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## **Boutique Hotels: Understanding Service Quality Dimensions through the Analysis of Online Reviews**

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Master's In Hospitality and Tourism Management

Supervisor:

PhD Ana Margarida Mendes Camelo Oliveira Brochado,  
Associate Professor (with Habilitation),  
ISCTE Business School

November, 2021





BUSINESS  
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Department of Marketing, Strategy and Operations

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## Resumo

Os Hotéis Boutique, alojamentos de pequena dimensão focados em design e experiência, são um subsector do turismo em franco desenvolvimento e expansão. Apenas em Portugal, existem, à data, mais de 50 alojamentos listados como Hotéis Boutique, cada um com pontos de diferenciação específicos. Desta forma, o presente estudo visa identificar e analisar as várias dimensões e atributos que compõem a experiência em Hotéis Boutique, assim como compreender de que forma a experiência de cada hóspede varia de acordo com o tipo de viajante (em família, em trabalho, com amigos, sozinho ou em casal) e de que forma cada um destes atributos impacta a satisfação geral do consumidor. Paralelamente, num momento em que se torna impossível ignorar os impactos da pandemia de Covid-19 no setor do turismo, o presente estudo pretende aprofundar de que forma a indústria dos Hotéis Boutique foi impactada por esta nova realidade, prevendo as suas consequências nos próximos anos.

De forma atingir os objetivos citados, 2 estudos foram aplicados de forma independente. Inicialmente, foi efetuada uma análise de conteúdo de avaliações online deixadas por visitantes de 12 Hotéis Boutique em Portugal. Posteriormente, 3 gestores de Hotéis Boutique portugueses foram entrevistados de forma a complementar as informações recolhidas no estudo anterior.

Os resultados desta análise revelaram que os principais atributos associados à experiência em Hotéis Boutique são: Pequeno-almoço, Quarto, Área Circundante, Hotel, Recomendação da Estadia, Dia de Chegada e *Staff*. Em concordância, os resultados comprovam que cada tipo de viajante valoriza atributos distintos durante a sua estadia em Hotéis Boutique. Adicionalmente, esta pesquisa permitiu detalhar quais os principais atributos que conduzem os hóspedes a classificar positivamente e negativamente a sua experiência em Hotéis Boutique. Por fim, os resultados deste estudo apontam para um crescimento exponencial da indústria Boutique durante os próximos anos, particularmente em zonas urbanas, no rescaldo da pandemia de Covid-19.

Esta dissertação contribui para o preenchimento de uma lacuna na literatura relativamente a Hotéis Boutique e permite que os gestores destes alojamentos, em Portugal e restantes cantos do mundo, retirem oportunidades e sugestões de melhoria para os seus hotéis.

**Palavras-chave:** Hotéis Boutique, Dimensões da Experiência, Qualidade do Serviço, Avaliações Online, Análise de Conteúdo

**Sistema de Classificação JEL:** L83 – Turismo; Z32 – Turismo e Desenvolvimento



## Abstract

The Boutique Hotels, small-scale accommodations focused on design and experience, are a subsector of tourism in fast development and expansion. At the moment, in Portugal, there are more than 50 accommodations listed as Boutique Hotels, each with specific points of differentiation. Thus, this study aims to identify and analyze the various dimensions and attributes that take part in the Boutique Hotel experience, as well as understand how the experience of each guest varies according to its traveler type (family, business, friends, alone or couple) and how each one of these attributes impacts the overall consumer satisfaction. At a time when it is impossible to ignore the impacts of the Covid-19 pandemic on the tourism sector, this study also aims to deepen on how the Boutique Hotel industry was impacted by this new reality, predicting its consequences in the next years.

In order to achieve such objectives, 2 studies were applied independently. Initially, a content analysis of online reviews left by visitors of 12 Boutique Hotels in Portugal was carried out. Subsequently, 3 managers of Portuguese Boutique Hotels were interviewed in order to complement the information collected in the previous study.

The results of this analysis revealed that the main attributes of a Boutique Hotel Experience are: Breakfast, Room, Surrounding Area, Hotel, Recommend the Stay, Arrival Day and Staff.

Moreover, the results prove that each traveler type values different attributes during their stay in Boutique Hotels. At the same time, this research allowed to detail the main attributes that lead guests into positively or negatively rate their experience in Boutique Hotels. Finally, the results of this study point to an exponential growth of the Boutique industry over the next few years, particularly in urban areas, in the aftermath of the Covid-19 pandemic.

This dissertation contributes to filling a gap in the literature regarding Boutique Hotels, and allows the managers of these accommodations, in Portugal and other corners of the world, to withdraw opportunities and suggestions for improvement for their hotels.

**Keywords:** Boutique Hotels, Dimensions of the Experience, Service Quality, Online Reviews, Content Analysis

**JEL Classification System:** L83 – Tourism; Z32 – Tourism and Development



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## 1. Introduction

Excepting 2020, due to effects of the coronavirus pandemic, tourism and international travel have been increasing exponentially in Portugal in the past years. According to Turismo de Portugal, the tourism sector contributed in 8,2% for the Portuguese GDP in 2019, generating revenues of 18,7 million euros. The same source states that this sector is responsible for employing 328.500 workers in Portugal, country which is just starting to establish itself as one of the most attractive destinations in Europe. According to PORDATA, within the country, Lisbon remains as the municipality that receives the higher income from lodging, meals and other services provided by the tourism industry, followed by Albufeira and Funchal.

With this unprecedented growth in tourism, new forms of lodging become more and more popular and, in particular, Boutique Hotels started to get widespread around the narrow streets of Portugal's urban areas. "The emergence of the boutique hotel as a phenomenon has been one of the most interesting developments in the hospitality sector of the leisure industry" (Horner, 2005, p. 369) and, although there isn't a formal definition for this concept, Boutique Hotels are expected to have a smaller size and intimate feel, emphasis on designer fixtures, focus on modern styles and personalized service (Horner, 2005).

Despite the fast development of these Boutique accommodations all over the world and its growing popularity, these establishments have received little attention by academic researchers (Jones et al., 2013). However, on the one hand, Loureiro et al. (2020), followed Churchill's paradigm to collect insights on the nature, dimensionality and measurement of the essence of small city Boutique Hotels. On the other hand, empirical studies conducted by Khosravi et al. (2014), identified and compared tourists' perceptions towards Boutique Hotels located in Penang Island. Nevertheless, most of the literature on this topic focuses on the exploration of the essence of the term "boutique" or on the customers' ambitions towards these accommodations, never centering on the guests' full experience and the associated dimensions of satisfaction.

The present study is an exploratory investigation that aims to obtain a deeper understanding of the Boutique Hotel Experience, as it is perceived by guests and Hotel Managers. By doing so, this research will cover a current gap in research, since there's no recent literature that addresses this topic and accounts both the perspectives of the guests and the Boutique Hotel managers.

Thus, this study's first objective is to get a clear understanding of the attributes that compose the Boutique hotel experience. Although studies from Olga (2009), Rogerson (2010),

Khosrave et al. (2012), Jones et al. (2013) and Loureiro et al. (2020) identify some of the attributes that define the “Boutique” concept and experience, this research aims to get deeper insights on this subject, relying on user-generated content to obtain such results. The second objective is to clarify if these concepts vary according to the traveler type of each guest and, if so, what are the main differences between these targets. Thirdly, this research aims to clarify the main reasons behind the positive and negative ratings and opinions that each guest leaves after their stay on Boutique Hotels. Lastly, in a moment when it’s impossible to ignore the impacts of the Covid-19 pandemic on the Tourism industry, this study purposes to get a prediction on the future of these accommodation sites and the possible impacts that this sector will suffer in the aftermath of this pandemic.

Such results mainly resort on the analysis of online content, especially content shared on social media platforms, namely, *Tripadvisor.com*, one of the most famous tourist reviews website in the world. According to Marchiori & Cantoni (2015), user-generated content is one of the most valuable sources of information for research, since this content is totally voluntary and non-biased. Parallel to this, the following research also contemplates interviews with Boutique Hotel Managers.

Based on the previous statements, the purpose of this dissertation is to understand in detail each step of the boutique Hotel experience, the behavior of Boutique Hotel guests and the most relevant attributes for each segment of guests. Therefore, the current study aims to answer the following research questions:

**RQ 1:** What are the main dimensions of the guest experience in Boutique Hotels?

**RQ 2:** Do the main dimensions of the experience vary according to the traveler type of the visitor?

**RQ3:** Do the main dimensions of the experience vary according to the overall satisfaction level of the visitor?

**RQ 4:** What will happen to the Boutique Hotel industry after the Covid-19 pandemic?

In order to achieve the proposed results and present them as clearly as possible, this study is structured as follows. The second section, presented right after the introduction, provides a summary of the literature review on the Boutique Hotel Experience and the Internet Revolution and its Impact on the Tourism Industry. First, this section summarizes the previous research on the concept of Boutique Hotel, the Boutique hotels’ service quality and attributes, the Boutique hotels’ target, Traveler Types and their impact on the Boutique experience, marketing strategies

for these hotels, covid-19's impacts on the industry and a reflection on the future of Boutique Hotels. Then, the study deepens on the online consumer behavior, the importance of user-generated content in online platforms, text-mining and its relevance for the tourism industry and online content in service quality studies. On this chapter, 4 propositions are presented regarding the previous studies and the main objectives of this paper. After, this research presents a contextualization section, which details the amenities and differentiation points of the Boutique Hotels selected to be part of this study. Next, the methodology chapter provides detailed information on the procedures used to conduct this research. For this specific study, both quantitative and qualitative strategies were used, therefore, this chapter provides details on the objectives, context, data collection procedures and data analysis procedures for each study. Next, in the results chapter, a word cloud generated with the titles of the collected reviews is first presented. Then, multiple concept maps are displayed, identifying the main attributes of the boutique hotel experience, according to each traveler type and rating. In the same chapter, the main conclusions of the interviews with Boutique Hotel managers are also presented. This study then concludes with a brief discussion of the results, followed by theoretical and managerial implications, limitations, and avenues for future research.



## 2. Literature Review

### 2.1 The Boutique Hotel Experience

#### 2.1.1 Boutique Hotels – Defining the Concept

During the past years, the international accommodation sector witnessed the evolution of different types of touristic lodging all over the world (Timothy & Teye, 2009). “The growth of the boutique and lifestyle hotel sector of the hospitality industry has been one of the most watched trends in recent years” (Jones et al., 2013, p. 715). This contemporary form of lodging entered the market twenty years ago, competing with the larger brands and chains, and struggling to stay competitive (Sears, 2016). However, this movement surpassed all the expected numbers and became one of the most popular forms of lodging of the decade as, only in 2015, generated room revenues of over \$13.7 billion worldwide (Skinner, 2016). However, due to the inexistence of a formal definition for “Boutique Hotel” and common confusion with lifestyle hotel, these establishments have received little attention by academic researchers (Jones et al., 2013).

“Uncertainties about what actually defines a Boutique Hotel are felt by consumers and industry practitioners” (Henderson, 2011, p. 218), yet there seems to be some consensus in common characteristics often found, or expected to be found, in these lodging facilities. According to The Chambers Dictionary (2003, p.175) Boutique Hotel defines as “a small hotel, with an intimate and individualistic atmosphere and style”, which reinforces its main attributes: size and atmosphere. Jones et al. (2013) conducted research that concluded that Boutique Hotels consider the “emotional response of guests a defining element” (p.722), while Henderson (2011) defined Boutique Hotel as a “property with no more than 100 rooms which is not affiliated to a large chain, emphasizes personal service and strives to be unique” (p. 218).

As mentioned, the small size is a determinant factor of a Boutique Hotel, as the few rooms available give the guest the sense of coziness (Khosravi et al., 2014). However, some parts of this description may be challenged (Henderson, 2011); for example, large hotels with more than 300 rooms have been classed or class themselves as Boutique, although smaller capacities make it easier to deliver the high quality and personalized service (Henderson, 2011). Due to such factors, authors and researchers commonly tend to agree that Boutique Hotels should not have more than 100 rooms (Henderson, 2011), since it’s challenging for large hotels to deliver the level of personalized service found in most Boutique accommodations. According to Henderson (2011), large scale hotels with numerous staff members struggle to maintain effective interactions between each guest and the employees, which reduces the ability of

delivering tailored service. Besides, hotels with more than 100 rooms struggle to maintain the flexibility and intimate environment often found in Boutique Hotels (Loureiro et al., 2020).

Additionally, Henderson (2011) describes how Boutique Hotels manage “the latest in communication technologies and a fashionable restaurant or bar” (p. 219), highlighting how guests usually expect to find high tech gadgets and trendy spaces in this type of accommodation. Braun (2017) describes Boutique Hotels as a perfect combination of the science of fitness and wellness with the art of travel. According to the author, there are no limits in customization and providence of services in Boutique Hotels, although it’s important to guarantee the sense of luxury and exclusive service (Braun, 2017).

### 2.1.2 Boutique Hotel Service Quality and Attributes

“In the hospitality industry, several studies have explored hotel attributes that guests find important when evaluating the performed service quality.” (Miguéis & Nóvoa, 2016, p. 157). Managing and evaluating service quality is particularly important in the tourism sector, since guests are responsible for motivating and influencing purchase behavior of other potential customers. Although there is a lack of a formal definition for Boutique Hotel in recent bibliography, multiple research papers have been developed on the main factors and dimensions that define the Boutique Hotel Experience.

Khosravi et al. (2012) developed a factorial analysis in order to identify the most relevant attributes guests seek in Boutique Hotels. According to the authors, the main factors pointed by guests as to support their preference in the choice of Boutique accommodation consist of:

1. **Special Services:** Directly refers to multiple personalized services, friendly staff and homely environment.
2. **Hotel Facilities:** Such as in room high tech facilities, the small size and coziness, food and beverage offering, entertainment options (such as night life, bar, lounge) and the variety of activities offered by the hotel, such as special tours and guided walks.
3. **Price and location:** This factor refers to the price of the stay and convenience to downtown and main city attractions.
4. **Hotel design and Image:** Encloses attributes such as the size of the hotel, general aesthetic, unique architecture of façade and entrance, interior design, reputation and quality.

According to the same author, the main factors stated by guests as support to their preference in the choice of Boutique accommodation consist of “individualization and personal

services, the availability of ready help and the attention from friendly staff in a homely environment with unique architecture.” (Khosravi et al., 2012, p. 73)

Studies conducted by Loureiro et al. (2020), identified three core dimensions that guests expect to find in small city Boutique Hotels: Style, Dream and Hospitality. According to their findings, the word “cool” is also frequently associated to a Boutique Hotel. A “cool” brand, place or lodging is something different from the norm that manifests authenticity and faithfulness. “Cool” things are also connected to a sense of aesthetics, representing style, trend and aspirational traces.

On the other hand, Jones et al. (2013) concluded that the attributes guests mainly expect to experience in Boutique Hotels are personalization, customized service, uniqueness, intimacy, individuality, history, coolness, high quality rooms and trendy architecture. Studies developed by Olga (2009), focused on the special services offered by Boutique Hotels, highlighting the importance of the facilities offered in resort destinations, such as the traditional spa, rose petal baths, private individual plunge pools, honeymoon packages, and art and painting sessions. According to Rogerson (2010), “the emphasis in Boutique Hotel accommodation is upon provision of service excellence, individuality, exclusivity, and privacy, which are possible only by the development of small establishments” (p. 431)

Research conducted by Khosravi et al. (2014) in Malasya reveals that guests hosted in that area order value attributes of Boutique Hotels as it follows: 1- Special services, 2- Room features, 3- Convenience, and 4- Hotel design. On a society where everything leans towards automatization and human relations tend to be put aside, the research of Khosravi et al. (2014) also highlights another major attribute of Boutique Hotels: Friendly staff and homely environment. The researchers state that Boutique Hotels have cordial, friendly, hardworking, multitasking staff, who can deal with customers in a very heartfelt and friendly way. Most of Boutique Hotels enforce the recognition of guest names by all hotel staff members, an experience that is clearly difficult to achieve in a large-scale hotel (Olga, 2009).

The following table summarizes the main attributes of Boutique Hotels highlighted by the previously stated authors (Table 2.1.2.1).

**Table 2.1.2.1 Summary of Boutique Hotel’s main attributes. Source: Self-elaboration.**

<b>Author (year)</b>	<b>Research Context</b>	<b>Boutique Hotel Attributes</b>
Olga (2009)	Study based on the collection of 3 <sup>rd</sup> parties’ research	Special services and proximity to guests
Rogerson (2010)	Study in South Africa; Interviews with 20 Boutique Hotel Managers	Service excellence, individuality, exclusivity, and privacy
Khosravi et al. (2012)	Study in Malasya; Questionnaire to 195 Boutique Hotel Guests	Special services, hotel facilities, price and location, hotel design and image
Jones et al. (2013)	Delphi Method applied to 41 Industry Practitioners from all over the world	Personalization, customized service, uniqueness, intimacy, individuality, history, coolness, high quality rooms and trendy architecture
Khosravi et al. (2014)	Study in Malasya; Questionnaire to 133 Boutique Hotel Guests	Special services, room features, convenience, hotel design, friendly staff and homely environment
Loureiro et al. (2020)	Study in Lisbon; Questionnaire to 310 Boutique Hotel Guests	Style, dream, hospitality and sense of “coolness”

According to the previous attributes of the Boutique Hotel experience identified by researchers, the following proposition is raised:

**P1:** The Boutique Hotel experience is multidimensional.

### **2.1.3 The Boutique Hotel Target**

When it comes to target definition, the rapid growing phenomenon of Boutique Hotels didn’t allow the required procedures to truly understand the extent of possible niches of interested people (Băltescu & Boşcor, 2016). Nevertheless, Firat et al. (2014) developed a study that



aimed to understand and specify the target market of Boutique Hotels operating in the city of Mugla (Turkey). According to the findings of this study, most Boutique Hotels don't make a distinction between domestic and foreign markets, as their marketing teams mainly aim to attract high income young guests. Additionally, when it comes to psychographic segmentation, the authors concluded that most Boutique Hotels select consumers who are "chasing for home atmosphere in vacation" (p. 86) as a target market, since the marketing efforts in most of these accommodations use language and attributes built to attract "high-income guests who are persistent in comfort" (Firat et al., 2014, p. 86).

### **2.1.4 Traveler Types, Ratings and their Impact on the Boutique Experience**

"Many previous studies have examined the differences in hotel selection or evaluation among traveler types, such as preferences, rating patterns and satisfaction" (Wang et al., 2020, p. 2). Lai & Graefe (2008), found that traveler types differ in their preferences for hotels and, therefore, search for different attributes in accommodations.

Dubé & Renaghan, (1999) focused their research on business and leisure travelers, concluding that this first segment placed more emphasis on hotel's smooth functioning (speedy check-in and check-out procedures, wake-up call services, among others), while the second traveler type mainly focuses its attention on comfort of the areas. On the other hand, studies from Yang et al. (2018), concluded that solo travelers mostly account the risk factor of the accommodation and destination when planning their travel experience. Another study from Radojevic et al. (2015), compared 2 distinct variables of the hotel experience: traveler type and rating. According to the authors, families consistently assign lower rating to hotels when compared to solo travelers, proving that this is a much more demanding audience when it comes to hotel evaluation. As such, the following propositions can be raised:

**P2:** The Traveler Type is a relevant market segmentation variable in the Boutique Hotel Experience.

**P3:** The Boutique Hotel dimensions linked with satisfaction and dissatisfaction vary.

### **2.1.5 Marketing Strategies for Boutique Hotels**

Marketing communication is a variable that tourism service companies use and control to prospect visitors and induce purchase of products and services. In the tourism industry, hotel marketing communication is a key factor, since most of hotels base their commercial activities on communication (Almeida et al., 2012). "With the advent of the internet, the rapid development of highly sophisticated information and communication technology has had a

paramount impact on both consumers and tourism enterprises in the 21st century” (Dinçer et al., 2016, p. 94). In this context, the tourist is understood as a potential buyer that searches for, evaluates, and stores information in all the stages of the buying decision process. This journey comprises behavioral responses, such as information search on destinations, travel and destination planning, and tourism services booking (Hyde, 2008). The extremely competitive atmosphere of the global tourism market has certainly stimulated hotel operators to invest more in the latest information technologies, to give tourists access to lodging information, vacation experiences, and comments about the destinations shared on social media or websites. As a result, hotels need to closely follow rising tourism trends and harness the newest communication technologies.

According to recent research, new tourist profiling shows a preference for small and medium scaled Boutique Hotels having a differentiating quality such as in its architectural design, decoration, furnishings, or quality of service (Dinçer et al., 2016). Lwin and Phau (2013) investigated the marketing appeal among Boutique and lifestyle properties. From the authors’ findings, one can conclude that Boutique Hotels use emotional appeal to target their customers. Emotional appeals are one of the most common strategies used by advertisers to draw the audiences’ attention and liking towards the brand and its product, as they are proven to have a positive effect on consumers’ reactions (Lwin & Phau, 2013). Research has found that emotional appeals and customer’s reactions to the marketing activations have a direct relationship with the customers’ attitude towards that brand of hotel, making those messages more memorable (Lwin and Phau, 2013). The marketing of Boutique and lifestyle hotels has recently centered around the words of ‘experiential travel’. The goal of these properties is to offer their guests more thoughtful and transformative experiences (Del Campo, 2014). Not only the hotels offer a sense of place and belonging through creative design features and thoughtful amenities, but also need to consider what experiential pieces connect them to a local community or neighborhood. It’s undeniable that much of the success for Boutique Hotels is due to their marketing strategy and communication platforms (Braun, 2017), as the main effort and definition of success in the long term will not solely rest of the initial numbers attracted to the hotel, but the ability of the hotelier to convert first time users into repeat guests as much as possible (Ryan, 1991).

Following previous studies, Dinçer et al. (2016), developed a SWOT analysis for Boutique Hotels in Istanbul, which revealed, as main strengths, the personalized service mentality and word of mouth marketing, as main weaknesses the inadequate advertising in both journals and internet and having a hard time maintaining the price-utility equilibrium, as main

opportunities the acceleration of online sales and possibility of increasing the number of potential customers by redefining the target and, as main threats, the lower price policies of other enterprises and the falling agency shares as a result of rising online reservations.

“Only time will tell if boutique hotels are a short-lived fashion or a permanent feature of the worldwide hotel market” (Băltescu & Boşcor, 2016, p. 4), however, with its fast growing and predicted rising, Boutique Hotel owners and managers must continue to adapt its marketing and communication strategies to guests’ needs and the new concerns in the “post Covid-19 world”.

### **2.1.6 Covid-19 Impact on Boutique Hotels**

Crises can be defined as “low-probability, high-impact events that threaten the viability of any organization or sector” (Canhoto & Wei, 2021, p.2). In a travel context, subjective perceived risk can affect tourists’ destination choices and travel behavior (Reichel, Fuchs, & Uriely, 2007). Since December 2019, the novel coronavirus disease (COVID-19) has affected nearly all countries in the world and caused more than four million deaths globally. The measures imposed to stop the spread of the virus, including quarantines, assembly restrictions and travel prohibitions, have led to enormous fallout for all the major economies (Canhoto & Wei, 2021). One of the most heavily hit sectors is hospitality. Not only has the demand for leisure travel dropped significantly as a result of widespread shutdowns, but business travels are also nearly all suspended because of canceled meetings, incentives, conventions and exhibitions.

Several unique features of COVID-19 make it an “unprecedented” crisis (World Bank, 2020) and thus distinguish it from the crises and disasters previously examined in the hospitality and tourism literature (Canhoto & Wei, 2021). Although it’s still early to make predictions on the long-term impact of Covid-19 on the tourism sector, most authors agree that in the short term, guests will prioritize safety measures, such as social distancing and privacy, two of the main attributes offered by Boutique lodging facilities.

According to the previous statements, the following proposition raises:

**P4:** The Boutique Hotel Experience will suffer multiple changes after the Covid-19 pandemic.

### **2.1.7 The Future of Boutique Hotels**

Kurgun, Bagiran, Ozeren & Maral (2011) developed research on possible future trends for Boutique Hotels to adopt and attract more guests. These trends are mostly related with emotional, architectural and flexibility factors. Blending interior design with chakra concepts,

offering tickets to plays, textile products embroidered with customers' names, personal welcome notes originally signed by the general manager in the rooms, private vehicles for transfers, free beverages, provided in-hotel notebooks and Wi-Fi service, boutique menu for guests and special lounges where hotel customers could welcome their guests are among the most popular suggestions. On the other hand, studies conducted by Dinçer et al. (2016) suggest improvement of brand awareness and recognition and communication over a wide array of channels, both digital and physical.

From a different perspective, Balekjian & Sarheim (2011) believes that design at discount is the way to go for Boutique Hotels. “The trend of redesigning economy is definitely emerging as the next big thing in the hotel sector” (Balekjian & Sarheim, 2011, p. 6). New York based Thompson Hotels are creating their own budget brand, while a Dutch hotel company, CitizenM, currently has three properties offering 643 rooms and an ambitious expansion plan throughout Europe focusing on cities such as London, Milan, and Paris. The concept of a ‘no frills’ boutique experience is catching on quickly, spurred on by the strength and resilience of the budget hotel sector in cities all over Europe. Development costs are lower, construction time considerably less, and potential sites can be more affordable, as rooms are intended to be tiny. The focus is creating living spaces in the lobby, which encourages social interaction and turn food and beverage offering limited to vending machines (Balekjian & Sarheim, 2011).

An example of a branded service innovation in the Boutique and luxury hotel sector is evident in the development of the Tommie brand by Two Roads Hospitality. The brand offers small, compact rooms with less than 150 square feet; but an open working space in the lobby to encourage socialization among their guests and target millennial travelers (Two Roads Hotels, 2017). Another example of a brand innovation is the Graduate Hotel brand by AJ Capital Ventures, which are being built on smaller college campuses across the United States of America. These hotels are themed to the local college or university in which it is associated (Graduate Hotels, 2016). Other examples include Aurora’s Express Hotel in Fairbanks, Alaska, offering hotel rooms on renovated retired train cars, or Sweden’s Ice Hotel, made entirely of ice and snow (Swedek, 2013).

## **2.2 Internet Revolution and the Tourism Industry**

### **2.2.1 Online Consumer Behavior in Tourism**

Within the tourism domain, the Internet (r)evolution brought a fundamental change in the overall value chain (Buhalis, 2003). On the one hand, tourism companies and organizations are understanding that a proper strategic and tactical use of technologies can bring a competitive

added value and, on the other hand, consumers are becoming much more sophisticated, and due to the advent of the Internet, they have the possibility of looking for different options while choosing their travel plans (Buhalis & Law, 2008). Additionally, consumers are in constant need of information throughout their decision-making process in all the stages of the tourism goods consumption, and the internet allows potential guests to search, find and share information instantly.

Amor (2002), stated that one of the biggest advantages of the Internet is its global availability, with the consumer being influenced by the accessibility of the products. The rapid growth of the Internet has changed the way people search for information about hospitality and tourism services (Mattila, 2004). Li & Bernoff (2008) conducted research in order to divide consumers into six segments, according to how they use social technologies: spectators, inactive, joiners, critics, creators, and collectors. Bronner and de Hoog (2010) set down these users' motivation in five main categories: self-directed, helping other vacationers, social benefits, consumer empowerment, and helping companies. Aye, Au and Law (2013) categorized people searching for information through social media into the following groups: "problem solvers" and those seeking fun, amusement, fantasy, arousal, sensory stimulation, and enjoyment.

Martins et al. (2015) conducted a study aimed to understand the main factors that influence the online purchase decision process for touristic services. According to the exploratory analysis, 5 main factors can be identified:

- 1. Convenience and Satisfaction:** Which is a prerequisite for loyalty and, according to Mowen and Minor (2007) and Nascimento (2000), the internet navigation avoids waiting and unpleasant sellers
- 2. Availability:** A variable directly connected to marketing stimulus and promotion
- 3. Information and Planning:** Consumers have at their fingertips all the information they need to develop their process of purchase decision, are increasingly exposed to a greater flow of information, and the easy access to information will make the future tourist more demanding (Dionísio, Rodrigues, Faria, Nunes, & Lefty, 2009)
- 4. Evaluation of alternatives:** The consumer demands certain benefits from the solution offered by the product to meet his/her needs (Mowen & Minor, 2007; Solomon, 2006).
- 5. Bad Experience:** Borja (2007) and Hoffman and Novak (1996) state that the mistrust stems from the fact that the Internet is providing personal data, distrust, poor visibility, and safety of the product

### **2.2.2 Impact of User Generated Content in Tourism**

Most research on user-generated content in the tourism sector is focused on comments and reviews. The electronic word-of-mouth can be defined as “all informal communications directed at consumers through Internet-based technology related to the usage or characteristics of particular goods and services, or their sellers” (Litvin, Goldsmith & Pan, 2008, p. 459). Consumers are using electronic word-of-mouth more and more to share opinions and experiences about products and the increased use of web 2.0 applications has led to a massive increase of user generated content online.

In the tourism sector, user generated content and electronic word-of-mouth become particularly relevant concepts, not only because hospitality products and services are intangible and difficult to evaluate, but also because these goods require high-involvement and are not part of routine shopping patterns for most buyers (del Chiappa et al., 2015). The intangible nature of tourism products doesn't allow evaluation before consumption, while it has long been recognized that interpersonal communications are an important information source among tourists (Litvin et al., 2008). Neu-hofer, Buhalis & Ladkin (2013) stated that, due to internet revolution and globalization, tourists became at the same time co-creators and users of online content throughout their entire tourism experience: before, during, and after their trip. Online content, especially shared on social media platforms, is one of the main sources of information for prospective travelers, who are the public interested in the destination, and such online content (Marchiori & Cantoni, 2015).

### **2.2.3. Text Mining and its Relevance on Tourism**

Ninety percent of travelers use online reviews in travel decision and planning (Godnov & Redek, 2016). Online platforms typically provide both numerical and textual evaluations and are especially important in decision-making, as they are considered objective and trust-worthy (Godnov & Redek, 2016). An immense number of digitized texts is available on online platforms, such as social media posts, customers' reviews on products and their experiences, scientific articles and press releases.

Text mining, also known as text data mining, refers to the process of “extracting interesting and non-trivial patterns or knowledge from unstructured text documents” (Tan, 1999, p. 1). From some time back, scholars from management have started utilizing the power of text mining in various fields for theory building and data analysis (Kar and Dwivedi, 2020). Furthermore, several studies have employed text mining on various subjects in tourism and

hospitality research. In the context of hotels, Bjorklund et al. (2012) analyzed textual reviews and visualized data on Google Maps, providing avenues for users to easily detect quality hotels. Lau et al. (2005) used text mining technology to analyze web documents of the Hong Kong Hotels Association and classified hotel types by counting words of web documents. Stepchenkov (2006) conducted his research using text mining to analyze the destination image of Russia by counting words in reviews. Also, a study by Choi et al. (2007) applied a similar technique to to analyze the destination image of travelers to Macau. Tang et al. (2011) also applied a similar process and technique to conduct research in destination images (Kim, Park & Yun, 2017).

### **2.2.4. Online Content in Service Quality Studies**

“Digital technology and social media have played an important role in developing travel industry businesses” (Nilashi et al., 2018, p.168). Online reviews and ratings are two of the most popular forms of UGC’s (Consumer-Generated Content), which allow the worldwide tourism chain to connect and share their preferences regarding tourism experiences (Nilashi et al., 2021). The analysis of online content shared by users provided vital data that allowed researchers to better understand consumer behavior and experiences in numerous fields, namely, Hospitality and Tourism.

MTE stands for “Memorable Tourism Experience” and refers to the study of a consumer-centric reflective view of the touristic experience, capturing the consumer’s emotional and subjective responses to the attractions they visit (Yu et al., 2021). This process includes the study of critical moments of what tourists did, how they felt, and what they thought when they visited a destination, composed of a selective construction of the most relevant and critical experiences (Kim et al., 2010). When writing an online review on social media platforms, users unconsciously create content that researchers can rely on and perform MTE studies, in order to better understand touristic experiences. “Social media tools have played an important role in the travel planning process and customers’ travel choices” (Nilashi et al., 2018, p. 177) and, as these platforms become more and more popular, new approaches and studies are performed using this data. For example, Moro et al. (2020) used online data written by guests to evaluate the main attributes of Airport Hotel Chains, while Luo et al. (2021) performed a similar study using robot hotels.





### 3. Contextualization

In order to achieve its main objectives and collect answers to the research questions, this study relies on the analysis of the content of reviews left by users on the platform *TripAdvisor* after their stay. Parallel to this, to obtain another perspective on this issue and complement the previous analysis, this study counts with 3 interviews with Boutique Hotel managers from different areas of Portugal.

Consequently, 3 Boutique Hotels from each of the main regions of Portugal (Porto, Lisbon, Algarve and Islands) were selected to be part of this study. The following pages contain a brief description of each Hotel.

- 1. Lx Boutique hotel:** Located in the heart of Lisbon, this Boutique Hotel identifies as a physical expression of this cosmopolitan city. According to the managers, many hotels have Lisbon at their doorstep, but few are a gateway to the city. The complete renovation of the centenary Hotel Bragança led to the creation of an ideal Boutique Hotel for city breaks, the LX Boutique Hotel.
- 2. Santiago de Alfama Boutique Hotel:** This 5-star family-ran Boutique Hotel is set in a fully restored 15th-century palace in the medieval neighborhood of Alfama. Santiago de Alfama incorporates wonderful products from local suppliers as their policy evokes a fierce believe in animal welfare and sustainability.
- 3. Valverde Hotel:** Reminiscent of London and New York Town Houses, Valverde Hotel has a classic and elegant language, punctuated by contemporary furniture, works of art, objects and antiques. These pieces, the light, the comfort of the fabrics and materials used, and the treatment of the space as if it was a residence, intend to distinguish Valverde from all other hotels that may exist in the surroundings, creating a unique place, described by the owners as a “Oasis of comfort and discreet luxury”. The Valverde Hotel welcomes leisure and business guests, offering a space in an enlarged house, with a deeply intimate atmosphere.
- 4. Descobertas Boutique Hotel:** The Descobertas Boutique Hotel, located in the heart of Porto's historic center, makes an 'allegory of multiculturalism' in each of its 18 rooms, standing out for the decoration adopted in each one of them. Inspired by the environment of the places where Portuguese navigators arrived at the time of the Discoveries, each floor is different, presenting different perspectives from that period. The hotel combines history with elements of the city, combining the atmosphere of the “old” with the ideals and comfort of the modern era.

5. **Canto de Luz:** Canto de Luz Boutique Hotel is perfectly situated in the heart of Porto's old town, just a few minutes away from all the key locations, but still set back from the main streets, to offer the peace and tranquility to all guests. Canto's breakfast has become part of Porto's and *Tripadvisor's* most searched places. Homemade and organic, it changes daily and is made using the freshest ingredients from Porto's markets. All rooms in Canto de Luz are equipped with the latest technology, including smart home devices and an Amazon's Alexa controlled by the guests' voices.
6. **Flores Village:** This hotel is 1 km from the center of Porto and its rooms are equipped with an electric kettle, coffee/tea facilities and glassware, as well as a flat-screen TV with satellite channels, a private safe and a desk. Guests can enjoy contemporary and healthy dining in Tapabento within a 6-minute walk of the property. Flores Boutique Hotel & Spa is also located 500 meters from São Bento train station, becoming an excellent option for guests travelling in business.
7. **Velamar Boutique Hotel:** Located in Albufeira, this hotel is in a quiet location and close to everything, making it the perfect choice for a relaxing stay. Velamar provides facilities for all tastes, whether guests prefer to relax by the pool or spend the day at the beach, do water sports or walks, play golf in idyllic surroundings or go on a family program.
8. **Vila São Vicente Boutique Hotel:** The hotel is ideally located at the old town of Albufeira, just above the main beaches, with the nearest golf course just 6 km away and with easy reach of the most beautiful viewpoints of the Algarve.
9. **Boutique Hotel Vivenda Miranda:** Boutique Hotel Vivenda Miranda is a beautiful small hotel perched atop the scenic coastline of Lagos in the West Side of Algarve. With a small number of individually decorated rooms and suites, a spa and a fine dining and artisan gastronomy restaurant onsite, Vivenda Miranda is a unique getaway experience that offers stylish comfort in stunningly gorgeous natural surroundings.
10. **Furnas Boutique Hotel:** Furnas Boutique Hotel is located in Furnas, São Miguel Island, Azores, a place of breathtaking beauty, where guests can find the largest concentration of thermal waters in Europe. Furnas is the perfect spot to unwind, leave the stress behind and connect to nature.
11. **Castanheiro Boutique Hotel:** In the heart of an historic zone, alongside the Palace of Jesuits, this four-star hotel arose from an innovative concept of blending design, detailed architectural restoration and a welcoming atmosphere. With 81 rooms, it boasts a lap pool where guests can enjoy panoramic views overlooking the Bay of Funchal, two

steps away from the main shops, museums, restaurants and bars in the city. This unique hotel concept comprises five historically classified buildings that lead guests on a journey through three centuries of Funchal. From the inner courtyards it accesses three buildings of the beginning of 20th century, where once was operating a typography company and an industry of embroidery. The hotel includes period pieces, building materials, furniture and antiques from these trades that embrace the journey through the different centuries. The result is a first-of-its-kind Boutique Hotel in the historic part of the city.

**12. Sé Boutique Hotel:** This hotel is located in the heart of the city, a few meters from the Cathedral of Funchal. A cosmopolitan and urban hotel in which art and the singularity of the past coexist with current comfort. Strategically located in an area enriched by the proximity to the most prestigious museums and within easy reach of the city's biggest attractions. A few minutes from the historic area of Funchal, Mercado dos Lavradores, the Cable Car, and the Marina.

The decoration of the common areas and the rooms was inspired by the unique characteristics of the Sé Cathedral - a monument of great historical, architectural, and artistic importance. A small 4-star hotel that excels in hospitality and service excellence, with 54 rooms, restaurants, a Terrace Bar with seductive 360° views over the city of Funchal, the mountains, and the sea. A vast collection of private art is also patent throughout the hotel.



## 4. Methodology

### 4.1 Objective

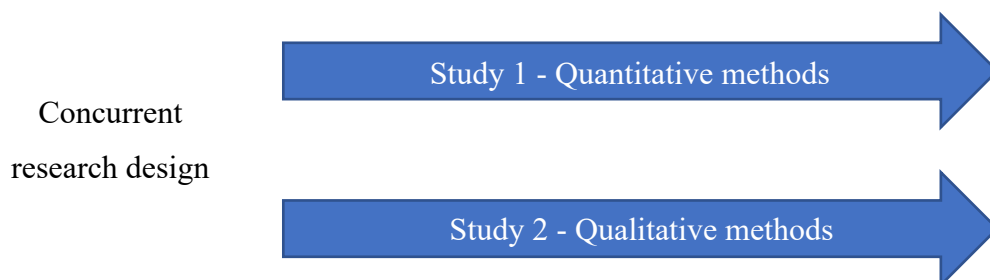
The main goal of this study is to understand the full Boutique Hotel Experience and which attributes guests value the most in these accommodations. It's crucial to identify how this experience differs for each traveler type and what are the main attributes that influence the rating each guest assigns to the hotel.

Lastly, this research aims to get different inside perspectives on Covid-19's impact on the industry in general, and on boutique accommodations in particular, as well as collect inputs on the next steps regarding the recovery from this unexpected crisis.

### 4.2 Research Design

Leech & Onwuegbuzie (2009) defined mixed research designs as “research that involves collecting, analyzing, and interpreting quantitative and qualitative data” (p. 265). The following study can be defined as a Mixed Research Concurrent Design, since the quantitative and qualitative data were analyzed separately before being compared and inferences were made.

Therefore, 2 main studies were performed during this research: Study 1 refers to the collection of reviews from the platform *Tripadvisor* for posterior analysis and Study 2 refers to interviews conducted to Boutique Hotel managers in Portugal. Study 1 aims to answer RQ1: “What are the main dimensions of the guest experience in Boutique Hotels?”, RQ 2: “Do the main dimensions of the experience vary according to the traveler type of the visitor?” and RQ3: “Do the main dimensions of the experience vary according to the overall satisfaction level of the visitor?” by developing intuitive concept maps that will allow further analysis of each variable. Study 2 aims to confirm and add inputs to the results obtained with Study 1, as well as answer RQ 4: “What will happen to the Boutique Hotel industry after the Covid-19 pandemic?”.



**Figure 4.2.1 Concurrent research design. Source: Self-elaboration.**

### 4.3 Data collection

Hox & Boeije (2005), stated that scientists and researchers make use of various data collection strategies. According to the authors, these strategies contemplate two methods of data collection: primary and secondary data. Primary Data collection consists of creating new methods to collect specific data, and therefore new content, that will become available and other researchers can use as secondary data afterwards. Secondary Data collection consists on the technique of looking for previous research on the same topic and use the provided information.

Regarding this research, both primary and secondary data were used to achieve the final conclusions. The extensive literature review presented in the previous chapter was written with a strong base of articles written by other sources (secondary data) and Study 1 and Study data collection procedures will be detailed in the following section.

#### 4.3.1 Data collection- Study 1

In order to complete Study 1, secondary data was collected to achieve the results since, as previously stated, this study consists of the collection of Boutique Hotels' guests reviews from *Tripadvisor*. This collection was manually performed in January and February of 2021 and all the information was grouped in an excel sheet.

The first step of this analysis was listing the top 50 Boutique Hotels in Portugal, its location and the number of reviews available in *Tripadvisor* in English for each one. After, the list was carefully analyzed and 12 boutique hotels (3 from each zone of Portugal: North, Lisbon, Center and Islands) that had a considerate number of reviews published in *TripAdvisor* were selected to be part of this research. After selecting the 12 boutique hotels, the most recent 84 reviews from each were collected into an excel sheet, making a total of 1008 reviews. For each review the following variables were collected: location, name of the hotel, date of the review, date of the experience, title of the review, rating, review context, traveler type, nationality, gender and user' number of contributions.

In order to leave a review on *Tripadvisor*, the user must assign a rating to the reviewed hotel that can go "Terrible" (1) to "Excellent" (5). Most of the collected reviews (71,43%) were written by users who considered the hotel "Excellent", assigning a rating of 5. The least popular rating was "Terrible", as only 1,79% of guests assigned a rating of 1 to the Boutique Hotel. When it comes to traveler type, most guests travelled (65,97%) in couple and Boutique Hotels are proven to not be very popular among business travelers, as only 4,07% of the sample belonged to this traveler type. Guests from all over the world visit boutique hotels in Portugal,

however, Americans are the most frequent guests, as they represent 18,15% of this sample. Finally, when it comes to gender, female contributors are more frequent in *Tripadvisor*, representing 26,88% of this sample.

The following table summarizes the descriptive analysis of the sample of the 1008 reviews used for this study.

**Table 4.3.1.1 Sample Descriptive Analysis. Source: Self-elaboration.**

<b>Variable</b>	<b>Category</b>	<b>N</b>	<b>%</b>
<b>Rating</b>	1 - Terrible	18	1,79
	2 - Weak	20	1,98
	3 - Medium	63	6,25
	4 – Very good	187	18,55
	5 - Excellent	720	71,43
<b>Traveler Type</b>	Alone	45	4,46
	Business	41	4,07
	Couple	665	65,97
	Family	142	14,09
	Friends	115	11,41
<b>Nationality</b>	American	183	18,15
	British	318	31,55
	Italian	10	0,99
	Portuguese	31	3,73
	Spanish	9	0,99
	Other	206	20,44
	NA	251	24,90
<b>Gender</b>	Female	271	26,88
	Male	234	23,21
	NA	503	49,90

**4.3.2 Data collection – Study 2**

For this study, only primary data was collected to achieve the results. Therefore, in order to obtain an inside perspective about the Boutique Hotel experience and complete the information extracted from the Leximancer’s output and the literature review, three interviews were conducted with three Boutique Hotel managers from different areas of the country (Lisbon, Algarve and Islands). Due to the pandemic situation and restrictions in force, two interviews were conducted via videocall, and one was conducted face to face in the designated Boutique Hotel. The three Hotel Managers asked to remain anonymous due to privacy concerns, therefore, their identity will not be disclosed during the analysis of the interviews and the hotels’ names were replaced with the symbol [X]. The main goal of this interview is to complement the collected data on the Boutique Hotel experience; therefore, the following table presents the details of the interviews’ scripts and reasoning behind each question.

**Table 4.3.2.1 Interviews’ script and objectives. Source: Self-elaboration.**

Questions	Objectives
According to your perspective, what are the fundamental characteristics that turn an accommodation into a Boutique Hotel?	Clarify the definition of Boutique Hotel and its most relevant characteristics
Regarding [X] in particular, what are its main points of differentiation when compared to the competition?	Understand which strategies Boutique Hotels use to differentiate from the competition
How would you characterize the target of this hotel?	Understand the main characteristics of Boutique Hotels’ guests
What about the traveler type, which one do you consider to be the most common?	
What are the main dimensions or attributes that customers value when visiting [X]?	Clear up the most important attributes guests look for when visiting Boutique Hotels and what are the main reasons for presenting compliments and criticism
What are the main reasons for customer dissatisfaction with the service?	



Questions	Objectives
Based on your experience as a hotel manager, do you consider that each type of traveler is looking for certain specific attributes in a Boutique Hotel?	Clarify how the Boutique Hotel experience varies for each traveler type
What are the main communication channels used by [X]?	Understand how the hotel maintains contact with their guests and what are the main platforms used to collect feedback
What platforms does [X] use to gather feedback from its customers?	
Following the Covid-19 Pandemic, what were the significant changes that [X] developed in its structure to welcome guests with all security measures?	Understand the impacts of the pandemic on this sector and get an inside perspective on this uncertain topic
Considering your personal experience, what do you think are the key factors that will dictate the future of hospitality? How do you imagine the tourism sector in 5 years?	

#### 4.4 Data Analysis

Two different approaches were used for analyzing the data from Study 1 and study 2. The following section provides a detailed description of the methods used for each case.

##### 4.4.1 Data Analysis- Study 1

Hookway, (2008), listed multiple advantages of using online generated content in research. Among others, the author highlights how this data is more accurate than other sources, since users are allowed to spontaneously create content. In order to analyze the extracted reviews, 2 different approaches were combined: wordcloud creation and text mining analysis.

As a first approach to this issue, the titles of the 1008 collected reviews were uploaded into the free online software “WordCloud generator”. This program automatically selects the most frequent words used in the titles, grouping them in a graph that allows any researcher to intuitively register the most frequent terms used by guests.

Concerning the content of each review, a text mining analysis was performed using the software “Leximancer”. This software program conducts unsupervised quantitative content

analysis of natural language texts submitted by the user, providing outputs which identify the most relevant themes and concepts for the analysis. “Leximancer offers both conceptual and relational analyses, measuring not only the presence of defined concepts in texts but also how these concepts are interrelated.” (Brochado & Brochado, 2019, p. 7). By analyzing these concept maps, the researcher can make conceptual comparisons and identify groups of concepts and themes.

### **4.4.2 Data Analysis- Study 2**

The three interviews carried out during this study were recorded, with the permission of the involved parties. This recording was then transcribed into a Microsoft Word document and translated to English. The next chapter contains the most relevant excerpts of these interviews, and the full transcription can be found in the annexes chapter.

## 5. Results and Discussion

### 5.1 Study 1

#### 5.1.1 Wordcloud Analysis

In order to fully understand and analyze the narrative of the title of the collected reviews, they were grouped into word clouds using the software “WordCloud Generator”. Through the upload of an excel file, this software developed the following figure, representing the frequency in which each word appears in reviews’ titles. The size of the words in this figure is proportional to the number of times they appear in the narrative.



**Figure 5.1.1.1 Generated Word Cloud for the overall Boutique Hotel Experience.**

**Source: Self-elaboration.**

According to this output, the most frequent words used by guests are the ones directly connected to the Boutique Hotel experience: “Hotel”, “Boutique” and “Stay” and some hotel attributes such as “Location” “Staff” and “Spa”, as these are all important factors that guests seek to find when booking boutique accommodations. Some adjectives also stand out, namely, “Great”, “Beautiful” and “Excellent”, proving that most clients are willing to share their positive experiences in this type of lodging.

Additionally, 4 wordclouds, one for each region of the country considered in this study, were generated and included in the annexes section of this research.

### **5.1.2 Leximancer Output Analysis**

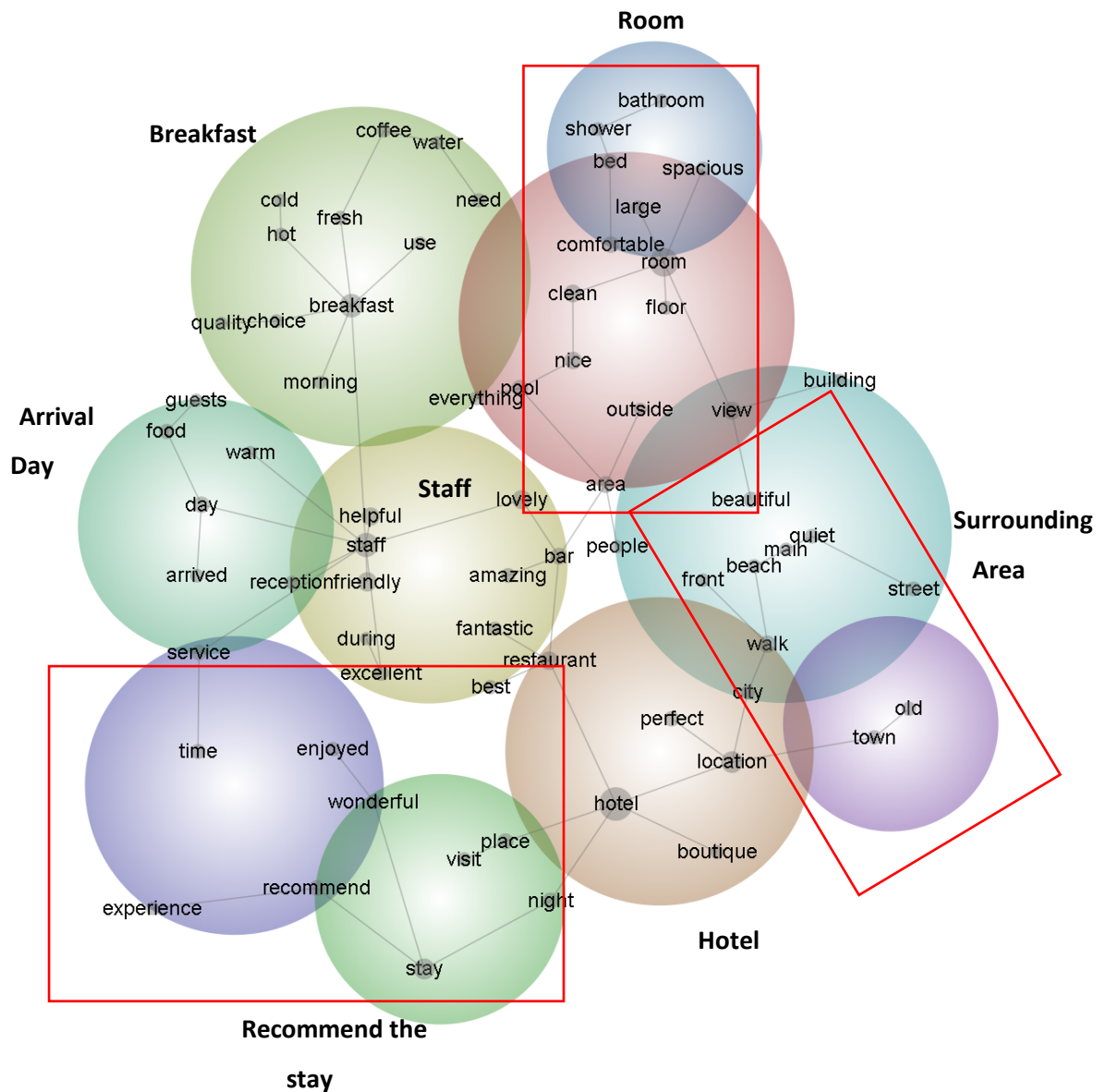
The following analysis was performed by manually extracting the content of the reviews to an Excel file. In order to obtain the results, the following information was extracted: name of the hotel and location, date of the review, date of the experience, title of the review, rating, content of the review, traveler type, nationality, gender and number of contributes. Due to the big amount of data and the impossibility to analyze it manually, the excel file was imported into Leximancer, a software that categorizes the content into themes and concepts, delivering the key ideas and actionable insights with powerful models.

To complement this research, the Leximancer analysis was performed considering different criteria, in order to obtain a broad vision of the Boutique Hotel experience in Portugal. Therefore, the following analysis were performed, and the respective outputs are presented in the following pages:

1. Overall Analysis of the Boutique Hotel experience dimensions in Portugal according to the 4 areas of study
2. Dimensions of the Boutique hotel experience according to the Traveler type
3. Dimensions of the Boutique hotel experience according to the Rating

#### **5.1.2.1 Overall Analysis**

The overall content analysis performed with the data from the 12 hotels revealed 7 themes: “Hotel” (hits = 2297), “Recommend the Stay” (hits = 2093), “Room” (hits = 1955), “Staff” (hits = 1827), “Breakfast” (hits = 1298), “Surrounding Area” (hits = 1045) and “arrival day” (hits = 1000). The following pages contain a detailed analysis of each dimension identified by Leximancer.



**Figure 5.1.2.1.1 Generated Concept Map for the overall Boutique Hotel Experience.**

**Source: Self-elaboration.**

The theme “Hotel” is the main theme of this analysis and is the central point of the Boutique Hotel experience. This theme can be linked to most of the others, such as the staff and surrounding area, and includes the concepts “hotel” (count = 1578, relevance = 100%), “location” (count = 621, relevance = 39%), “restaurant” (count = 390, relevance = 25%), “walk”, (count = 312, relevance = 20%) “perfect”, (count = 212, relevance = 13%) “city” (count = 145, relevance = 9%) and “boutique” (count = 123, relevance = 8%).

A typical review for this theme reads, “My second stay at this nice hotel, and definitely not the last one. Location, reception, staff, room(s), restaurant, again nothing to complain. This hotel is one of the best I ever stayed, cozy, clean, nice room design, I love it.” (Male, Business, Lx Boutique Hotel, Rating: 5). Another guest wrote “This is one of the best small luxury hotels in Lisbon, regarding services, facilities and friendly staff. [...] Highly recommended.” (Male, Business, Valverde Hotel, Rating: 5). A third reviewer mentioned “Just back from spending a week in this boutique hotel and we cannot praise it high enough. We stayed in room 214 a very spacious room with lots of storage and a huge walk-in double shower. [...] Staff were always very professional friendly and polite. Room cleaned every day it was spotless. The continental breakfast was plentiful and delicious. Will definitely be returning next year.” (Female, Couple, Vila São Vicente Boutique Hotel, Rating: 5).

The theme “hotel” is strongly related to the location as guests often comment on this aspect. One guest stated “Lovely small hotel, nice rooms, perfect sea side view, quiet, lovely staff, very helpful and smiling all the time, perfect location, close to the beach, close to the town, would go back again, continental breakfast is just what you need in a morning, you can sit outside having a breakfast looking at the sea” (Male, Couple, Vila São Vicente Boutique Hotel, Rating: 4).

The “Recommend the Stay” theme compasses the concepts of “stay” (count = 753, relevance = 48%), “night” (count = 310, relevance = 20%), “place” (count = 283, relevance = 18%), “recommend” (count = 307, relevance = 19%), “wonderful” (count = 181, relevance = 11%), “visit” (count = 156, relevance = 10%), “time” (count = 240, relevance = 15%), “enjoyed” (count = 166, relevance = 11%) and “experience” (count = 147, relevance = 9%). This second theme gathers two sub-themes that are recognized as being directly related to the same dimension, since, even if both are not always used in the same narrative, they most often have the meaning of a “Recommend the Stay” dimension. Therefore, this theme essentially enforces how the tourists are willing to share their experience in Boutique Hotels and recommend it to others. One guest stated the following: “Lovely staff. I would recommend the hotel to anyone travelling to Lisbon.” (Female, Family, Lx Boutique Hotel, Rating: 5). A further guest wrote “We stayed at this hotel for 2 nights and we liked everything there. [...] So we were glad to stay there and will recommend to our friends” (Female, Couple, Lx Boutique Hotel, Rating: 5).

On the other hand, this theme also compasses some negative reviews from guests who didn’t enjoy their stay and, therefore, do not recommend it to others. For instance, one guest

wrote “[...] Anyway, maybe the hotel has new owners but would not recommend or return.” (Male, Couple, Valverde Hotel, Rating: 1).

The theme “Room” also gathers two different dimensions: Room and Bathroom, since both refer to in-room facilities and guests tend to refer to these attributes in the same narrative. This theme consists in the concepts of “room” (count = 1061, relevance = 67%), “view” (count = 338, relevance = 21%), “clean” (count = 321, relevance = 20%), “nice” (count = 324, relevance = 21%), “area” (count = 258, relevance = 16%), “pool” (count = 274, relevance = 17%), “comfortable” (count = 248, relevance = 16%), “bed” (count = 197, relevance = 12%), “floor” (count = 110, relevance = 7%), “outside” (count = 75, relevance = 5%), “bathroom” (count = 155, relevance = 10%), “spacious” (count = 116, relevance = 7%), “large” (count = 108, relevance = 7%) and “shower” (count = 85, relevance = 5%).

A typical review of this dimension may be presented as following “Super spacious room (big as a small apartment), with a fridge and everything you need in the bathroom! [...]” (Male, Alone, Descobertas Boutique Hotel, Rating: 5). Another excited guest described the room facilities as “Room 402 top floor, spacious with large skylight windows. Marble bathroom with quality fixtures, thick oversized bath towels.” (Female, Couple, Descobertas Boutique Hotel, Rating: 5). A third guest praised the room by mentioning “Rooms were spot on! Clean, spacious and very well appointed with incredibly comfortable beds and efficient air con[ditioner].” (Male, Family, Castanheiro Boutique Hotel, Rating: 5).

The staff theme includes the concepts “staff” (count = 716, relevance = 45%), “friendly” (count = 426, relevance = 27%), “lovely” (count = 420, relevance = 27%), “helpful” (count = 356, relevance = 23%), “bar” (count = 248, relevance = 16%), “excellent” (count = 202, relevance = 13%), “amazing” (count = 175, relevance = 11%), “best” (count = 143, relevance = 9%), “fantastic” (count = 113, relevance = 7%) and “during” (count = 64, relevance = 4%). In general, this theme describes how the staff of the hotel contributes to a great experience and is mainly connected to 2 important moments of the Boutique experience: breakfast and arrival day.

Regarding this theme, one guest shared: “[...] the staff were friendly and extremely helpful. They couldn’t have done more for us!” (Female, Couple, Sé Boutique Hotel, Rating: 4). Another guest emphasized the staff’s qualities by writing “I would highly recommend this place, the finest, we were treated like royals, unforgettable experience, unforgettable food, and oh my God, unforgettable bed! Looking forward to see your place again, very helpful staff. thank you!” (Male, Family, Santiago de Alfama Boutique Hotel, Rating: 5).

## Boutique Hotels: Understanding Service Quality Dimensions

The Breakfast theme mainly summarizes clients' opinions on the first meal of the day, since this is one of the principal factors that guests look for in the Boutique accommodation. This theme encompasses the concepts "breakfast" (count = 730, relevance = 46%), "fresh" (count = 117, relevance = 7%), "need" (count = 150, relevance = 10%), "everything" (count = 117, relevance = 7%), "choice" (count = 116, relevance = 7%), "use" (count = 115, relevance = 7%), "hot" (count = 88, relevance = 6%), "coffee" (count = 91, relevance = 6%), "morning" (count = 89, relevance = 6%), "water" (count = 76, relevance = 5%), "quality" (count = 69, relevance = 4%) and "cold" (count = 56, relevance = 4%).

Regarding this theme, one client described her breakfast experience as the following "The breakfast is great with a lot of options. I personally prefer to pay a small fee rather than have only a lousy buffet. I had an almond milk cappuccino, yogurt with seasonal fruits and an avocado toast with eggs." (Female, Business, Santiago de Alfama Boutique Hotel, Rating: 4). Another typical review reported: "Breakfast was extensive, homemade and inc[luded] in rate. Every member of the staff was friendly & ready to assist us in any way." (Female, Couple, Valverde Hotel, Rating: 4). Another guest complemented the breakfast options by stating "Made to order breakfast, freshly squeezed orange juice and great coffee or cappuccino." (Male, Friends, Valverde Hotel, Rating: 4).

The theme "Surrounding area" is mainly the junction of 2 sub-themes: Town and Beautiful, since guests' narratives often describe how beautiful are the surroundings of boutique accommodations. This theme includes the following concepts: "beautiful" (count = 232, relevance = 15%), "quiet" (count = 156, relevance = 10%), "street" (count = 167, relevance = 11%), "beach" (count = 132, relevance = 8%), "main" (count = 97, relevance = 6%), "front" (count = 91, relevance = 6%), "building" (count = 83, relevance = 5%), "people" (count = 74, relevance = 5%), "town" (count = 150, relevance = 10%) and "old" (count = 137, relevance = 9%).

Regarding this theme, one guest states: "Probably the best location hotel we've ever stayed in. Close to the old town in fact actually in the centre and one road back from the quayside." (Female, couple, Descobertas Boutique Hotel, Rating: 5). Other guest reinforces this opinion by writing "Gorgeous hotel in a superb location. Perfect for a one or two night city stop, parallel to the river front and easy to access the rest of the town. Perfect for a couple or single person exploring the beautiful city of Porto [...]." (Male, Couple, Descobertas Boutique Hotel, Rating: 5).

The last theme, "Arrival Day", refers to the way guests are received at check-in and their first impressions on the accommodation. Therefore, this theme is tightly connected to "Staff"



and “Recommend the stay” and contains the following concepts: “day” (count = 308, relevance = 20%), “service” (count = 262, relevance = 17%), “food” (count = 214, relevance = 14%), “arrived” (count = 130, relevance = 8%), “reception” (count = 110, relevance = 7%), “guests” (count = 91, relevance = 6%) and “warm” (count = 70, relevance = 4%).

A great typical review for this theme that reveals the importance of a great first impression is “Upon arrival, we were warmly greeted and offered a beverage. Mario gave us a map of Porto and showed us great restaurant recommendations and spots to visit. The whole place was so beautifully renovated and decorated.” (Female, couple, Canto de Luz, Rating: 5). Another guest describes his arrival experience as the following “On arrival you can have a free drink and sushi. There are Portuguese tarts and drinks available at reception for guests to try and they noticed it was my birthday without us saying anything so they brought a bottle of sparkling wine up to the room. The staff were incredibly nice and always really helpful. If you want to make your experience in Lisbon not just great but perfect, I recommend booking here.” (Male, couple, Lx Boutique Hotel, Rating: 5).

### 5.1.2.2 Traveler Type Analysis

After performing the overall analysis, it is crucial to extract a new concept map with information regarding each traveler type, in order to understand how this criterion influences the Boutique experience. The following concept map identified 10 new themes: breakfast, hotel, staff, room, view, [arrival] day, street, service, stay and experience, and the respective connectivity rates to each traveler type, which will be analysed individually in the following pages.



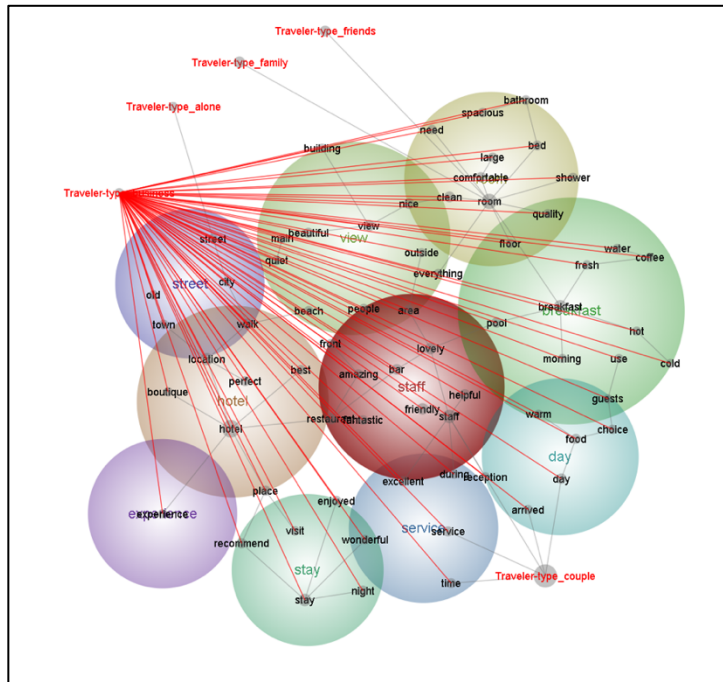
**Figure 5.1.2.2.1 Generated Concept Map for the Boutique Hotel Experience according to each Traveler Type. Source: Self-elaboration.**



## Boutique Hotels: Understanding Service Quality Dimensions

When it comes to the theme “hotel”, the concept “boutique” (co-count = 5, likelihood = 4%) is highlighted by this traveler type, as they often seek to find the attributes these hotels usually offer. One guest stated “Good value for money. It is one of the rarest hotels where you are accompanied to your room and helped with your luggage - all by a nice lady. Real boutique hotel feeling.” (Male, Business, Descobertas Boutique Hotel, Rating: 5).

The theme and concept “experience” (count = 6, likelihood = 4%) also takes an important role in journey of the business guests, since they give detailed descriptions of their stay. One client wrote “This hotel would easily be rated as the loveliest hotel I have ever stayed at! I cannot begin to unravel the numerous well thought-of details of my room, the welcoming reception by the employees, the lovely view of the room to a small square and then to the river Tagus in the distance and so much more! Each floor is wittily titled with a different name that contains some of Portugal's symbols (Fernando Pessoa, fado, Baixa, Bairro Alto) and as I was staying on the Pessoa floor, I had a huge blue mural abounding in symbols of Pessoa. Words cannot express just how amazing an experience I had at the LX Boutique! Lisbon was beautiful both indoors and outdoors for me.” (Female, business, lx Boutique Hotel, rating: 5). When it comes to the theme “street”, the concepts “old” (co-count = 8, likelihood = 6%) and “town” (co-count = 5, likelihood = 3%) become relevant since most of these tourists travel for short periods and enjoy being close to the city centre. One tourist wrote “The Hotel is beautifully situated in the centre of the old town near the river. You can walk to most areas of the town and the staff went out of their way to help suggest routes and places we would enjoy even though our trip was short [...]” (Male, Business, Flores Village, rating: 5).



**Figure 5.1.2.2.3 Generated Concept Map for the Boutique Hotel Experience for Business. Source: Self-elaboration.**



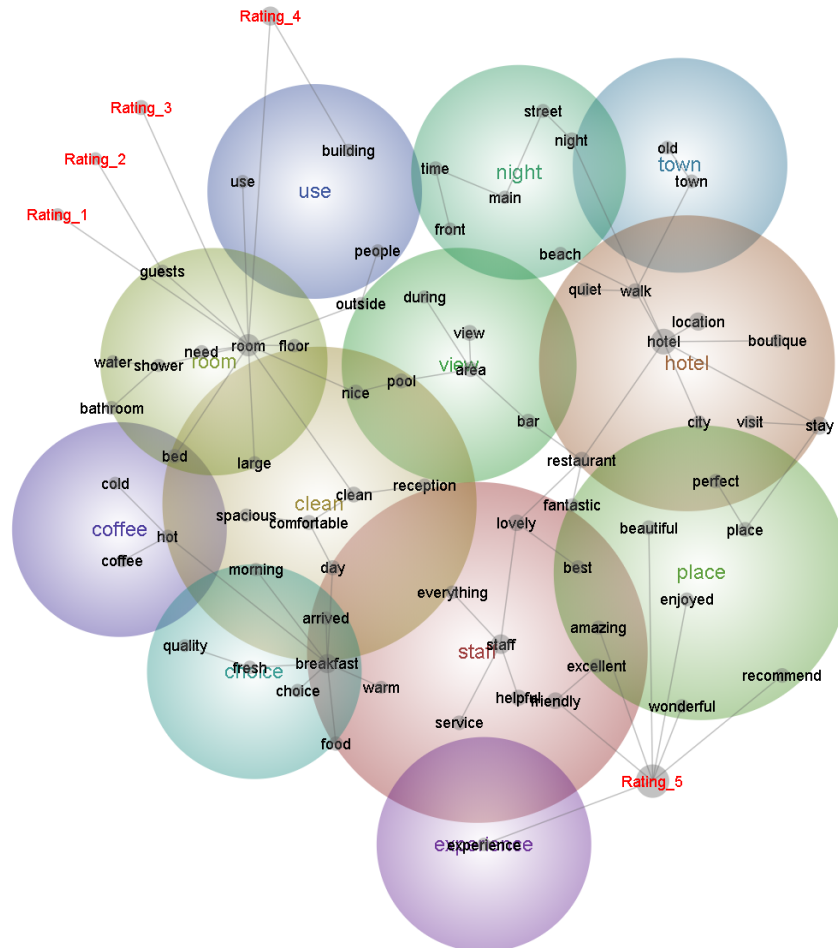






### 5.1.2.3 Rating Analysis

Rating is an important variable to analyze in order to better understand what are the main reasons that lead guests into recommend or criticize a specific attribute in their boutique experience.



**Figure 5.1.2.3.1 Generated Concept Map for the Boutique Hotel Experience according to each Rating. Source: Self-elaboration.**

Guests who rated hotels with the maximum score (5), often use words related to emotion to describe their experience. Concepts such as “amazing” (co-count = 148, likelihood = 85%), “perfect” (co-count = 177, likelihood = 83%) or “beautiful” (co-count = 193, likelihood = 83%) are frequent in these users’ narratives. For example, one guest comments: “A lovely little boutique hotel which was recommended by a friend. Great location amazing service. [...] Nice little sushi restaurant attached to it which didn’t try but looked great. Felt very homely the whole stay as the staff made us feel very welcome. Highly recommend for anyone who is not looking to waste time traipsing from site to site.” (Male, Family, Lx Boutique Hotel, Rating: 5)

## Boutique Hotels: Understanding Service Quality Dimensions

Guests who rated boutique hotels with a classification of 4 out of 5 usually use similar emotion concepts as the ones who gave maximum classification. However, these reviews usually point small details that failed during the boutique experience, justifying the classification. Accordingly, the concept “cold” (co-count = 20, likelihood = 36%) is particularly relevant for these guests as some present complains, for example, regarding the temperature of the shower or the room itself. For example, one guest wrote: “We booked this hotel at a decent price for 2 nights. Room was bright and comfortable. [...] The only thing as we advised reception was that we could not control the aircon the second night, so we had cold air falling right on our faces.” (Female, Couple, Velamar Boutique Hotel, Rating: 4). One guest commented on the shower temperature stating the following “Location is the best, breakfast is amazing, rooms a little too small, cold water sometimes, bathroom a little smelly. Bed is old, especially the matress should be replaced. But overall a very nice and cozy hotel” (Male, Couple, Descobertas boutique hotel, Rating: 4).

Guests rating their boutique experience with 3 out of 5 points usually mention concepts such as “shower” (co-count = 15, likelihood = 17%) and “time” (co-count = 35, likelihood = 15%) in order to justify their opinion. Accordingly, some guests reported how showers were disappointing due to inconsistent temperature and pressure “[...] getting a shower was a challenge, once we worked out that you had to run every hot tap for about 5 mins and then deal with varying pressures and temperatures. [...]” (male, Couple, Sé Boutique Hotel, Rating: 3). Other guests commented on waiting time to access the restaurant, for example, one guest stated “We were told it was fully booked but we could come back for 9pm. We came back and were seated in the couches as the table wasn't ready yet. We waited almost 40 min to be seated when the table was already available. The overall service is of high quality, but we found the waiting time long.” [Female, Couple, Boutique hotel Vivenda miranda, Rating: 3).

Guests who rated hotels with 2 out of 5 points consistently report other “guests” (co-count = 12, likelihood = 13%) behavior to justify their classification. For instance, one guest reported: “Unfortunately the rooms are by no means sound proof and the doors are very heavy. During our stay there were 4 large parties checked in, two of which overpowered the pool area and breakfast room with their inappropriately loud voices and tales from the night before, their lack of manners and respect for other guests at this time and at 4 am in the morning was frustrating. There are conflicting descriptions of this hotel between the hotel itself and tour operators regarding large parties as the hotel says it welcomes all guests while more than one tour operator say they are not permitted. They are identifiable at check-in as they arrive with hen/birthday attire.” (Female, Couple, Velamar boutique hotel, rating: 2). The “pool” (co-count = 10,



likelihood = 4%) is also a relevant concept regarding this rating as, for example, one visitor states “The pool was unusable due to how freezing it was, I asked the manager about this and she was so rude and defensive, but I think it was clear from the amount of guests unable to use the pool at how cold it was. When I spoke to another colleague about this, we were basically told to use the beaches, however we chose the hotel on the pool so this was disappointing.” (Male, Couple, Velamar Boutique Hotel, rating: 2).

Finally, guests who rated boutique hotels with the minimum classification (1), mainly refer to the concepts “reception” (co-count = 11, likelihood = 10%) and “building” (co-count = 8, likelihood = 9%) while writing their complaints. For example, one client mentioned how the construction work in a building nearby ruined his experience “I stayed with my friends for 4 days. On the 3rd day, we were woken up with loud noise coming from the other building undergoing construction.” (Male, Friends, Flores Village, Rating: 1). Other guest commented on his reception experience describing the following situation “On requesting additional toiletries to the room, this simple request couldn’t be met. The staff were beyond rude and the female member of staff verbally abused my partner in the public reception [...]” (Male, couple, Vila São Vicente Boutique Hotel, Rating: 1).

## **5.2 Study 2**

As previously mentioned, study 2 relies on 3 interviews conducted to Boutique Hotel managers in Portugal. Due to privacy concerns, during this section, all the hotel names will be replaced by the symbol [X] and the respective Managers’ names by Manager 1, Manager 2 and Manager 3.

### **5.2.1 Boutique Hotel Definition – An inside perspective**

As previously stated in the Literature Review, authors can’t achieve a consensual definition for “Boutique Hotel”, although there is a common agreement on some attributes that all Boutique Hotels should have. Manger 2 addressed this issue affirming “[...] there is nothing in the legislation that defines what is or is not a boutique hotel.” And added that “a boutique [hotel] implies complementary services, namely, meals, a driver, offering varied services “out of the box””. When asked about his own interpretation on this subject, manager 1 affirmed “The boutique concept for me is the type of accommodation that I personally like and look for when I travel. I think that, to be considered a boutique, a unit has to be small... the big hotels for me are fast food. For a hotel to be a boutique it is necessary to express art and culture, especially in a country as rich in culture and traditions as Portugal. Furthermore, the most important factor

is the service, the quality of service. In our hotel there is some informality, whether in terms of aesthetics or service. Our reception team is constantly receiving positive reviews online because what we want above all is to make people feel at home. It's important to address people by name and not by room number, for example. In fact, we became friends with a lot of people who stayed here at the hotel, we believe that this is what people like, the feeling of home away from home”.

### **5.2.2 The Boutique Hotel Target**

Regarding its target definition, Manager 1 reinforced how it's hard for Boutique Hotels to receive big groups of friends due to its limited capacity. According to this manager, “the [X] Boutique Hotel is a greatly located hotel that welcomes many corporate and couples' clients. Groups are not common as it is a small hotel, therefore one needs to be very careful when accepting groups. We also receive some people who travel alone.”. Following the same premise, Manager 2 reports that “[couples] correspond to 90% of the target. The rest is occupied by single travelers” and Manager 3 reports that their most frequent traveler type is “couples and friends [...]”.

### **5.2.3 The Boutique Hotel Attributes**

When asked to list the main attributes guests look for in his boutique hotel, Manager 1 stated that the location was the most important dimension while Manager 2 mentioned “breakfast, bed and yoga [classes]”. Regarding the same point, Manager 3 highlighted the location, the mattress quality and the shower/ bathroom amenities. All the three interviewed managers agreed that staff is essential to guarantee that guests have a good experience, and the service is according to their expectations. As manager 3 reported, “the staff must be “top”, has to beat the Olympic minimums and we can't get amateurs, otherwise we'll fall into the clichés of a hostel or local accommodation, the staff has to be friendly and speak many languages”.

When asked about the main reasons that would lead guests into giving bad reviews, Manager 1 referred that the breakfast and room temperature needs some improvement. On the other hand, Manager 2 mentioned the “accesses and location”, while Manager 3 reported that, due to a too central location, noise was their main problem.

When asked about how guests' behavior would change according to their traveler type, the three managers agreed on the importance of offering a wide range of activities and services, since each guest looks for something different. According to Manager 1, “young couples usually look for activities for two on the area and relaxing moments, while solo travelers, for

example, frequently ask for radical activities and trails”. Manager 2 highlighted that “as we have 90% of couples, I can say that we ended up making an experience suitable for this target. We are in great demand for services such as SPA or massage sessions for 2. Travelers who come alone ask us about safety in the area and places to go out at night”. When asked about this topic, Manager 3 stated that “customers traveling with friends are always looking for what the city has to offer (bars, clubs, etc). families want cultural plans and couples end up mixing a little bit of everything”.

### **5.2.4 Covid-19 and the future of Boutique Hotels**

The three interviewed Managers were prompt to list multiple changes that the Covid-19 pandemic forced them to apply in their operation. From the “[use of] masks, temperature measurement and disappearance of buffet service” mentioned by Manager 3, to the positive changes described by Manager 1 “we completely changed our hotel. The pandemic was the opportunity to carry out some works that were already scheduled. We divided the team into 2 and came to the hotel every day to work. We did gardening and painting and the hotel is completely different. We expanded the reception and lobby and built an indoor swimming pool, which was a utility that we still lacked”, all the three managers were able to list different impacts the pandemic had on their businesses.

However, the three interviewed managers also agreed in one point: a positive perspective for the near future. Regarding this issue, Manager 2 stated the following: “I think urban tourism will suffer a lot. Webinars and everything that can be done online will be done online by all companies. The need to hold meetings will continue to exist, but the vast majority will go online. Tourism in cities such as Lisbon or Porto will take much longer to recover. On the other hand, everything that is tourism related to leisure, such as the Algarve for example, will recover as soon as there is the possibility to travel [...]. There will be a “boom” in demand... starting as early as next year. In the first years, people will avoid very distant destinations, but the European market will have an increase in demand [...]”. Manger 1 highlighted how small hotels have a good advantage in these hard times, since tourists are looking for more reserved places: “I want to believe that in 5 years this region will be booming. I think we, as a Boutique Hotel, won't suffer too much because we ended up being in the trend and being something more reserved and smaller. We are not in an isolated place in nature, but we are a small hotel and that is what people are looking for, especially at a time when social distance has become part of our lives. I believe that next year there will be no reasons for tourism to slow down. Vaccination and group immunity are going well and if Covid is here to stay, it's something we'll have to deal

with”. Following the same perspective, Manager 3 stated that “it will take 2 or 3 years to reach the 2019 values, the modest destinations will recover quickly, and the urban destinations will follow them after”.

### **5.3 Summary of results**

According to the obtained results, all the 4 anticipated propositions are verified. P1 “The Boutique Hotel experience is multidimensional”, is confirmed by the overall analysis of Study 1, as it shows how the attributes “Hotel”, “Room”, “Staff”, “Breakfast”, “Surrounding Area” and “Arrival Day” compose the Boutique Hotel Experience. Moreover, in Study 2, the interviewed Boutique Hotel managers refer most of these attributes when describing guests’ experience in their accommodation. P2 “Traveler Type is a relevant market segmentation variable” is also verified since the previous studies proved how each traveler type’s experience is influenced by different dimensions as, for example, friends are focused on night activities and people travelling alone are concerned with safety. P3 “The dimensions linked with satisfaction and dissatisfaction vary” is proved as, for example, most of the guests who rated their stay with the maximum rating commented on attributes such as the staff and offered experiences. In contrast, guests who reviewed the hotel with a rating of 1 or 2 out of 5 often mention dimensions related to cleaning and hygiene procedures and other guests’ attitude. Finally, P4 “The Boutique Hotel Experience will suffer multiple changes after the Covid-19 pandemic” is confirmed by the statements provided by the interviewed Boutique Hotel managers.

## 6. Conclusions and Recommendations

### 6.1 Summary and discussion of the results

This study aims to gather information and results in order to fully understand the Boutique Hotel Experience. To achieve such results, four main research questions were proposed in the first chapter and two concurrent studies were applied in order gather answers for the stated questions. First, a text mining analysis was performed in 1008 reviews from *Tripadvisor.com*. Secondly, 3 boutique hotel managers were interviewed.

In order to obtain an answer for the first research question (RQ 1), “What are the main dimensions of the guest experience in Boutique Hotels?”, both studies 1 and 2 are relevant. The Leximancer outputs obtained in study 1 allow us to clearly identify 6 main attributes that guests mention when recalling their Boutique Experience: “Hotel”, “Room”, “Staff”, “Breakfast”, “Surrounding Area” and “Arrival Day”. In congruence, the interviewed Boutique Hotel managers often refer most of these attributes when describing guests’ experience in their accommodation and referred some additional attributes such as “Spa” and “Restaurant”. In addition, studies from Olga (2009), Rogerson (2010), Khosravi et al. (2012), Jones et al. (2013), Khosravi et al. (2014) and Loureiro et al. (2020), also identified multiple attributes and dimensions in the Boutique Experience, highlighting, among others, the “Staff”, “Room Features” and “Breakfast”. Therefore, P1 “The Boutique Hotel experience is multidimensional”, is verified and one can conclude that the theoretical contributions for previous research are congruent with the findings of this research.

The second research question (RQ 2), “Do the main dimensions of the experience vary according to the traveler type of the visitor?” can find an answer on the results of the Leximancer analysis. According to the software’s output, each Traveler Type identified in *Tripadvisor.com* reviews values different attributes as, for example, couples often mention staff and breakfast, business travelers comment on the location, solo travelers are concerned with safety of the area, families seek rooms with various facilities and friends value attributes such as the pool and the activities close to the hotel. In addition, the Boutique Hotel managers referred multiple times to the importance of offering different activities to each traveler type and gave as example how couples look for activities such as spa dates and massages, while solo travelers would look for radical activities. As suggested by Lai & Graefe (2008), this study revealed that traveler types differ in their preferences for hotels and, therefore, P2 “Traveler Type is a relevant market segmentation variable” is verified.

The third Research Question (RQ 3) “Do the main dimensions of the experience vary according to the overall satisfaction level of the visitor?” also relies on the Leximancer outputs to obtain an answer. According to the results presented on the previous chapter, most of the guests who rated their stay with the maximum rating commented mainly on attributes such as the staff and offered experiences. In contrast, guests who reviewed the hotel with a rating of 1 or 2 out of 5 often mention dimensions related to cleaning and hygiene procedures and other guests’ attitude. Therefore, P3 “The dimensions linked with satisfaction and dissatisfaction vary” is verified.

Finally, this study aimed to get a prediction on what’s next for Boutique Hotels after the Covid-19 pandemic. Due to its subjectivity and constant mutation, this research question investigation is solely based on the personal opinions of the interviewed parties in study 2. According to the results of this study, Boutique Hotels have a great advantage when compared to other accommodation sites due to its small dimension and private environment. As stated by Canhoto & Wei (2021), in the short-term, guests travelling in leisure will prioritize safety measures, such as social distancing and privacy, and therefore, the post-crises environment can stand as an opportunity for boutique lodging to attract more guests from different niches. However, it’s impossible to ignore the new legal and societal changes that this pandemic has brought to the industry and, as mentioned in the results of study 2, procedures such as requiring faces masks and promoting social distance are the new standards for any touristic lodging. Therefore, P4 “The Boutique Hotel Experience will suffer multiple changes after the Covid-19 pandemic” is verified.

### **6.2 Theoretical implications**

This study contributes to the existent literature on Boutique and Design accommodations in various ways. The research comprises an extensive examination of the boutique industry which, although was contemplated in multiple studies, it’s still under researched. Parallel to this, the results obtained through this study support the well-known benefits of employing user-generated content in tourism research, rather than surveys or other methods of in-person data collection. In addition, the previously presented findings provide a deeper knowledge of the most important aspect of Boutique Hotels, revealing how different market segments remember and rate their experience.

In particular, this research complements previous studies from Olga (2009), Rogerson (2010), Khosrave et al. (2012), Jones et al. (2013) and Loureiro et al. (2020) by reinforcing the

importance of attributes such as “friendly staff”, “location” and “special services” in the Boutique Hotel Experience, and by adding inputs on the importance of others factors, such as “Breakfast” and “Arrival Day”. Moreover, this study contributes of the validation of the theory debated by Lai & Graefe (2008), which is focused on how traveler types differ in their preferences for hotels and validates the study from Radojevic et al. (2015) which emphasizes the attributes’ variation according to the rating assigned by travelers in online platforms. Finally, this study opens new horizons on the future of Boutique Hotels in the aftermath of the covid-19 pandemic, following the studies from Canhoto & Wei (2021) on the impacts of this pandemic in the tourism sector.

### **6.3 Managerial Implications**

As conclusions are drawn, this research covers a lack in literature review regarding the Boutique Hotel Experience and consumer behavior on this type of accommodation. Additionally, this study is mostly focused on the boutique hotel experience as seen by the guests and as perceived by the hotel managers, bringing different inputs and perspectives on this critical issue, particularly in the hard times that the tourism industry is facing.

The findings of this research prove the prominence of the Boutique Hotel industry in urban areas and emphasize the need to improve the guests’ experience by understanding their behavior and expectations towards these accommodations. The main conclusions of this research are in line with other previous studies, namely, research conducted by Dinçer et al., (2016), Khosravi et al., (2014) and Loureiro et al., (2020) which also highlighted the growing relevance of this market segment in the industry. Considering this growth, the previous research allows Boutique Hotel Managers to clearly understand the degree of relevance of several attributes related to the Boutique Experience. Understanding these dimensions and the influence they undertake in consumers’ minds is, by itself, a targeting strategy which provides pivotal insights to industry practitioners, namely, Boutique Hotel managers. This study also leads marketers into new paths, since it suggests criteria that marketing managers can use while promoting these accommodations through multiple platforms. In particular, the presented results become relevant for Digital Marketers who can take advantage of the great segmentation power of social platforms such as Google Ads or Facebook Ads, to target specific personas and traveler types based on the attributes they seek for in these accommodations. According to the conclusions withdrawn from this study, it becomes clear that the narratives of each guest vary according to its traveler type, therefore, managers should offer and promote

packages that include activities that satisfy the specific needs of each group. For example, for guests travelling with friends, managers can prepare special packages that include an afternoon of cocktails by the pool and for couples, promote a special price package that includes a day at the spa.

Moreover, if managers consider the Boutique Experience as a whole, it's important to independently invest on each of the identified attributes in order to provide a complete experience to each guest. The results presented in this study not only provide details about the different attributes each guest seeks, but also identifies the main factors that influence the rating each guest associates the hotel with. For example, in order to avoid low ratings, it's crucial for managers to guarantee the fulfilment of strict cleaning and hygiene standards.

### **6.4 Limitations and Future Research**

The conduction of this study presented some limitations that might help building the path for further research on this topic. First, the collected data was too homogeneous since 65,97% of the sample belonged to the same traveler type. A larger and more heterogenous sample could facilitate the identification of different dimensions. Besides from that, complementing the study with other types of online shared content other than reviews can also provide the researchers a deeper understanding of the boutique hotel experience.

On the other hand, research on the Covid-19 pandemic is also very limitative, since this novel virus leaves a lot of uncertainties towards the future. In fact, the impact of this virus on the hospitality industry is still impossible to analyze, therefore, all the presented results are based on subjective analysis.

According to the obtained results, the Boutique Hotels are in development and expansion and there's still a gap in research. This research is focused on the Boutique Hotel experience in Portugal, it would be relevant to investigate if the conclusions remain the same in other European and non-European countries. With those results, it would be possible to generate insights on how different cultures behave when face similar conditions and environments.

It would also be relevant to build a bridge between the traveler type and the rating in order to understand which guests are more likely to qualify hotels with high and low rating. With these findings, managers could get more detailed insights on the Boutique Hotel experience as it is perceived by guests and promote a better overall experience according to each guest's needs and expectations.



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**Annex J – Translated transcription of the Interview with Boutique Hotel Manager 1**

**Question 1: According to recent literature, several authors have highlighted some characteristics that make boutique hotels unique accommodation spaces, including their small size and wide range of complementary services. In your perspective, what are the fundamental pillars that make accommodation a boutique hotel?**

The boutique concept for me is the type of accommodation that I personally like and look for when I travel. I think that to be considered a boutique, a unit must be small... the big hotels for me are fast food. For a hotel to be a boutique it is necessary to express art and culture, especially in a country as rich in culture and traditions as Portugal. Furthermore, the most important factor is the service, the quality of service. In our hotel there is some informality, whether in terms of aesthetics or service. Our reception team is constantly receiving positive reviews online because what we want above all is to make people feel at home. It's important to address people by name and not room number, for example. In fact, we became friends with a lot of people who stayed here at the hotel, we believe that this is what people like, the feeling of home away from home.

**Question 2: Regarding [X] in particular, what are its main points of differentiation when compared to the competition?**

In terms of this area there is not much competition. The [Y], despite being a direct competitor, cannot be considered a boutique because it has about 100 rooms and the decor theme has no identity. On the other hand, the [X] is admittedly different, the decoration does not have a conducting end. There are some references in the rooms alluding to monuments, but it doesn't follow any lines. The lobby is funky, a fusion of old and new. We are obsessed with details; it is extremely important to have attention to detail. Every time they walk through our door, customers notice something different. WE have many pieces of art from our manager's private collection. It is a fusion of the old and the modern. Things are thrown at random, but they end up working and that's what sets us apart. We are a completely different product from what this region is used to. We have a soul. We speak enthusiastically and the service is done with passion.

**Question 3: How would you characterize the target audience of this hotel?**

Given the circumstances of the moment, this summer we need the national tourist. This region is still seen as a senior destination and our promotion association has been trying to reach

new audiences. The target audience is the millennials, younger people, beginning their careers, with money, who want to travel and are interested in culture and art. We cannot afford to choose segments in this region because it is still mostly visited by an age group above 50, but ideally the millennials would be our target, people between 20 and 40 years old. I emphasize, however, that it has a lot to do with the public that travels here.

**Question 4: What about the type of traveler? Which do you consider to be the most common? (Couple, at work, as a family, alone, friends)**

The [X] Boutique Hotel is a greatly located hotel that welcomes many corporate and couples' clients. Groups are not common as it is a small hotel, you need to be very careful when accepting groups. We also receive some people who travel alone.

**Question 5: What are the main satisfaction dimensions or attributes that customers value when visiting [X]?**

The location above all. There are people who, despite everything, consider that we are not in a good location because we are in the center of the city. We sometimes receive comments on booking where people complain that the hotel is too central. These people are clearly not our target. The hotel allows you to visit the city autonomously on foot, that is our goal. The staff welcomes people very well because that is what the people from here have always done and we do it very well. It is very important to captivate the customer from check-in, the 1st approach must be captivating, it is a starting point so if something goes wrong, there is already a certain level of empathy and if things are resolved in a friendly way.

I also highlight the comfort that is always important. The friendliness and comfort. Because we are so different people have the first impact of "WOW"! We even have people who come in to think we are a fashion store. 99% of the reaction is very positive, even though the director and I don't have any hotel training.

**Question 6: What are the main reasons for customer dissatisfaction with the service?**

We opened in 2017 in a soft opening and only had the minimum conditions to receive people. That summer there was no AC, and it was very frustrating. It's impossible to live up to all people's expectations. I personally have never been satisfied with the breakfast we serve.

**Question 7: Based on your experience as a hotel manager, do you consider that each type of traveler is looking for certain specific attributes in a Boutique Hotel?**

Millennials want to explore the region. They are curious by nature. Repeaters only come to spend a few days here. Things are different depending on the visitors, it depends a lot on the lifestyle, active people want to go hiking, quiet people want to rest. Young couples usually look for activities for two on the area and relaxing moments, solo travelers, for example, frequently ask for radical activities and trails.

**Question 8: What are the main communication channels used by [X]?**

The main form of communication is social media, namely Facebook and Instagram. Communication, image and color must have a common thread. We often work with influencers; we always bet on this segment and bring a lot of people to the hotel. It is difficult to measure these results, but as we have been doing this since 2017, we kept the same strategy. There are people who are not hotel customers and come in asking for the terrace because they saw it on Instagram. On the other hand, we also need the big tour operators because they attract a lot of people. In the digital channel we have the GDS which, although the practice of high commissions, in terms of promotion and exposure of the hotel, they are a great help that we need and appreciate. Our goal is direct bookings on the website, which we also keep up to date and promote on Google services.

**Question 9: What platforms does [X] use to gather feedback from its customers?**

We have a satisfaction survey that is placed the day before checkout in each room. At the hotel we have a Tripadvisor spot that is connected to the Wifi network. Thus, customers fill out a form and we collect contacts to connect to the internet. During the stay, a popup appears asking the customer to rate satisfaction and if it is less than 2, on a scale of 1 to 5, the manager receives an alert to try to understand what happened and what the satisfaction was even before checkout. For the rest, after checkout they receive an email asking for a review on *tripadvisor*.

**Question 10: Following the Covid-19 Pandemic, what were the significant changes that [X] developed in its structure to welcome guests with all security measures?**

We completely changed our hotel. The pandemic was the opportunity to carry out some works that were already scheduled. We divided the team into 2 and came to the hotel every day to work. We did gardening and painting and the hotel is completely different. We expanded the reception and lobby and built an indoor swimming pool, which was a utility that we still lacked.

Of course, these days it's the new reality to have to measure the temperature, ask for the Covid test, and ask to sanitize your hands whenever guests enter the hotel. After September

11th, the level of security at airports increased a lot and nowadays everyone sees these procedures as a standard. Once we get used to it, and if the pandemic lasts much longer, these processes will also become normal. At checkout, it is also necessary to quarantine the rooms and pay more attention to disinfection, whether in the room or in the common spaces.

In general, we ended up taking some advantage of the pandemic and I think we are much better now than before; we are much more prepared to receive people.

**Question 11: In a time full of uncertainties like the one we are experiencing and considering your personal experience, what do you think are the key factors that will dictate the future of hospitality? How do you imagine the tourism sector in 5 years?**

I want to believe that in 5 years this region will be booming. I think we, as a Boutique Hotel, won't suffer too much because we ended up being in the trend and being something more reserved and smaller. We are not in an isolated place in nature, but we are a small hotel and that is what people are looking for, especially at a time when social distance has become part of our lives. I believe that next year, if 2019 is natural again, I see no reason for tourism to slow down. Vaccination and group immunity are going well and if Covid is here to stay, it's something we'll have to deal with.

**Annex K – Translated transcription of the Interview with Boutique Hotel Manager 2**

**Question 1: According to recent literature, several authors have highlighted some characteristics that make boutique hotels unique accommodation spaces, including their small size and wide range of complementary services. In your perspective, what are the fundamental pillars that make accommodation a boutique hotel?**

The first thing is, without being sure of what I am going to say, there is nothing in the legislation that defines what is or is not a boutique hotel. It turns out to be a self-titled.

A local accommodation, for example, cannot use the term “Boutique” in its name, the concept implies the existence of a hotel, the term boutique hotel is undoubtedly more attractive than a bed and breakfast. A boutique implies complementary services, namely, meals, a driver, offering varied services “out of the box”.

The term “boutique” itself is very important next to Google.

**Question 2: Regarding [X] in particular, what are its main points of differentiation when compared to the competition?**

Let's contextualize this within our competition. Among our competitors are 2 small hotels nearby. What truly sets us apart is the fact that we have yoga classes every day. We have different types of yoga every day. In the 1st year we had yoga classes included for everyone who made any reservation, however, the clients themselves did not realize that the service was included. The following year, those who booked directly on the website were entitled to yoga and those who booked via third parties would have the right as a complementary service. Now we offer breakfast and accommodation. The guest can, however, purchase the yoga package included. The hotel has many guests who don't even leave the hotel, so we made a dome and put on 2 lessons a day. The hotel allows this.

What really sets us apart is yoga, but once people are here, I can guarantee that we have the best beds in the zone. I know several hotels, and none can match this quality of beds. The blackouts are 100% allowing no light to enter, the amenities are organic. Our breakfast has the most expensive and best and all this to live up to our slogan “happy guest, healthy guest”. This is said in every recruiting interview and people know that it doesn't matter if they spend extra money on clients, what matters is that the client leaves the hotel healthier and happier.

I even have customers who wanted to buy the bed, even a Dutch customer asked to buy the bed and deliver it to the Netherlands.

We look at the pillars of wellness: nutrition, sleep and exercise. And, although some people don't notice, we make the stay involve all these pillars.

**Question 3: How would you characterize the target audience of this hotel?**

Undoubtedly couples. They correspond to 90% of the target. The rest is occupied by single travelers.

Those looking for us are mostly Germans and Dutch. The Portuguese also come, but for the sake of proximity. From the moment we partnered with a specific tour operator for boutique hotels in the Netherlands, the hotel exploded, and they became the main target.

If we look at the share of English people in the zone, we are clearly far below, it is not a target that seeks this type of service.

Outside Europe we have some audience as well, some Koreans are looking for gastronomic tourism, namely the famous chicken. We have some Australians and Brazilians too, but it's not relevant numbers.

**Question 4: What are the main satisfaction dimensions or attributes that customers value when visiting [X]?**

Our reviews revolve around breakfast, bed and yoga.

**Question 5: What are the main reasons for customer dissatisfaction with the service?**

I'll try to remember, but it's not easy. Mainly it's the accesses and location. If we were by the river or by the sea, we would have a much higher rating. However, this feeling of isolation from the big city is part of our concept.

**Question 6: Based on your experience as a hotel manager, do you consider that each type of traveler is looking for certain specific attributes in a Boutique Hotel? In other words, as a rule, tourists traveling as a couple seek different activities from tourists traveling as a family, alone, etc...?**

Yes! As we have 90% of couples, I can say that we ended up making an experience suitable for this target. We are in great demand for services such as SPA or massage sessions for 2. Travelers who come alone ask us about safety in the area and places to go out at night.

**Question 7: What are the main communication channels used by [X]?**

The sales channels themselves become communication channels. Booking is a communication channel. Booking and other operators end up being a showcase because there are people who find it in booking but end up booking directly on the hotel's website. Another way is through (physical) operators for different markets. There are people who go to these websites and see brochures from the operators and end up booking with us. We also do advertising on facebook, instagram and Google, we always have very targeted adwords campaigns running. There are a lot of things that we do unconsciously, like for example an article that came out in an online magazine where we were mentioned, and we didn't even know it was going to come out. I personally think this is derived from their ease of finding us online.

**Question 8: What platforms does [X] use to gather feedback from its customers?**

We don't force the customer to do anything. I always have a conversation with all customers at check in when I offer a drink, this alone is a feedback-gathering measure. Our internal reservation management system has several automatisms and when the customer leaves, 2 days later, the system sends a farewell email with a direct link to tripadvisor. It's the only thing we do since our checkout involves delivering a gift and it's a very quick process. It's one thing for a hotel with 500 rooms, we have 8 rooms, and we treat our guests by name, making it easy to establish a conversation. That way, we know that the customer will tell us if they have any feedback, positive or negative. That's the magic of running a boutique hotel.

**Question 9: Following the Covid-19 Pandemic, what were the significant changes that [X] developed in its structure to welcome guests with all security measures?**

We have made 2 or 3 changes here. First of all, we stopped using large tables, tables of 6 became tables of 2. There were no major changes because customers usually eat outside. The breakfast changed completely, there was no longer a buffet and breakfast started to be served at the table. We bought UV lamps to disinfect the rooms whenever there is a change in customers. Aside from the use of the mask obviously, these are the most notorious changes we have here.

**Question 10: In a time full of uncertainties like the one we are experiencing and considering your personal experience, what do you think are the key factors that will dictate the future of hospitality? How do you imagine the tourism sector in 5 years?**

## Boutique Hotels: Understanding Service Quality Dimensions

I think urban tourism will suffer a lot. Webinars and everything that can be done online will be done online by all companies. The need to hold meetings will continue to exist, but the vast majority will go online. Tourism in cities such as Lisbon or Porto will take much longer to recover. On the other hand, everything that is tourism related to leisure, such as the Algarve for example, will recover as soon as there is the possibility to travel and as soon as people have that possibility. There will be a “boom” in demand... starting as early as next year. In the first years, people will avoid very distant destinations, but the European market will have an increase in demand and places such as Alentejo will have a nice growth in the coming years.



**Annex L – Translated transcription of the Interview with Boutique Hotel Manager 3**

**Question 1: According to recent literature, several authors have highlighted some characteristics that make boutique hotels unique accommodation spaces, including their small size and wide range of complementary services. In your perspective, what are the fundamental pillars that make accommodation a boutique hotel?**

What do I think about the boutique designation? We started this project 10 years ago when nobody invested much in this area nor in Portugal. And the boutique was born as our signature, because we wanted to give a unique experience to each customer. Even today, each floor of the hotel has a specific theme, and we are constantly expanding. We had to differentiate ourselves in some way from a big hotel where the quality of service ends up being lost. We are boutique because we are in an old building, we want to look just like just another house. At this time in Lisbon, everyone who was not a hotelier and had a building decided to create a boutique hotel, 200 hotels opened downtown, and the word is completely trivialized, they completely spoiled the word. For me, the big challenge is to replace branding to ban the word boutique in Portugal because the word is completely trivialized so, at this moment, it comes from a completely exclusive acronym from 10 years ago that came to decline, at the end of the day there are few hoteliers but there are many people who want to own a hotel. How can we deconstruct all this? Going back and demystifying it all. The Marriott itself made a growth for Starwood, Ritz, etc. to adapt to the needs of each client, the word Marriott is very trivialized. At the end of the day, a boutique hotel in my head is a city center hotel for 2 or 3 nights, a very nice hotel. A boutique hotel has charisma, a unique personality and above-average service. Calling a bad hotel a boutique hotel is the same thing as making a Ritz 2 stars, these are factors that do not intersect.

**Question 2: Regarding [X] in particular, what are its main points of differentiation when compared to the competition?**

At the end of the day, the rules are very strict because all hotels can establish their criteria and any review is exposed to the whole world, there is no longer the essence of word-of-mouth. Here, all our uniforms are designed by Ralph Lauren, we have a porter service that other hotels do not provide and, in general, our way we resort to a superior quality service. We're the only boutique hotel in downtown with river view. I have a good sushi restaurant that gives the accommodation a good name.

**Question 3: How would you characterize the target audience of this hotel?**

The age group here is over 45 years old. It's a hotel that was cataloged for being noisy and that's why it's a city break, the average stay is 2 nights. The clients are mostly middle class to upper, over 45 years old looking to stay in a walking distance hotel. The number 1 client here is American, and they value hotels and restaurants more than the city itself. Our average price is above the competition, but we attract a lot of everything

**Question 4: What about the type of traveler? Which do you consider to be the most common? (Couple, at work, as a family, alone, friends)**

Couples and friends mostly.

**Question 5: What are the main satisfaction dimensions or attributes that customers value when visiting [X]?**

There is something that is very popular in the hotel industry these days: the value for money, thinking if what I paid is fair or not. If I ask what the essence of a hotel is, anyone will say it's giving the customer a good sleep. The essential factors are the location, the mattress must be top, there are no savings in this criterion, the shower must be top and the bed linen and towels must be top too. Then come all the other things: the staff has to be top, has to beat the Olympic minimums and we can't get into amateurs, otherwise we'll fall into the clichés of a hostel or local accommodation, the staff has to be friendly and speak many languages.

**Question 6: What are the main reasons for customer dissatisfaction with the service?**

The noise because we are in an area with many clubs, some rooms are above clubs. Those who don't like our hotel or were unlucky came by mistake. We must improve the noise and the breakfast is not top yet.

**Question 7: Based on your experience as a hotel manager, do you consider that each type of traveler is looking for certain specific attributes in a Boutique Hotel? In other words, as a rule, tourists traveling as a couple seek different activities from tourists traveling as a family, alone, etc...?**

Customers traveling with friends are always looking for what the city has to offer (bars, clubs, etc)... families want cultural plans and couples end up mixing a little bit of everything. The visits are short, there's no time for big plans.

**Question 8: What platforms does [X] use to gather feedback from its customers?**

We respond to everything one posts on online platforms. The client wants to have a life of his own and doesn't want to be bothered by inquiries. Our lives are being flooded with inquiries and the RGPD is increasingly tightening, this process is tiring and has fallen into disuse, customers know exactly where to leave comments if they want to.

**Question 9: What are the main communication channels used by [X]?**

Social networks and Google ads. At the end of the day, especially Google ads, and that's the future. The hotel has an annual occupancy of 87%, excluding the covid period, and a lot of traffic comes from ads.

**Question 10: Following the Covid-19 Pandemic, what were the significant changes that [X] developed in its structure to welcome guests with all security measures?**

Masks, temperature measurement, buffet disappeared

**Question 11: In a time full of uncertainties like the one we are experiencing and considering your personal experience, what do you think are the key factors that will dictate the future of hospitality? How do you imagine the tourism sector in 5 years?**

We must set our sights towards Israel, for example, that no longer mandates the use of masks. Airbnb shares are going up every day, tourism is in people's DNA and if we study what will happen in the post pandemic, I think the new "crazy 20s" will come. People will want to make the most of it all and in other parts of the world everything is skyrocketing. Tourism is here to stay; a slice of the tourists' "pie" only saves money to travel. I compare tourism now with what happened in the 2008 crisis, people have short memories and want to have experiences. It will take 2 or 3 years to reach the 2019 values, the modest destinations will recover quickly and the urban ones later. 5-star hotels will be the first to emerge from the crisis because the rich will always have money to travel.