilton is a name I trust. ”

According to the data, reputation works better in hotels from the famous/big chains, groups or brands. Customers mention that they trust the name/brand of the hotels where most of the hotels are Hilton, Sheraton, LHW, IBIS, Hyatt and so on.

4.1.4 Safety and Security

Safety and security is another critical term evoking expression of customer trust since to let customers feel safe and secure is primary when living and having the services offered by hotels. Customers do not have the power to control the safety and security themselves in hotels; thus, customers endure a certain degree of risk and rely on hotels to arrange all the things. Hotels should protect the customers, not only in their rooms but also in other places of hotels. The term has more than 10 reviews and can evoke both positive and negative perception on trust level; however, most of them indicate trust declining.

When customers can acquire a sense of safety and security, the customer trust is built or enhanced as the R095 conveys.

R095: “Excellent staff for party, very friendly people to have in a party, they are persons you can trust and make sense a safety environment to stay all night long”

On the contrary, when hotels fail to deal with emergencies or let customers expose themselves to actual or possible harm, customers feel unsafe where customer trust might just damage. There are cases such as rooms getting broken into by other people, serious food allergies and so on. These accidents are not supposed to happen in hotels from the customers’ perspective. R052 describes that the hotel fails to deal with the emergency and R320 has the issue of room being broken into which all lead to insecure feelings.

R052: “Lost Electricity, Mass Chaos, Underinformed, Horrible Night. [...] It was chaos and caused me alot of stress on what should have been a stress relieving vacation. I personally wouldn't trust the hotel to handle an emergency judging by this response. The power going out again is unlikely, but what about the water? The air conditioning in the rooms? A terror alert?

Food poisoning? The computers crashing? Things can and do go wrong, and the response is quite important. “

R320: “ However,when I got to my room I saw my door was open. A wet towel was placed on the floor, keeping the door ajar. I immediately thought that someone had broken into my room or was still in the room. [...] Fortunately, nothing was stolen and nobody was inside.I called the lobby to explain the situation and asked to change rooms because I felt unsafe and uncomfortable that someone may have been in my room. [...] On a night where I just wanted to get rest, I was up worrying about my safety. Even if this was an accident, this type of situation shouldn't happen in a 5 star hotel. I have another business trip in October, but I just can't put my trust and safety on the XXX because they don't seem to make safety a priority for their guests. “

4.1.5 Statements and Reviews from Other People

It is also interesting to find that customer trust can be evoked due to other people's statements and reviews. R142 and R150 both show the situations in which the customers are influenced by other customers. Although customers do not experience themselves, they take the statement and reviews, mostly negative, as the cue to form their perception and thus the trust level reduces. Compared to the other terms, it is more difficult for hotels to directly control other people's behavior or thoughts. However, if the statements and reviews are generated due to service failures or negative experiences, the hotels may try to avoid those conditions happening.

R142: “ I did not have high expectations for the staff or the rooms just because of the other reviews. So the rooms are ok, the room itself was pretty clean, but we always put a do not disturb sign on our door because to be honest I did not trust the staff cleaning my room. ”

R150: “ DO NOT TRUST SECURITY - my experience was not that bad with them but we met another group of people where one of the guys was robbed by security. He said that the

security guy followed him uncomfortably close, so he asked him what he was doing when the guy threatened him and took all the money he had and his iPhone. ”

4.2 Hotel Trust in Customers

As mentioned, service providers' trust in customers has less discussion; however, the thesis still finds that hotel trust in customer are expressed by the customers. The expression of trust regarding this direction stands as a kind of positive feelings or complaint which indicates hotel trust is somehow important for them. Those reviews imply that hotel trust in customers would affect the overall perception of customers towards the hotels. There are 38 reviews containing the theme which involve both the positive and the negative change of level of trust. The main terms include monetary issue, availability of facilities and ID/membership.

4.2.1 Monetary Issues

The term of monetary issues includes the categories of deposit and payment being urged that most cases indicate a declining level of hotel trust in customers.

a. Deposit

First, there are over 10 reviews mentioned by customers relating to deposit and most of customers perceive the policy of deposit as the negative sign. Seen in the previous part, deposit affects customer trust in hotels, especially when the hotels do not or lately return the deposit. Regarding hotel trust in customers, the requirement of deposit can be one of the main reasons evoking expression of trust, mostly causing a declining level of trust. Customers are asked to provide their credit card information or pay/hold a certain amount of deposit for the room and/or for extra services. The empirical data shows that customers feel irritated, insulted or have other negative

feelings. Although hotels respond that the deposit is a common protocol or standard policy to operate worldwide, the complaints from customers indicate that it is not yet well-accepted by all customers. It leads to the damage on hotel trust in customers which indicates the negative perception from customers.

R074: "Hotel don't trust your guests? You feel like you are labelled/mistrusted when your card is almost hold 'hostage'."

R224: "but I was asked on the check-in if I wanted any "extra service" (I did not know what this was), then I said no. When I tried to get an beer from the automatic minibar (EUR 3,50 too expensive), it said "Guest not checked in". The same happened with me trying to put on the room the restaurant bill and the bar. You need to prepay like EUR 100 to put as credit for your room that you can use. This is not really optimal in my opinion, as it creates the impression that the hotel does not trust on the guests, and that you need to pay something before being able to use basic things like the minibar."

R355: "We were also irritated by the front desk insisting on holding \$100 per night on our card on arrival, despite our having already paid for the room online. [...] This implies a lack of trust in the customer, which frankly we found insulting."

On the contrary, R207 shows that the hotel trust in customers builds when the hotel does not require deposit and provides the choice of late payment when departure. It stands opposite to the above mentioned cases which argues again that the requirement of deposit is somehow influential regarding the trust here.

R207: "Mr Harun Cadirci was very kind and took our booking without any advance deposit. We offered to make payment on arrival but he said that it would be fine if we paid on departure. An unusual gesture of trust in this day and age."

b. Payment being urged

Second, payment being urged also leads to negative expression of trust, especially when customers are urgently asked by the hotels to finish the payment and they usually feel uncomfortable or frustrated. R266 is asked and reminded to pay the expense by the hotel in a rather aggressive and demanding way where the customer generates the expression of the lack of trust from the hotel's side. Moreover, it can even affect the intention of the customers to choose the specific hotel again.

R266: " I have never been chased for money because I'd spent more than the incidentals deposit taken. [...] The experience felt cheap and demeaning. It also highlighted an inexplicable lack of trust between hotel management and guest. What were they afraid of? That I'd abscond without paying my bill? And remember, this was my second visit. So I wasn't an unknown entity to the hotel. Unfortunately, this incident has now ensured that I'll never use the XXX Hotel again, nor recommend it to colleagues and friends."

4.2.2 Availability of Facilities

The other main term evoke the trust from hotel in customers refer to the availability of facilities which also has more than 10 reviews related to. The term can evoke trust and it can lead to building/enhancing or declining level of trust where the latter happens more than the former regarding the collected data. The facilities can be various objects, for example the mini bar (the most), pool, gym, food, charger, hair dryer and so on. Customers feel that hotels trust them if they can get access to those facilities freely or without certain limitations whereas they feel the trust decline in the opposite situations. R153 shows that the allowance to the facilities evokes the expression of hotel trust in customers on a positive level.

R153: *"The pool closes at 11pm but you're allowed to go to the beach at night which was a great surprise for me because here in the States they would usually close it off. I guess they trust their guests."*

However, the following reviews present the opposite result where customers express the lack of trust due to the limitations on the access of facilities.

R167: *" minibar was emptied with a note saying you could customise your experience which means call Room Service, I think this implies a lack of trust."*

R343: *" You have cameras in the gym and people paying premium prices to stay in a 5 star hotel—can you really not trust them to be in the gym before 7? "*

4.2.3 ID/Membership Check

When the customers are asked for ID and membership check, they feel the trust level from hotels towards themselves lower. It is more obvious for the cases of returning customers and loyal members which indicates the perception of hotel trust is declining. The reviews related to this term are fewer than the above two terms but still evoke the expression of trust. Customers suppose that hotels may recognize them and treat them as returning guests where the requirement of ID check causes the negative feeling as the data of R238. Also, the customer claims that it shows a lack of trust to them when the membership gets denied by the hotel in R391 case.

R238: *"However the staff is generally very stiff, lacking flexibility and common, practical sense (had to fill a new arrival sheet for my second night in the same room but on different bookings), not incredibly friendly. [...] It shows very little trust towards its customers."*

R391: *"My husband is a XXX Honours member and whilst he is Gold the hotel system still had him as Blue. He had e-mails to prove he was a Gold member, but it was a case of 'Computer says no!' So we were not treated like Gold members and frankly we both felt like we were*

'begging' for something we were not entitled to! (This lack of trust in honouring our Gold Status also cost us several calls back to the UK for verification, as our e-mails were not good enough proof!)"

4.3 Discussion

4.3.1 Reflection on Previous Studies

a. Customer trust in hotels

Customer trust in hotels is the common theme recognized by customers and hotels which also reflects the knowledge of previous studies. The expectation element is shown from the data. The behavioral intention to be vulnerable exists but when negative situation happens, it can still raise customers' strong reaction although they know there is possibility to have uncertainty or vulnerability. Also, mentioned in literature review, ability/competence, benevolence, integrity, reliability and predictability are the common dimensions. Regarding the hotel context, the term of service quality and satisfaction is critical to trust. Therefore the ability/competence of hotels should be highlighted to lead to the term. It is essential to fulfill what hotels promise (Chen & Dhillon, 2003) since when basic needs and promises are not met, it is not possible to further provide good service quality and achieve customer satisfaction. Furthermore, when hotels aim to provide customer-oriented services and strengthen relationships with customers, it is significant to emphasize the benevolence where hotels treat customers with genuine concern and care (Ganesan, 1994; Ganesan & Hess, 1997). Hotels need to do more than basic with sincere care as the starting point to earn the trust of customers. Also, according to the findings, customers react fiercely to the terms of monetary issue or personal information and property. When customers feel that the hotels do not act in an honest manner with integrity and reliability (Chen & Dhillon 2003), they express that their trust in hotels is seriously

damaged. Lastly, the predictability is reflected in reputation and information provided by hotels. Customers will rely on cues to present the continuity of consistent service where the predictability helps to build trust (Tan and Sutherland (2004). Overall, although customers do not understand the dimension of trust, those critical factors are still reflected regarding the terms evoking expression of trust. Furthermore, as stated before, service quality and satisfaction and reputation can lead to customer trust where the hotel sector has the same outcome. Monetary issues, personal information and property, and safety and security are not discussed a lot before; however, those are basic and significant things to take care, not only in hotels but other service firms. The statements and reviews from other people demonstrates the importance of WOM in trust where previous studies are less focused. The online context regarding customer trust reflecting in reality should be paid more attention as well.

b. Hotel trust in customers

Service firms may also have expectations on customers to behave in a certain manner which indicates the hotel trust in customers (Phillips et al., 2005). In fact, customers perceive hotel trust not only as the expectation but also the judgment on themselves from hotels. Meanwhile, customers also expect hotels to trust themselves based on the mutual relationships. When hotels show a positive level of trust towards customers, customers feel they are respected regarding their integrity and goodwill. On the contrary, customers feel themselves being questioned by hotels when there is a lack of hotel trust. For customers, the trust received from hotels is somehow an honor to praise or a tag to label them. From customers' perspective, the respect or the positive recognition can be important to contribute the expression of trust. When customers enjoy a certain degree of freedom and control shared by hotels, they feel they are assigned power and trust. Whereas, when customers feel their right is deprived or feel

unrecognized, it raises the negative perception to complain about the decline of hotel trust. However, what can be the dimension of hotel trust or what leads to hotel trust still in need of more discussion and exploration.

4.3.2 Trust for Customers

Through the qualitative approach, data with dynamic content is reached to explore customers' attitude and perception about trust between customers and hotels. As argued above, it is difficult to reduce trust into single element or simple concept, especially for customers. The qualitative data helps to reflect the complexity and dynamic of trust that provides new insights to the concept. According to the empirical data, there are diversified terms related to the expression of trust of customers. Customer can be sensitive to both direction of trust due to different terms and it is easy for them to change their trust in hotels or to feel the trust from hotels. It indicates again that trust is a changing value where developing, building, declining and even resurfacing could easily happen (Rousseau et al., 1998). Furthermore, based on the data, it shows that customers do not just treat trust as a variable relating to other concepts where trust can stand for different things when expressed by them. When customers actively share what they think or what they experience online, they know that service providers and other customers will pay attention to what they write. It forms a customer-oriented community for them to exchange thoughts and information and to express their feeling to service providers. Customers are undoubtedly aware of the importance of trust; therefore, they express trust to highlight the point and to indicate various use.

How do customers perceive trust? Trust can be perceived and used by the customers in different ways. For instance, it first can be the positive expectation conveyed by the

customer which pushes hotels to provide good services. Second, trust can also represent the repurchase/repatronize intention. When there is positive level of trust, customers usually show their willingness to revisit hotels. To revisit hotels, it also indicates the intention to build or tighten relationships with hotels even in the future. Whereas, the decline of both trust reduces the intention to choose the specific hotel/brand again. Thirdly, trust can use as a kind of WOM, both positive and negative. Customers recommend hotels to friends/other customers when there is strong trust. However, when trust is damaged, both customer trust and hotel trust, it leads to negative perception and negative WOM. Fourth, trust can serve as the feeling and impression of customers towards hotels. The expression of trust can be the compliment or the complaint which are recognized by other customers or hotels. Overall, trust for customers does not mean the same thing nor the single element all the time.

5. CONCLUSION

5.1 Summary

Trust catches attention from both academic and industrial fields due to its remarkable impact which cannot be ignored. It is a social phenomenon that people encounter in daily lives; however it is complicated and abstract to understand. Thus, to explore trust in an empirical angle can provide solid examples for people to understand the concept more. In the hotel sector, trust plays a critical role regarding the relationships between customers and hotels since two parties have close interaction with each other. The trust between customers and hotels is worth to discuss and it would be valuable to understand the customer's side to gain more knowledge. The thesis aims to explore the customers' attitude and perception about trust in the hotel sector through the expression of trust of customers, and a research question is proposed: What are the terms that evoke the expression of trust of customers regarding the interaction between customers and hotels? In order to study the complex and dynamic features of trust and to answer the research question, a qualitative approach is employed to gain more understanding on trust between customers and hotels. I choose a netnographic approach to collect reviews of customers from hotels in different cities where the covert position is used to reduce the intervention from the researcher. Tripadvisor is the chosen site due to its popularity among travellers and users which can provide diversified data. 397 reviews are collected from 80 hotels in 22 cities in the end. The data is analyzed by qualitative content analysis through the help of Nvivo. Two themes are identified which are “customer trust in hotels” and “hotel trust in customers” based on the findings. 355 reviews are related to the former and 38 reviews are related to the latter. Also, several terms are classified which evoke the expression of trust of customers in the hotel sector.

Regarding customer trust in hotels, there are six terms identified under this theme. First, the term of service quality and satisfaction can effectively evoke the expression of trust where positive quality and satisfaction lead to building and negative ones contribute to declining. Several categories are related to the terms including promise and expectation, service experience, service recovery, employees, and facilities. To build customer trust, it is critical for hotels to keep their promises and meet/exceed customer expectations to provide desired service quality and contribute to satisfaction. It is noticeable that previous and previous satisfying experiences as well as successful service recovery satisfaction contribute to trust. Employees and facilities are necessary to compose the operation of hotels which play key roles to affect the customer trust as well. However, if the above mentioned situations happen in the opposite way where service quality and satisfaction cannot be achieved, customer trust declines. Second, monetary issues can always evoke trust since the term is sensitive and important for all. To have service failures regarding money is normally unacceptable for customers which lead to serious decline in customer trust. A correct, clear and fair bill is essential and the deposit policy should be conducted properly and to be refunded on time. Thirdly, the term regarding personal information and property is proposed. Customers can build their trust in hotels especially when hotels keep their property untouched or returned. However, when properties are lost or damaged in hotels and personal information is misused, it damages the trust. This term is a more exclusive term regarding the hotel sector since customers see their rooms as the private space where to keep the intactness of properties becomes significant. Fourth, the reputation of a brand can lead to customer trust and it is the same in the hotel industry. The positive name can provide a sense of guarantee where customers have positive perception. Reputation serves as the sense of confidence for customers to reduce their uncertainty. Fifth, safety and security can be the key term evoking

customer trust as well. Customers endure a certain kind of degree of risk when living and having services in hotels since the operation is held by hotels. When the sense of safety and security is not guaranteed by hotels, customer trust is strongly damaged. Finally, statements and reviews from other people, especially negative, evoke the declining level of trust. The statement and reviews serve as the cue for customers to form their perception.

Regarding hotel trust in customers, it is less discussed in academia and industries; however, from the empirical data, it is found that customers also mention hotels trust. Thus, it indicates that hotel trust in customers can be a theme worth exploring. There are three terms in this theme and first of all, the term of monetary issues again is seen as the sensitive term evoking trust, yet from hotels' side. When customers are asked for the deposit or urged to pay the bill in an unpleasant manner, they may feel insulted or receive the negative label by hotels. They claim that hotel trust in customers declines which usually indicates a negative perception towards hotels. Hotels should face the negative signal brought by the monetary issues and come up with a better policy to solve the problem. Second, the availability of facilities is another term to evoke the hotel trust and facilities can be various objects, including the pool, gym and items in the room (the mini bar, hair dryer, hanger, tv program...,etc.). Customers feel that hotel trust increases when they freely access to those objects without certain limitations whereas they feel the trust decline in the opposite situations. Third and the last, the term regarding ID and membership is expressed. As the returning guest or loyal member of hotels, customers suppose they will be recognized by hotels. Thus, the term generated negative perception of customers so that they feel it is a lack of hotel trust in them. In general, there is less data related to hotel trust in customers regarding the reviews collected in this thesis; however, the phenomenon still presents

the value to study more since there might be more data unexplored and the theme proves to affect customers' evaluation of hotels according to the reviews.

When examining the trust between customers and hotels, it should be noted that trust can change all the time where customers can experience various terms affecting the trust. Also, the findings on customer trust also reflect the previous knowledge. The elements of expectation and intention to be vulnerable are presented. Common dimensions of trust, ability/competence, benevolence, integrity, reliability and predictability, are also indicated from the data. Whereas, hotel trust is a rather new phenomenon to be discussed which needs more exploration to relate to previous studies. Furthermore, instead of treating trust as a variable with quantitative methods, I examine trust in a more comprehensive way to gain more understanding through dynamic data collected from the qualitative approach. When customers express trust, trust is used in various ways, for instance to indicate expectation, intention of repurchase, WOM, and their feeling or evaluation. Trust is a complex component in real cases and it is hard to reduce it into a single element to understand.

To sum, the thesis explores trust between customers and hotels where both directions of trust are identified. It is noted the trust between customers and hotels can be bi-lateral direction instead of single construct in the relationships of two parties. Trust is a dynamic and floating value and there are different terms evoking customers' expression of trust regarding the interaction. Customers and hotels are aware of the significance of trust so that trust is frequently mentioned and employed to deal with relationships and to communicate with each other. Through the findings and discussions, it contributes to gain more understanding of trust in hotel context. The hotel industry can employ the understanding as a practical base to consider how to

interact with their customers. The knowledge of trust can be applied in other service firms as the reference as well.

5.2 Limitations and Recommendations

There are still limitations of the thesis which need to be discussed regarding the research design. First, a netnographic approach has several weaknesses to be aware of when collecting data from the internet. As mentioned earlier, the verification of the participants is hard to test where some of the background information will not be allowed to know. Also, the authenticity and truthfulness of the online world becomes another noticeable challenge to overcome due to the anonymous and pseudonymous design. Moreover, a passive position is hard for the researcher to interact with participants to acquire the more related data or further details. Therefore, the drawbacks can limit the deeper exploration. However, the covert netnographic approach is chosen in order not to intervene participants due to the complexity and sensitivity feature of trust. The advantages of netnography which offer the unobtrusive and naturally rich reviews are the desired data. Regarding the drawback of covert position, it is possible to make up by doing follow-up interviews with the reviewers to get further details of their background and what they think if needed. Although the study does not perform further interviews or other triangulation due to the limitation time and length, the recommendation can be an option. Second, the ethical consideration of the online data should be deliberately taken care of as well. It is important to consider how to use/quote the reviews properly in order to protect the reviewers involved in the thesis. Although online data on platforms such as Tripadvisor is normally regarded as public data, it still needs to pay extra attention to the ethical issues since the guideline of online ethics is still controversial and constantly changed. Third, although the netnographic approach generates rich, less

intrusive data with a huge amount of base, it can only reach the online community that people who do not use online platforms are not accessible in the thesis. I am aware of this limitation so that Tripadvisor is chosen regarding its popularity among travellers to access as many people as possible. Research triangulation can be used in future studies to bridge offline and online communities. Finally, qualitative content analysis is rather time-consuming and labor intensive so that clear operational design is necessary. When having large amounts of data, the process needs to be extra careful. In order to reduce the defect of the qualitative content analysis, it is recommended that other coders can be invited to ensure the accuracy and consistency of the coding units as well as the whole process.

Regarding the recommendations for future research, several suggestions are proposed here to broaden the related knowledge. First, as presented in the thesis, there are different terms that evoke trust between customers and hotels. The future works may explore more on the degree of terms to affect the trust. As argued in previous literature, trust is not static all the time where different terms may cause different levels of change in trust. Second, the topic regarding trust from service providers towards customers is worth examining. This direction of trust receives less attention; however, it is found in the empirical data that customers do value the trust from hotels. Does the trust from hotels affect for example customer loyalty, customer commitment, satisfaction, intention of repatronize and so on remains unsure. Thus, the topic related to this serves as a valuable knowledge which should not be neglected. Finally, in reality, customers treat trust in different ways; therefore, it can be an interesting phenomenon to explore as well.

5.3 Managerial Implications

Trust is studied empirically through reviews from 80 hotels of 22 cities, therefore it provides useful results for the hotel sector to contemplate where several recommendations can be suggested. First, to build and enhance customer trust in hotels, it is critical for hotels to meet the basic promises and expectations. Resources such as employees, physical facilities and service systems are needed to devote to provide desired services. The basic requirements regarding services should definitely be achieved and the detailed elements should not be ignored. Thus, the positive performance and a reputable image can lead to customer trust. Furthermore, it is inevitable for hotels to have service failures; however, to perform an effective service recovery is necessary. Service recovery can alter the negative results into positive impact, not only on customer satisfaction but also regarding customer trust.

Second, the internet has developed into a critical channel for customers to understand hotels and make their booking in this decade. However, the change of consuming habits due to the internet has caused some problems. Nowadays, customers are used to the visual feature of the online world; hence, hotels tend to show eye-catching and good-looking images on websites in order to create a positive vibe and attract customers. In some cases, those images might be out-dated or be embellished which creates a serious gap and declines customer trust, so do the descriptions or marketing words. Therefore, how to find the balance between aesthetic need and the reality should be considered carefully by hotels. Meanwhile, online advertising and deals can be changed rapidly where the lack of consistency and accuracy leads to harm as well. It is crucial for hotels to pay more attention to managing the information online to keep it updated and consistent.

Finally, as the concept of hotel trust in customers is identified in the thesis, hotels should consider the influence of hotel trust since it can affect customers' perception on hotels according to the findings. Hotels may set up certain rules to ensure the operation of hotels in order to reduce the risk and uncertainty caused by customers. However, how to communicate with customers in an appropriate way to let them accept the rules and policies is a complicated task to conduct. All in all, hotels should consider as well as take care of the perception and emotion of customers since customers can treat the trust from hotels towards themselves as one of the critical factors. Thus, when performing the above mentioned issues, including deposit, payment, ID check and so on, hotels should find the balance to satisfy their customers.

Undoubtedly, hotels are eager to construct and enhance the trust in the relationships with their customers in order to benefit from the positive impact of trust, for instance, customer loyalty, customer commitment, intention of the repatronize, positive WOM and so on. It is significant for hotels to bear in mind that building trust can be time and cost consuming whereas damaging it can be rather easy. Instead of remaining static status, trust changes overtime in relationships due to different terms. It is critical for hotels to learn the possible terms and have the ability to do the prediction in order to prevent the negative outcomes.

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APPENDIX

22 Cities, 80 Hotels and 397 Reviews	
(Hotels in Top 10 Best Value with over 3000 reviews on Tripadvisor)	
NORTH/CENTRAL/SOUTH AMERICA	
New York (8) 200213	R001-R052
1. Hotel Edison Times Square (13,208 reviews #1 Best Value of 812 places to stay in New York City)	
2. The New Yorker a Wyndham Hotel (14,836 reviews #2 Best Value of 812 places to stay in New York City)	
3. Row NYC Hotel (25,352 reviews #3 Best Value of 812 places to stay in New York City)	
4. Park Lane Hotel (9,336 reviews #4 Best Value of 812 places to stay in New York City)	
5. Crowne Plaza Times Square Manhattan (11,903 reviews #5 Best Value of 812 places to stay in New York City)	
6. Park Central Hotel New York (7,159 reviews #6 Best Value of 812 places to stay in New York City)	
7. The Knickerbocker Hotel (5,926 reviews #8 Best Value of 812 places to stay in New York City)	
8. YOTEL New York (13,700 reviews #9 Best Value of 812 places to stay in New York City)	
Miami (27) 200331	R053-R061
9. YVE Hotel Miami (3,971 reviews #3 Best Value of 281 places to stay in Miami)	
10. Hilton Miami Airport Blue Lagoon (4,155 reviews #8 Best Value of 281 places to stay in Miami)	
Los Angeles (29) 200331	R062-R072
11. Hilton Los Angeles/Universal City (5,087 reviews #2 Best Value of 903 places to stay in Los Angeles)	
12. Shore Hotel (3,802 reviews #3 Best Value of 903 places to stay in Los Angeles)	
Toronto (53) 200331	R073-R088
13. Chelsea Hotel Toronto (8,216 reviews #3 Best Value of 548 places to stay in Toronto)	
14. The Westin Harbour Castle, Toronto (5,313 reviews #6 Best Value of 548 places to stay in Toronto)	
Cancun (40) 200403	R089-R164
15. Fiesta Americana Condesa Cancun All Inclusive (12,445 reviews #1 Best Value of 697 places to stay in Cancun)	
16. Crown Paradise Club Cancun (12,944 reviews #2 Best Value of 697 places to stay in Cancun)	
17. Live Aqua Beach Resort Cancun (12,236 reviews #3 Best Value of 697 places to stay in Cancun)	
18. Hotel Krystal Cancun (7,100 reviews #4 Best Value of 697 places to stay in Cancun)	
19. Fiesta Americana Cancun Villas (3,810 reviews #6 Best Value of 697 places to stay in Cancun)	
20. Grand Oasis Cancun (13,522 reviews #7 Best Value of 697 places to stay in Cancun)	

21. Marriott Cancun Resort (4,879 reviews #8 Best Value of 697 places to stay in Cancun)	
22. Hotel NYX Cancun (6,313 reviews #9 Best Value of 697 places to stay in Cancun)	
23. Emporio Cancun (3,278 reviews #10 Best Value of 697 places to stay in Cancun)	
Buenos Aires (85) 200403	R165-R169
24. Hilton Buenos Aires(4,327 reviews #2 Best Value of 1,452 places to stay in Buenos Aires)	
25. Hotel Ibis Buenos Aires Obelisco(4,327 reviews #2 Best Value of 1,452 places to stay in Buenos Aires)	
EUROPE	
London (3) 200215	R170-R201
26. Park Plaza Westminster Bridge London (22,068 reviews #1 Best Value of 3,600 places to stay in London)	
27. Travelodge London Covent Garden (11,074 reviews #2 Best Value of 3,600 places to stay in London)	
28.The Tower Hotel (10,320 reviews #5 Best Value of 3,600 places to stay in London)	
29. Strand Palace Hotel (14,325 reviews #6 Best Value of 3,600 places to stay in London)	
30. Point A Hotel, London Kings Cross St Pancras (6,747 reviews #8 Best Value of 3,600 places to stay in London)	
31. InterContinental London - The O2 (5,953 reviews #10 Best Value of 3,600 places to stay in London)	
Paris (6) 200215	R202-R204
32. Novotel Paris Les Halles (5,408 reviews #1 Best Value of 2,347 places to stay in Paris)	
33. Mercure Paris Centre Eiffel Tower Hotel (5,565 reviews #9 Best Value of 2,347 places to stay in Paris)	
Istanbul (10) 200403	R205-R209
34. White House Hotel Istanbul (4,868 reviews #9 Best Value of 4,819 places to stay in Istanbul) R205-R209	
Rome (16) 200403	R210-R214
35. Rome Cavalieri, A Waldorf Astoria Hotel (7,018 reviews#1 Best Value of 7,540 places to stay in Rome)	
36. Hotel Artemide (8,326 reviews #4 Best Value of 7,540 places to stay in Rome)	
Amsterdam (25) 200210	R215-R227
37. DoubleTree by Hilton Hotel Amsterdam Centraal Station (8,668 reviews #3 Best Value of 1,155 places to stay in Amsterdam)	
38. WestCord Fashion Hotel Amsterdam (5,103 reviews #8 Best Value of 1,156 places to stay in Amsterdam)	
39. Ibis Amsterdam Centre (6,457 reviews #9 Best Value of 1,156 places to stay in Amsterdam)	
Barcelona (33) 200213	R228-R233
40. Hotel Jazz (5,252 reviews #3 Best Value of 1,915 places to stay in Barcelona)	
41. W Barcelona (7,691 reviews #8 Best Value of 1,915 places to stay in Barcelona)	
42. Hotel Barcelona Universal (5,122 reviews #9 Best Value of 1,915 places to stay in Barcelona)	

Berlin (41) 200213	R234-R245
43. Radisson Blu Hotel, Berlin (6,485 reviews #2 Best Value of 1,388 places to stay in Berlin)	
44. Park Inn by Radisson Berlin Alexanderplatz (10,866 reviews #3 Best Value of 1,388 places to stay in Berlin)	
45. Meliá Berlin (6,777 reviews #8 Best Value of 1,389 places to stay in Berlin)	
46. Hilton Berlin (5,832 reviews #9 Best Value of 1,389 places to stay in Berlin)	
ASIA & AUSTRALIA	
Hong Kong (1) 200405 R246-R250	
47. Regal Airport Hotel (6,543 reviews #2 Best Value of 1,422 places to stay in Hong Kong)	
48. Kowloon Shangri-La Hong Kong (4,599 reviews #6 Best Value of 1,422 places to stay in Hong Kong)	
49. L'hotel Nina et Convention Centre(3,302 reviews #10 Best Value of 1,422 places to stay in Hong Kong)	
Bangkok (2) 200405 R251-R275	
50. Eastin Grand Hotel Sathorn(8,795 reviews #1 Best Value of 4,103 places to stay in Bangkok)	
51. The Peninsula Bangkok (5,534 reviews #2 Best Value of 4,103 places to stay in Bangkok)	
52. Lebua At State Tower (8,989 reviews #3 Best Value of 4,103 places to stay in Bangkok)	
53. The Athenee Hotel, A Luxury Collection Hotel, Bangkok (5,377 reviews #5 Best Value of 4,103 places to stay in Bangkok)	
54. Tower Club at lebua (3,135 reviews #8 Best Value of 4,103 places to stay in Bangkok)	
55. The Okura Prestige Bangkok (3,571 reviews #9 Best Value of 4,103 places to stay in Bangkok)	
56. SO/ BANGKOK (7,093 reviews #10 Best Value of 4,103 places to stay in Bangkok)	
Macao (4) 200405 R275-R281	
57. Sheraton Grand Macao, Cotai Strip (7,894 reviews #1 Best Value of 121 places to stay in Macau) R275-R280	
58. The Venetian Macao Resort Hotel (8,406 reviews #6 Best Value of 121 places to stay in Macau)	
Singapore (5) 200406 R282-R317	
59. Marina Bay Sands (29,097 reviews #1 Best Value of 783 places to stay in Singapore)	
60. Shangri-La Hotel, Singapore (6,682 reviews #3 Best Value of 783 places to stay in Singapore)	
61. YOTEL Singapore (3,107 reviews #4 Best Value of 783 places to stay in Singapore)	
62. The Fullerton Hotel Singapore (7,335 reviews #6 Best Value of 783 places to stay in Singapore)	
63. Grand Hyatt Singapore (4,420 reviews#8 Best Value of 783 places to stay in Singapore)	
64. The Ritz-Carlton, Millenia Singapore (6,024 reviews#10 Best Value of 783 places to stay in Singapore)	
Kuala Lumpur (9) 200406 R318-R341	
65. Mandarin Oriental, Kuala Lumpur (6,673 reviews #1 Best Value of 1,498 places to stay in Kuala Lumpur)	
66. Grand Hyatt Kuala Lumpur (4,336 reviews #2 Best Value of 1,498 places to stay in Kuala Lumpur)	

67. Shangri-La Hotel, Kuala Lumpur (8,331 reviews #8 Best Value of 1,498 places to stay in Kuala Lumpur)
68. Traders Hotel, Kuala Lumpur (11,093 reviews #10 Best Value of 1,498 places to stay in Kuala Lumpur)
Sydney (55) 200406 R342-R373
69. Shangri-La Hotel Sydney (7,952 reviews #1 Best Value of 545 places to stay in Sydney)
70. Four Seasons Hotel Sydney (7,928 reviews #2 Best Value of 545 places to stay in Sydney)
71. Sheraton Grand Sydney Hyde Park (5,980 reviews #3 Best Value of 545 places to stay in Sydney)
72. Hilton Sydney (5,547 reviews #6 Best Value of 545 places to stay in Sydney)
73. Hyatt Regency Sydney (3,391 reviews #10 Best Value of 545 places to stay in Sydney)
MIDDLE EAST & AFRICA
Dubai (7) 200406 R374-R396
74. Burj Al Arab Jumeirah (6,000 reviews #1 Best Value of 1,220 places to stay in Dubai)
75. FIVE Palm Jumeirah Dubai (8,363 reviews #2 Best Value of 1,220 places to stay in Dubai)
76. Anantara The Palm Dubai Resort (7,835 reviews #6 Best Value of 1,220 places to stay in Dubai)
77. Jumeirah Mina A' Salam (4,845 reviews #7 Best Value of 1,220 places to stay in Dubai)
78. Waldorf Astoria Dubai Palm Jumeirah (8,667 reviews #8 Best Value of 1,220 places to stay in Dubai)
79. Grosvenor House, a Luxury Collection Hotel, Dubai (5,974 reviews #9 Best Value of 1,220 places to stay in Dubai)
Johannesburg (54) 200406 R397
80. Hyatt Regency Johannesburg (955 reviews #5 Best Value of 644 places to stay in Johannesburg)