



## MASTER'S THESIS

# Measuring the Effects of Airbnb's Growth on Consumer Brand Perception in the Hotel Industry: A Case Study of Best Western Hotels & Resorts

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## Executive Summary

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The technological trajectory that has followed the digital revolution and the emergence of the sharing economy have resulted in disruptive trajectories and innovation in a number of industries, among them the travel, tourism, and hospitality industry. The rapid growth and development of the sharing economy company Airbnb is one player that appears to be disrupting the industry. Questions regarding consumer brand image, and the possible effect that the disruptive emergence of Airbnb could have in this are for the incumbent firms in the industry are therefore becoming increasingly interesting. In order to answer such questions, this research conducts a case study on Best Western Hotels & Resorts, a branded hotel that caters to various segments in the market. As such, the main research question of this study becomes: *To what degree and extent has the consumer brand image of Best Western Hotels & Resorts changed before, during, and after the arrival of Airbnb's disruption in the hospitality industry?*

Based on theories concerning brand image in terms of brand equity and brand identity, as well as Christensen's (1997) and Christensen and Raynor's (2003) theories regarding disruptive innovation, and by examining the consumer sentiment on Best Western Hotel & Resorts official Facebook page, with the use of big data sentiment analysis and the more qualitative research method netnography, the thesis cannot argue with certainty for any correlation between the emergence of the disruptive innovation of Airbnb and the consumer brand perception of Best Western over time. However, the thesis argues that the more general technological trajectory that is the sharing economy has in fact affected consumer brand perception and the brand image of Best Western. Furthermore, it is argued that this has resulted in Best Western losing its position in the industry. Therefore, the thesis also *suggests possible strategic business responses that Best Western Hotels & Resorts could apply in order to cope with the competitive landscape created after the emergence of Airbnb and the sharing economy*, which also is this study's sub-proposition. These suggestions were based on Amit's et al (2012) activity-system framework related to business model innovation as well as theories concerning corporate catalyst innovation.

The research was conducted with a deductive, mixed-method research approach. Firstly, the study conducted big data sentiment analysis and big data keyword analysis in order to acquire a holistic and broad picture of the general consumer sentiment. Secondly, in order to understand the context of the consumer sentiment, netnography research was also performed. This mixed-method approach ensured the triangulation of the findings.

## 1. Introduction

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During recent years, the tourist accommodation industry, traditionally consisting of hotel chains, has faced disruptive innovation from the sharing economy company Airbnb (Guttentag 2015). While Airbnb has had an immense growth during this time-frame, incumbent companies, such as hotels, have had to admit to themselves that the industry, and therefore the competitive landscape, has changed forever. Furthermore, it would not be unreasonable to argue that it is possible that the consumers have noticed this shift as well. Questions regarding consumer brand image, and the possible effect that the disruptive emergence of Airbnb could have in this areas for the incumbent firms in the industry are therefore becoming increasingly interesting. Moreover, questions regarding possible strategic responses for the established parts of the industry should also be of importance.

The question of consumer brand perception is indeed of interest in the context of disruptive innovation. Established and incumbent companies often tend to listen to their top-end customers, trying to accommodate their needs and demands, when engaging in product or service development, or innovation (Christensen & Raynor 2003). A reliance on mainstream high-end customers often provides the company with a sustaining trajectory as well as sustaining innovations. However, engaging too heavily in such efforts may cause the incumbent firm to overshoot what most of the market needs and, in extension, failure to capture the whole market in the innovation process (Christensen & Raynor 2003). Furthermore, if too much attention is given to the existing high-end customers and low-end market segments are neglected, it is not unlikely that a fertile breeding ground for disruptive innovations from new entrants is created. Thus, upcoming disruptive trajectories are ignored. However, disruptive trajectories and innovations do not, in contrast to more sustaining innovations, attempt to provide the established high-end customers in existing markets with better products or services (Christensen 1997). Instead, the aim is to develop niche products or services for the low-end segments and markets. At the time of introduction to the market, such disruptive innovations are generally inferior to established products and services. However, the disruptive innovation is often more convenient, less expensive, and appeals to a new or less-demanding segment of customers (Christensen 1997). Furthermore, once the niche product, the disruptive innovation, has found its way to the market and gained a foothold in a new or a low-end market or segment, thanks to continuous product or service improvement, the previously immature product or technology will eventually improve enough to intersect with the needs of more demanding

customers (Christensen 1997). Considering the way disruptive innovations capture low-end consumer segments, only to eventually move towards more established and high-demanding consumer segment, it would not be unreasonable that the consumer brand perception throughout the industry is affected.

The emergence of Airbnb, a sharing-economy accommodation service, follows a very similar pattern (Guttentag 2015). The traditional market for tourism accommodation involves tourists renting rooms from formal business, in other words tourists renting accommodation from hotels. Airbnb's business model, where private individuals rent and share their own accommodation and housing with tourists and temporary tenants, initially appealed to the low-end segments of the tourism accommodation market. Compared to the traditional tourism accommodation industry, Airbnb often falls short in many areas important to tourists when searching for holiday accommodation, such as security, service quality or staff friendliness (Chu & Choi 2000a; Dolnicar 2003). Initially, this meant that Airbnb had a hard time appealing to high-end customer segments. However, just as other disruptive products and innovations, Airbnb's offered service was significantly cheaper and more convenient than traditional accommodation offered by hotels in the tourism accommodation industry, which meant that Airbnb appealed to lower-end customer segments (Guttentag 2015). With continuous improvements to their offering, as well as cost being an important factor in holiday accommodation decisions (Lockyer 2005a; Chu & Choi 2000b; Dolnicar 2003), Airbnb has successfully established a foothold in the market and is now also appealing to more demanding customer-segments, in extension successfully disrupting the tourist accommodation industry.

Faced with challenges that threaten the dynamics of the hotel industry, traditional hotels and resorts are left with little choice but to respond in order to achieve a stable and sustainable position in the market. Scholars have proposed various strategies to traditional businesses in order to achieve competitive advantages. Charitou & Markides (2003) have discussed five possible moves for a business to take when faced with disruptive innovation, with a 'no response' strategy on one end of a scale and an 'embrace it all' strategy on another. Researchers such as Cusumano (2015) have also suggested ways to compete with Airbnb by proposing marketing and branding efforts, loyalty programs and cheaper deals during hotel stays, to name a few examples.



## 1.1 Purpose of This Study

Airbnb's disruptive business model has created a frenzy in the hotel industry, but the reason behind this is still unclear. Is it a force due to its affordable nature or is it because it taps into an unanswered need in the consumers that the traditional hotels cannot satisfy (Forgacs & Dimanche 2016)? The answer to this question can lead to an effective business strategy to battle the onslaught of Airbnb. A thorough understanding of consumer perception of the hotel industry and where it stands when compared to Airbnb, is therefore the focus of this research. Another important aspect of this research entails a study of possible strategies that hotels can utilize in response to the challenge that is Airbnb and the sharing economy.

Branded hotels are known for their brand consistency and service quality, and are the main revenue generators in the industry (Douglass 2015). Therefore, this research will be a case study on Best Western Hotels & Resort, a branded hotel with a collection of services that cater to various segments in the market, which is important for the authenticity of this research. Located in over 100 countries and territories, Best Western Hotels & Resorts offer accommodations to all types of travelers, and has a collection of seven unique brands targeted to different consumer groups (Best Western 2017). In order to thoroughly study the effects that the emergence of Airbnb and the sharing economy has had on the company, investigating the changes of consumer brand image, before and after the innovation of Airbnb is essential. Due to this, the following research question has been stated to capture this aspect of the investigation.

*To what degree and extent has the consumer brand image of Best Western Hotels & Resorts changed before, during, and after the arrival of Airbnb's disruption in the hospitality industry?*

Furthermore, another part of the research focuses on the corporate side of the hotel industry. Therefore, depending on the results related to the above research question, this thesis will also aim to suggest possible strategic responses in order for Best Western to improve and strengthen its competitive position in the market, considering the emergence of Airbnb. Therefore, the following sub-proposition is stated as well.

*To suggest possible strategic business responses that Best Western Hotels & Resorts could apply in order to cope with the competitive landscape created after the emergence of Airbnb.*

In short, this research is an attempt to cover two directions; to study the consumer brand image of Best Western in the hotel industry with the passage of time, and to propose possible strategic

responses for Best Western, when dealing with such an intense competition and the disruptive business model of Airbnb. With this in mind, the research has been limited to a few key investigative areas.

## 1.2 Delimitation

The hotel industry consists of various entities such as motels, hotel chains, casinos etc. However, literature and supporting secondary research is limited to the international hotel chains. Luckily, there are many branded hotels that compete in this specific industry. Nevertheless, the research will be limited to an investigation of a single brand which is the case study of Best Western. It should be noted that the Best Western brand consists of a collection of seven hotels and brands. As stated, however, this thesis will only focus on the main brand - Best Western Hotels & Resorts. Of the various stockholders that have a vested interest in the Best Western brand, the research will be limited to consumer's perception of the brand.

## 1.3 Structure of the Thesis

*Chapter one* of this paper introduces the topic and the purpose of this study. It also outlines the objectives, the research questions, and limitations of the thesis.

*Chapter two* of this paper consists of the practical background, which presents the travel and hospitality industry, discusses digitalization in the industry, as well as presenting the rise of Airbnb.

*Chapter three* outlines the relevant theories and theoretical frameworks which are used throughout the thesis. The representation of the theories and frameworks are divided into theories regarding the sharing economy, disruptive innovation, branding, business model innovation, and corporate catalyst innovation.

*Chapter four* begins by discussing the research philosophy and approach. It also presents the research strategy and the methods used to gather data, more specifically sentiment analysis, keyword analysis, and netnography research. The chapter ends with a discussion regarding validity and reliability, as well as an ethical research discussion.

*Chapter five* presents the findings of the research. First the findings from the sentiment analysis are presented, followed by the keyword analysis and related statistics. Finally, the findings from the netnography research are presented.

*Chapter six* provides an analysis of the findings. All of the findings are examined through a theoretical lens. Furthermore, the information presented in the practical framework is also considered. The analysis is separated into two main parts; the first discussing the current situation of Best Western, and the second suggesting and discussing possible strategic responses.

*Chapter seven* summarizes the study and draws conclusion based on the analyzed findings.

*Chapter eight* describes and suggests possible further research.

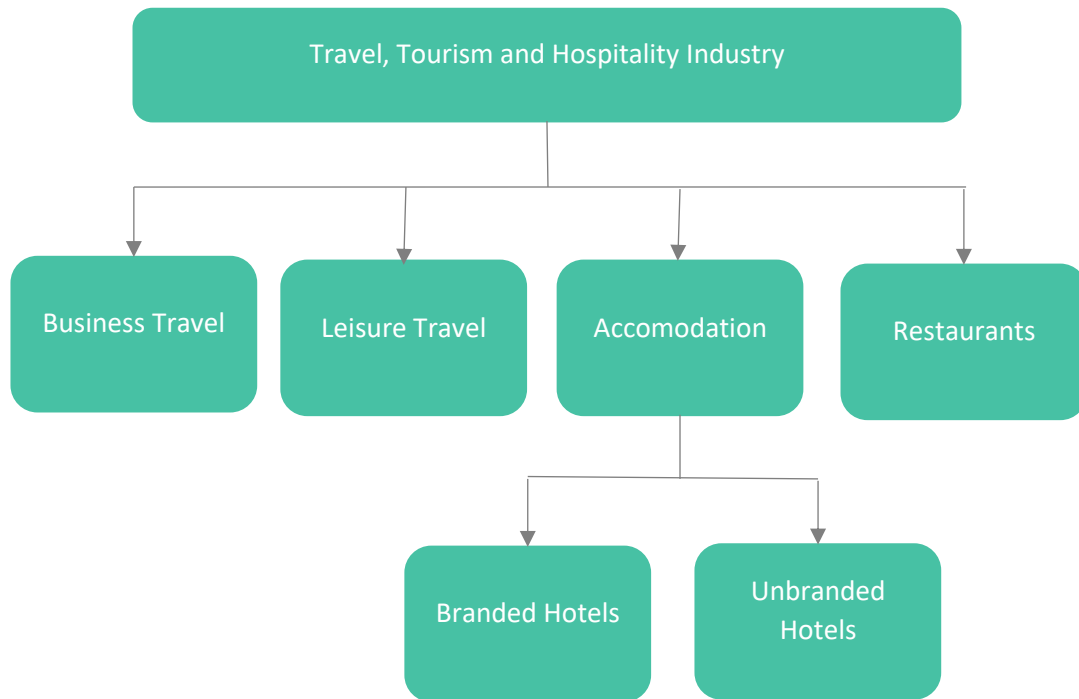
## 2. Practical Background

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*In this chapter, the practical background is presented. This section aims to present an overview of the travel, tourism and hospitality industry of which the hotel industry is a major part, the emerging digital trend enabled due to technological development in the society and changes in the consumer mindset. The aim of the practical background is to create an understanding of the hotel industry and to capture the innovative development in order to comprehend the theoretical framework.*

### 2.1 Overview of the Travel, Tourism and Hospitality Industry

The hotel industry, though huge, is just a small part of a bigger whole, consisting of various other industries working simultaneously with one another. At the top of the pyramid lies the travel, tourism and hospitality industry which consists of accommodation, business travel, leisure travel and restaurants as shown in Figure 1 (Statista 2017). The accommodation industry mainly consists of two types of hotels; unaffiliated/unbranded hotels and branded/chain hotels of which branded hotels are the major revenue contributors to the growth of the industry (Douglass 2015). Business travel, leisure travel, and restaurant industries overlap with the hotel industry on a continued basis. Growth in this entire structure is derived simultaneously as arrivals increase. The rate with which consumers are travelling has doubled from 527 million in 1995 to approximately 1.19 billion in 2015, and is expected to exceed 1.8 billion people by 2030 (UNWTO n.d.). An average traveler needs all the sectors of the travel, tourism and hospitality industry working, in order to have a successful and fulfilling visit. To provide tourists with high satisfaction the entire industry needs to have a deep understanding of the consumer mindset. With insight to what travelers are looking for in a visit, companies can customize their businesses to best suit their customers (Anamaria & Maria-Cristina 2013).



*Figure 1. The structure of the Travel, Tourism, and Hospitality Industry (Statista, 2017)*

### 2.1.1 The Accommodation Sector

After the financial crisis, there has been an increase in the economic development which has led to the progression of various industries. The global hotel industry being one of them, contributed approximately 493 billion USD in the year 2015 and is forecasted to contribute 550 billion USD in the year 2018 (Euromonitor 2017). It should also be mentioned that chain hotels, such as Best Western, have been the main revenue generators in the hotel industry. Catering to various consumers that travel both for leisure and business, the incumbent businesses have had a strong foundation in the industry. Revenue from the US hotel industry alone has yielded 189 billion USD in 2015 (STR Global. n.d.). This astronomical growth has made the hotel industry a very profitable one, with a variety of branded hotels and services available for consumers to choose from. The top three hotels responsible for the development of global hotel industry are InterContinental Hotels Group, Marriott International and Hilton Worldwide, contributing 24 billion USD, 14.5 billion USD and 11.27 billion USD respectively (Statista 2017). Although Best Western does not make the cut as one of the highest revenue contributors in the global hotel industry, it still has a strong presence in the industry and is reported to generate 4.0 billion USD in North America in the year of 2016 (Best Western 2016).

Consumer satisfaction is a key element in the success of the hotel industry but according to American Consumer Satisfaction Index (ACSI) the hotel industry has faced a decline in

consumer satisfaction from a 77 ACSI score in 2013 to a forecasted figure of 74 ACSI score in 2016 (ACSI n.d.). Best Western, in particular, has had a drastic decline in the consumer satisfaction index from a 79 ACSI score in 2013 to 75 ACSI score in 2016 (ACSI n.d.). One could possibly assume that such a change is due to an emerging trend of collaborative consumption that has produced unsatisfied consumers even with a rapid growth in the hotel industry. This change in industry has created competitors such as Airbnb that pose a threat to branded hotels and is exactly what this thesis aims to investigate.

## 2.2 An Emerging Trend Towards a More Digital World

Technology has played an essential part in the evolution of the human society. Archaic practices that once dominated have been eradicated. There was a time when consumers followed advice and direction from experts in order to make important decisions but with the advent of Web 2.0, advice and help is sought after on the internet from the average consumer, who are experiencing the same or a similar situation (Denning 2014). Technologies responsible for this new form of peer-to-peer human dynamic, such as Facebook, Twitter and other forms of social media, encouraged a trend of sharing and participating to create a united source of information which can be utilized commercially (Botsman & Rogers 2010).

The rise of the shared economy is a result of an internet-based culture; a new socioeconomic system which allows for shared creation, production, distribution, and consumption of goods and services between individual consumers (Tussyadiah & Pesonen, 2015). Shared economy, or collaborative consumption as referred to by some scholars, has entered into various industries including the hotel industry.

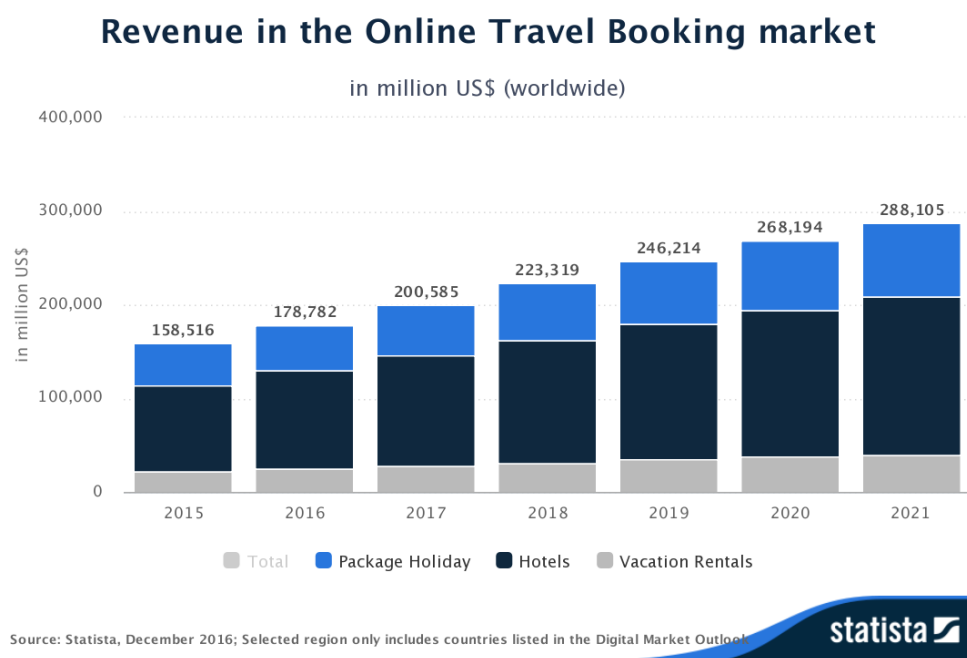
The once traditional industry of chain hotels is facing competition in the form of peer-to-peer accommodation. According to Tussyadiah & Pesonen (2015), peer-to-peer accommodation is when individuals rent out their underutilized assets to achieve some capital gain. The system has created potential threats in the hotel industry in form of Airbnb and Uber. These startups provide travelers with affordable accommodations and transport services and have gained appreciations amongst various consumer segments (Tussyadiah & Pesonen 2015).

### 2.2.1 Online Travel and Tourism Sector in the Hotel Industry

The hotel industry has always been on an innovative front in terms of technology, in order to effectively target consumers. Currently, chain hotels appear to have an established online presence in the form of private websites and social media pages. Furthermore, the hotel industry players utilize online travel booking services to reach as many consumers as possible.

Currently, the online travel booking services is used for packaged holidays, hotel stays and private vacation rentals by online users (Statista 2016). Providers of package holidays are online travel agencies (OTAs) such as Expedia and Opodo as well as tour operators such as TUI and Thomas Cook. Whereas specialized service providers of hotel stay and private accommodations booked online are, for example, Hotels.com, Booking.com, TripAdvisor and Airbnb (Statista 2016).

In 2015, 392 million users utilized online travel booking and it is forecasted to increase to 545 million users in 2018 (Statista 2016). This dependence on online platforms has yielded growth in the travel booking sector. Package holidays generated 44 000 million USD in 2015 while vacation rentals earned 21 800 million USD in the same year worldwide. Contributing to 92 000 million USD in 2015, hotel stays are responsible for the most growth in the sector (Statista, 2016). The numbers have been forecasted to increase at a steady pace by the year 2018 as dependence and usage of online services and presence increases (Statista, 2016).



**Figure 2.** The revenue in the online travel booking market, divided into package holidays, hotels, and vacation rental, between 2015 and 2021 (Statista 2016)

In order to compete in a highly competitive environment, hotels have enabled a proactive environment in the industry that focuses on creating packages that effectively target the market. Companies such as TripAdvisor and Expedia are a result of this digital world. These companies have replaced the traditional travel agencies and have created new avenues for hotels to target consumers more effectively (Guttentag 2015). On the other hand, organizations such as Airbnb,

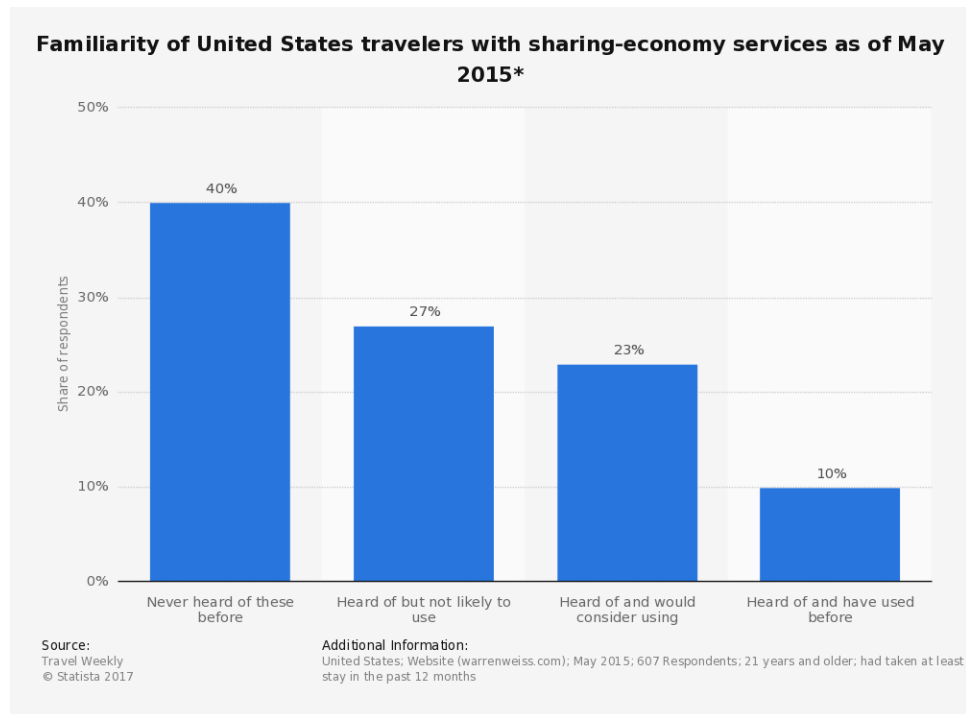
9flats, Wimdu and Roomorama directly affect the hotel industry by enabling the ordinary user to offer accommodations to tourists and travelers (Guttentag 2015). More internet-based companies, such as Onefinestay, are in the game that cater to a niche by offering rental services for only upscale listings and there are also 'hospitality networks', e.g. CouchSurfing, in which hosts offer their accommodations free of charge to other people (Guttentag 2015).

### 2.2.2 The Rise of Airbnb: A Destructive Force in the Hotel Industry

In a short amount of time, Airbnb has faced an astronomical amount of success. According to Wall Street Journal (n.d.), Airbnb's company value in 2015 was estimated to be 25.5 billion USD. Targeting desires and wants of the consumers of this generation, the company created a business model that competes with well-established organizations in the hotel industry without the cost of owning assets (Guttentag 2015). Due to an evolving culture of collaborative consumption in the society, the use of Airbnb's services has grown exponentially. In New York alone, the number of units booked through Airbnb have increased from 2,652 in 2010 to 16,483 units in 2014 (New York State Office of the Attorney General. n.d.). Interestingly enough, according to Douglass (2015), the company has mostly effected the market share of branded hotels while hostels and other lodgings have not faced any major loss of market share. Founded in 2008, the company enjoyed intense growth from the year 2012 and onwards. The revenue of Airbnb in New York was estimated to amount to approximately 451 million USD in 2015 and is forecasted to increase to 805 million USD in 2018 (HVS Global Hospitality Services. n.d.).

Even though Airbnb has experienced immense growth in recent years, there is still a huge population that does not utilize its services or are a part of the shared economy. As a survey, done by Travel Weekly (n.d.) in 2015, shows, only 10% of United States travelers have heard of and have used the service before, while 23% of them have heard of it and would consider using it. Though it is clear that the company is still in its initial stage and is dealing with brands that have a strong and firm foundation in the hotel industry, it is still a rising entity that should not be ignored or underestimated as the statistics show.

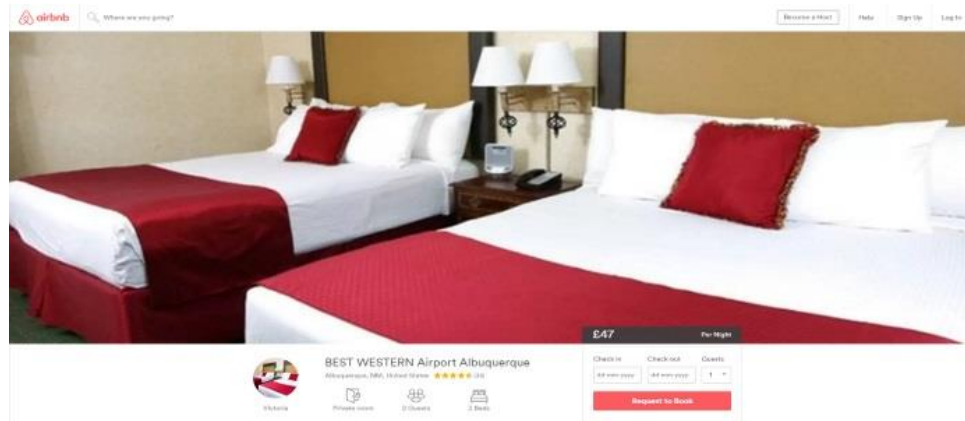




*Figure 3. The familiarity of United States travelers with sharing-economy services as of May 2015 (Travel Weekly. n.d.)*

Airbnb's growth has indeed not gone unnoticed and the incumbent firms in the hotel industry, including Best Western, do seem to worry. In an official company blog of Best Western, David Kong, the Global CEO of Best Western Hotel & Resorts, outlines how Airbnb has become a major player in the industry (Kong 2015). For instance, Kong (2015) recognizes the immense growth of Airbnb and states that it is unlikely that this trend will be slowing down any time soon. However, Kong (2015) makes his stance towards Airbnb clear, and argues that it is unjust and unsuitable that Airbnb doesn't have the same requirements as hotel chains such as Best Western do when it comes to taxes, safety, and compliance.

Despite the CEO's opinion and stance towards Airbnb, it would appear as recently, some branches and local Best Western hotels use Airbnb themselves (May 2016). This is something that other hotels and hotel chains also appear to be doing (May 2016). For example, Figure 4 shows a previous Airbnb ad of a Best Western Hotel at the Albuquerque Airport, New Mexico.



*Figure 4. Best Western Albuquerque Airport, New Mexico selling rooms, using Airbnb as an intermediary*

### 3. Theoretical Background

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*In this chapter, the theoretical background is presented. The theoretical background consists of four main sections. First, the sharing economy phenomenon will be presented and reviewed. Secondly, theories and frameworks concerning disruptive innovation and disruptive technologies will be presented. Furthermore, theories related to consumer perception in relation to branding, brand identity, and brand personality will be described and reviewed. Finally, possible responses and solutions to external disruptive innovation, more specifically business model innovation and corporate catalyst innovation, will also be presented.*

#### 3.1 Sharing Economy

A market, by definition, has always been a place where buyers and sellers meet, both online and offline, to exchange goods and services at a cost (Kotler & Keller 2012). This definition, though simple, captures the basic essence of ownership rules that a human society abides by. Due to this, consumption of assets through ownership of goods and services has always been the norm. Continued acquisition and disposal of products has enforced “throwaway habits” among the consumers and has created a generation that is full of greed (Botsman & Rogers 2010). This trend of disposing products after use, ensures a life time of revenue flow which is why tendency of attaining goods has been increasing at a rapid pace and has had a negative impact on the environment. Furthermore, after the financial crisis in 2008, the damage that was done to the economy created conscious consumers (Botsman & Rogers 2010). As a result, a new trend has emerged of sharing among the average consumer. This change in culture has been referred to as “collaborative consumption” which is ‘traditional sharing, bartering, lending, trading, renting, gifting, and swapping, redefined through technology and peer communities’ (Botsman & Rogers 2010 ; p. 3).

According to Botsman & Rogers (2010), at the heart of this transformation lie two interlocking phenomena. Firstly, it is a shift in consumer mindset which is that resources are not infinite and high consumption habits are leaving a sizeable impact on the environment. Secondly, consumers have realized the potential of sharing in terms of getting more value out of a good. Even though sharing and lending has been going on for ages, the creation of an economy based on sharing was enabled by technology and the use of internet (Matzler & Kathan 2015). In an article, Denning (2014) talks about the Internet creating an economy of access, re-inventing the economy in three waves. The first wave focused on eliminating the middle man which put an

end to old markups and margins of traditional vertical value chains and established as vast new set of horizontal value chains. Consumers started with buying goods online and moved on to sharing ideas, videos, photos and finally to physical goods. The second wave created internet-based organizations like Airbnb and Uber, effectively commercializing the cultural shift. The third wave, as Denning (2014) puts it, has created social networks in which the new generation has a choice between access rather than ownership of the product. The new trend has been especially preferred by the young generation as access of products and services provides them with meaning and satisfaction, and at the same time lets them meet new people (Denning 2014).

### 3.1.1 Types of Collaborative Consumptions

According to Botsman & Rogers (2010), there are three ways in which people can collaborate and consume collectively. The first type is Product Service Systems (PSS) in which consumers have access to the benefit of the product for its use without actually owning the product. This system is disrupting the traditional industries that are based on models of individual private ownership (Botsman & Rogers 2010). In such a system, a service enables multiple products owned by a company to be shared or products that are privately owned to be shared or rented peer-to-peer. Turo, an online car-sharing platform, is one example of this phenomenon. Companies like Denim therapy, Steelcase and Interface carpets also belong to the PSS category, as they provide repair services to extend the life of products (Botsman & Rogers 2010).

The second type is called Redistribution Markets that encourage, through the use of social networks, the reusing and reselling of old items rather than throwing them away. This reduces waste and production, which is beneficial for the environment and can therefore be considered a sustainable form of commerce (Botsman & Rogers 2010). Other than reselling and reusing, consumers can swap for other goods of similar value. Examples of such types of consumption networks are Ebay, Craigslist, Swaptree and Swapsimple (Botsman & Rogers 2010).

The third type is called collaborative lifestyle in which people band together to share less tangible assets such as time, money, skill sets and space. This type of collaboration works both on a local level in order to help the community, and on a global level, as the internet has transcended boundaries and enabled strangers to interact with one another (Botsman & Rogers 2010). The most successful results of this lifestyle is in the form of CouchSurfing, Airbnb and Uber (Botsman & Rogers 2010). In particular, Airbnb and Uber are organizations that have disrupted entire industries.

### 3.1.2 New Mindset in the Travel and Tourism Industry

Before the innovation of Airbnb and other shared economy companies, the consumers relied on branded and unbranded hotels for business and leisure travel. The hotel industry, especially the branded chains, relied on brand consistency and high service quality (Richard & Cleveland 2016). The idea was to ensure maximum consumer satisfaction in order to achieve competitive advantage in an intensely competitive industry (Blagojević-Popović 2015). Nowadays, consumers of the new world are moving away from brand consistency and service quality and have shown interest in travelling with a focus towards meaningful cultural experience (Guttentag 2015). They are evolving from mere tourists to travelers that thirst for authenticity of culture and prefer to meet the locals in there “natural habitat” (Forgacs & Dimanche 2016). This aspect is what Airbnb markets to its consumers. The brand has identified with a niche and portrays itself as a service that enables travelers to meet locals and experience the actual culture of the place (Guttentag 2015). MacCannell (1973) elaborates on this note by claiming that the tourist wants an authentic experience when travelling. The tourist has a desire to share the culture of places he or she visits. The new culture of shared economy in the accommodation sector, enables consumers to experience this authenticity and interact with the locals in order to meet new people (Botsman & Rogers 2010).

Another reason why consumers prefer to use the shared accommodation services is due to its affordable nature. People travel with a certain budget in mind and cheap accommodation can help plan a stay in which they have more funds at their disposal (Forgacs & Dimanche 2016). Samuel (2015) mentions in an article that consumers will prefer to share products instead of ownership if they can save at least 25 % on the purchase. Even though Airbnb markets itself as a meet-the-locals service (Guttentag 2015), there is still a huge segment that prefers it as an affordable alternative (Forgacs & Dimanche 2016).

With this shift in consumer mindset and social structure, traditional organizations and businesses have faced considerable revenue losses as this new sharing economy reduces consumption (Botsman & Rogers 2010) and has created internet-based organizations that offer cheaper and more viable alternatives (Byers et al. 2013). Due to the advent of the Internet, the power has been shifted away from organizations to entities born out of a shared economy. Various scholars have referred to this economy of access as a disruptive innovation and have proposed various ways in which traditional organizations can battle this onslaught. With this in mind, the next section is dedicated to innovation and other relevant areas of this research.

## 3.2 Disruptive Innovation

Disruptive innovation, or disruptive technologies, can come in various different packages. The new innovation could consist of a new technology that, at first sight, appears to be just a build-on on an already existing technology, being of an incremental nature. On the other hand, the new innovation can be completely new to the world, having no relation to previous technologies.

Innovation, defined as the exploitation of an invention, is a constantly ongoing phenomenon. Innovation happens, more or less, all the time. There are several different ways to innovate and several types of innovation as well (Schilling 2013a). An innovation can be of an incremental nature, just building upon already existing products or technologies, making relatively minor changes and adjustments to existing practices (Schilling 2013b). In contrast, innovations can also be radical in the sense that they are new and different from prior solutions (Schilling 2013b). Furthermore, Henderson and Clark (1990) expands the notion of innovation, stating that dividing innovation into radical or incremental innovations isn't sufficient and introduces modular innovation and architectural innovation as concepts. Modular innovation is innovation that only changes the core designs of a product, process, service or technology, while an architectural innovation is more complex (Henderson & Clark 1990). It destroys the usefulness of a firm's architectural knowledge but preserves the usefulness of its knowledge regarding the product's components (Henderson & Clark 1990). Architectural innovation can in that sense have catastrophic effects on incumbent firms, since smaller firms or new entrants usually are able to adapt much faster (Henderson & Clark 1990).

Moreover, innovation can also be competence-enhancing, meaning that it, from the perspective of a particular firm, builds on the firm's existing knowledge base (Schilling 2013b). In contrast, an innovation can be considered competence destroying, from the perspective of a particular firm, if the new technology does not build on the firm's existing competencies or renders them obsolete (Schilling 2013b).

New innovations and technologies, be it radical, incremental, modular, or architectural, might create technology trajectories. Dosi (1982) argues that previously dominant theories regarding technology change are insufficient in explaining the phenomenon. Furthermore, Dosi (1982) states that technological paradigms stem from the interplay between scientific advances, economic factors, institutional variables, and unsolved difficulties on established technological paths. Within this technological paradigm, the search and, more importantly, the direction of

change and advancement is located and programmed - the technological trajectory (Dosi 1982). Movement along the technological trajectory is associated with research and development. According to Dosi (1982), due to the institutionalization of ideas, markets and professions, a technology development can get "stuck" within one trajectory, and firms and engineers are unable to adopt to ideas and innovation from outside. Why certain technological trajectories are chosen depends on the economic interests of the organization in question, their technological history, institutional variables like public agents, as well as cost savings of new technologies (Dosi 1982). Furthermore, progress on a technological trajectory is cumulative. Once a path has been selected and established, it obtains a momentum of its own and might be difficult to change (Dosi 1982). Dosi (1982) continues, stating that technologies do not always reach their limits, as they might be displaced by new, discontinuous technologies. Extraordinary technological attempts emerge either in relation to new opportunities opened up by scientific developments or to the increasing difficulty in going forward on a given technological direction (Dosi 1982).

The concepts of technological trajectories and technological paradigms are very much related to disruptive innovation. Time and again, companies and industries fail to acknowledge and/or adapt to new innovations, technologies and market changes (Bower & Christensen 1996). In other words, the firms fail to break and change the cumulative progress of the current technological trajectory, even though a technological paradigm has occurred. This often occurs when the new technology or innovation does not fit the firm's current customer base, which in extension means that the specific firm does not have any incentive to invest in the new technology (Bower & Christensen 1996). As already touched upon in the introduction, this is the first step in the phenomenon that is disruptive innovation.

Christensen (1997) measure innovation and technology trajectories on product's user functionalities. In the center of the consideration is the *Innovator's Dilemma*, which describes why a company should defend the least profitable low-end market segments instead of only focusing on the most profitable high-end customer segments (Christensen 1997). In order to understand this notion, Christensen (1997) makes a distinction between sustaining innovation and disruptive innovation. A sustaining innovation targets demanding, high-end customers with better performance than that was previously available, such as incremental year-by-year improvements of existing products as well as technological breakthrough products (Christensen 1997). Established firms, such as Best Western, will almost certainly win the battle of sustaining innovation against a new entrant, such as Airbnb, since the incumbent firm

have the required resources and motivation to develop a better product (Christensen 1997). However, if incumbent firms develop sustaining innovations that customers do not need, while at the same time neglecting low-end market segments, this creates a fertile breeding ground for disruptive innovations from new entrants (Christensen 1997).

Disruptive innovation, in contrast to sustaining innovation, is not about attempting to bring better products to the established customers segments in existing markets through incremental innovation (Christensen 1997). Instead, the goal is to develop niche products and services that are not as good as currently available products by the time of market introduction. However, these products are often simpler, more convenient, and most importantly, less expensive than the already established products and services (Christensen 1997). In that manner, these niche products and services are able to appeal to new or less-demanding customer segments that are more price-sensitive (Christensen 1997). Once these niche products gain a foothold in new- or low-end markets, the improvement cycle begins and the once low-end segment products are able to disrupt the high-end market, coming from beneath (Christensen 1997). Now, the pace of technological progress outstrips customer needs and the previously immature technology eventually improves enough to intersect with the needs of more demanding customers (Christensen 1997). According to Christensen (1997), when this happens the disruptor, often in the form of a new entrant since almost all successful disruptive innovations are launched by new entrants, crushes the prevailing incumbent firms, successfully disrupting the whole market.

According to Christensen (1997), this is possible due to the several weaknesses established firms have when facing new technology trajectories in the form disruptive change. First of all, established firms are putting too much faith in the demands and needs of their existing high-end customers, which hinders the incumbent firm adopt the new and steep learning curve of disruptive trajectories (Christensen 1997). This is supported by Christensen and Raynor (2003), who state that established firms listen too much to existing high-end customers, which causes them to be prone to ignore upcoming disruptive trajectories in marginal market segments. Furthermore, this means that the incumbent firms address improvements of sustaining trajectories rather than jumping onto new disruptive trajectories (Christensen & Raynor 2003). Secondly, small market niches do not satisfy the growth needs of large companies. Consequently, large established firms prefer to innovate in the upper market segments, where the expected growth is less volatile and more certain. This phenomenon is called asymmetric innovation and is the core element of the innovator's dilemma (Christensen 1997). Finally,



established firms have a hard time predicting the coming of a disruptive innovation and new technological trajectory, since that specific market does not exist yet, meaning that there is no way of engaging in any proper form of market analysis (Christensen 1997). However, naturally and as mentioned, established firms do have an advantage under the condition of a sustaining technological trajectory, since they listen so heavily on their mainstream lead-customers (Christensen & Raynor 2003).

However, there might be more to it than just making a distinction between sustaining innovations and disruptive innovations. According to Christensen and Raynor (2003), there are two types of disruptive innovation – new market disruption and low-end disruption, as well as a number possible hybrid firms. Furthermore, in an established industry, there exists something called a value network, which is a combination of the established cost structures and operating processes, the interactions with suppliers and channel partners and the responding to common customer needs (Christensen & Raynor 2003). This dimension to disruptive innovation theory, the value network dimension, describes the rise of new markets created by disruptive innovations. The shift towards a new market comes with a new performance perception, e.g. the performance perception of notebooks shifted from microprocessor power to simplicity, availability, affordability (Christensen & Raynor 2003). In that sense, the value network dimension shows that disruptive innovation, in addition to being able to disrupt existing industries, also can create new markets in a new value network (Christensen & Raynor 2003).

With this in mind, a disruptive innovation must always pass the three-litmus test, in order to determine whether it is an innovation that is disruptive (Christensen & Raynor 2003). Is the technology or product a (1) new-market disruption or a (2) low-end disruption? Furthermore, is it (3) disruptive to all significant incumbent firms in the industry? Moreover, an innovation may be disruptive to some incumbents but enhancing to others. If this is the case, it will be very difficult for a new entrant to push incumbents out of the market and achieve market dominance. Thus, an innovation must be disruptive to all incumbents in order for a new entrant to prevail (Christensen & Raynor 2003).

In conclusion, existing consumers may lock-in the established companies to existent value networks and hence, hinder the established companies to develop disruptive innovations themselves or at least jump on to disruptive technological trajectories (Christensen & Raynor 2003). However, incumbents can avoid this lock-in into existing customers in two ways. First, they can build new core competencies by spinning out organizations as completely independent

firms in terms of their customer relationship. Secondly, they can construct completely new business models that fosters disruptive innovation, which are supported from top management (Christensen & Raynor 2003). Furthermore, according to Bower and Christensen (1996), there are a few steps that one can take in order to identify and cultivate disruptive innovations and technologies. First of all, it has to be determined if the technology in question is disruptive or sustaining. Secondly, the firm should define the strategic significance of the technology as well as locating the initial market or market segment that the disruptive technology will act in and on. After that, responsibility for incorporating the disruptive technology into the organization needs to be determined. Bower and Christensen (1996) argues that it is necessary to create a separate and independent organization to foster the disruptive technology, far away from the mainstream customers.

### 3.3 Branding

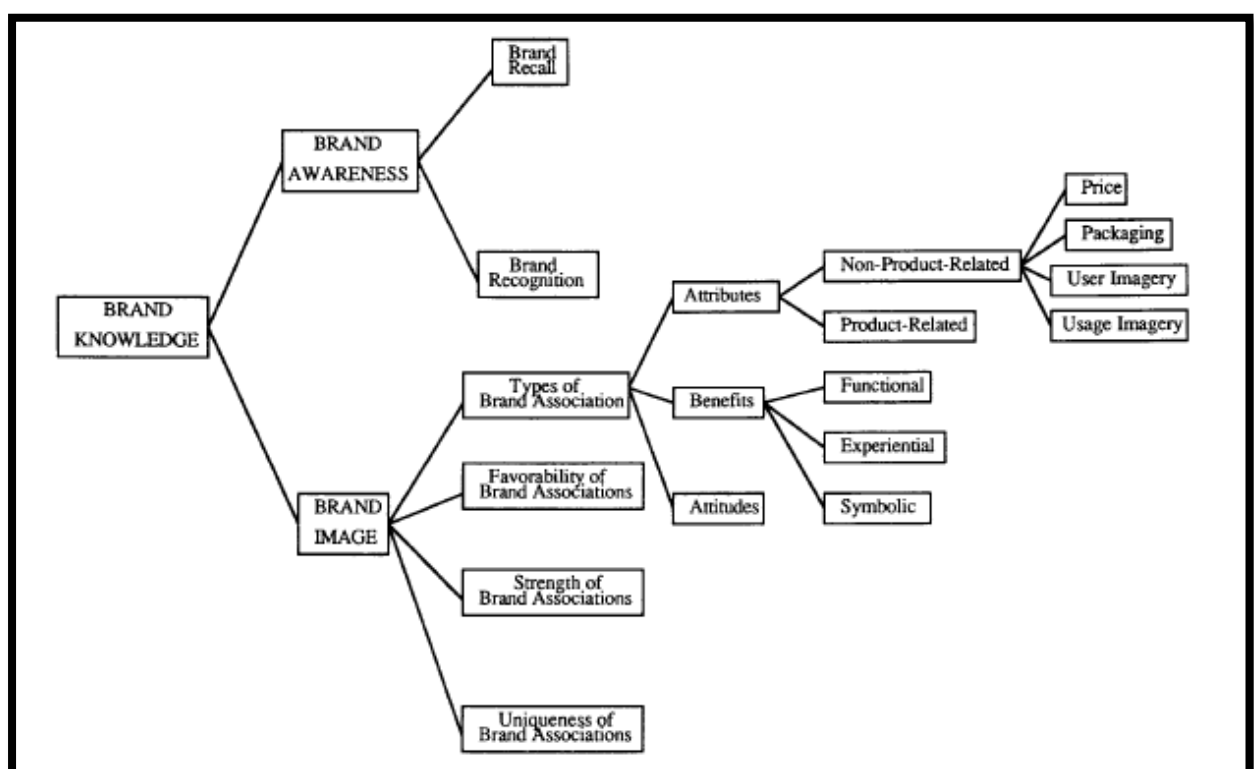
The American Marketing Association (AMA) defined branding in 1960 as a name, term, sign, symbol, or design, or a combination of them, which is intended to identify the goods or services of one seller, or a group of sellers, and to differentiate them from those of the competitors. The concept of a brand has evolved since then and newer definitions include internal and external work processes (Heding et al. 2009). The reason for including broad aspects in the definition is because branding effects an organization as a whole. Brands stem from the corporate side creating identities, and from the consumer side creating brand equity and image. Therefore, this section is dedicated to providing detail knowledge about consumer perception and brand equity, consumer behavioral theories and brand identity.

#### 3.3.1 Consumer Perception and Brand Equity

For decades, organizations have had a vested interest in developing, maintaining and nourishing brand equity, which is basically a brand's worth. There are two reasons why this is an essential factor in the success of an organization. The first one is its financial worth at times of accounting, mergers, acquisitions, and divestiture. The second reason is its strategic role to improve market productivity (Keller 1993). In a revolutionizing article, Keller (1993) proposed that with higher costs, greater competition, and flattening demand firms must seek to create an effective marketing campaign. As a consequence, marketers need a more thorough understanding of consumer behavior to make better strategic decisions regarding target audience. This led to the introduction of consumer based brand equity which is defined as 'the differential effect of brand knowledge on consumer response to the marketing of the brand'

(Keller 1993; p. 2). Consumer based brand equity occurs when a consumer is familiar with the brand and holds some favorable, strong and unique brand associations in the memory. Knowledge that has been created about the brand in the consumers' minds through the firm's past marketing programs, is its most valuable asset and it is this knowledge that needs to be influenced in the most positive light in order to nourish and develop brand equity (Keller 1993).

By conceptualizing brand equity with the focus towards brand knowledge, Keller (1993) discovered that it can create possible benefits on short-term goals such as sales, as well as, result in the success of future marketing efforts. This conceptualization is shown in Figure 5 below as dimensions of brand knowledge.



*Figure 5. Conceptualization of the dimensions of brand knowledge*

Understanding the content and structure of brand knowledge is important because they influence what comes to mind when a consumer thinks about a brand (Keller 1993; p. 2). According to the associative network memory model, knowledge is stored in sets of nodes and links, with nodes acting as information storage spaces and links connecting the information together. Due to the exposure to stimuli, (a marketing program in the form of advertisement) an activated node might activate other nodes, thereby creating a spreading effect (Keller 1993). With this in mind, brand knowledge can be divided into two dimensions. The first one is brand awareness. This part of brand knowledge helps consumers recall and recognize brands.

Working as identifiers, these dimensions work best when making low involvement purchase decisions (Keller 1993). The second dimension of brand knowledge is brand image which is defined 'as perceptions about a brand as reflected by the brand associations held in consumer memory' (Keller 1993; p. 3). Brand associations are the other memory nodes that contain meaning in the consumer's memory. How positive or negative a brand is perceived depends on the level favorability, strength and uniqueness of the associations in the consumer's mind. These associations play a vital role in creating consumer brand equity and are best used when dealing with high involvement decisions (Keller 1993). Attributes, benefits and attitudes are the three associations that create meaning of a brand in a consumer's mind (Keller 1993). When exposed to stimuli or a brand, the consumer will either have positive or negative perception which will ultimately influence the brand equity. This system is why the focus is towards understanding consumer behavior and influencing it with the most positive knowledge as possible.

Various marketing efforts, and brand interactions work to build on perceptions and to create a positive one, marketers need a thorough understanding of consumption patterns, their needs and wants, and what motivates and derives them. Hence, the next part focuses on the discussion about consumer behavior perspectives.

### 3.3.2 Consumer Behavior

In order to create a competitive advantage and effective marketing strategies marketers need to have a deep understanding of consumer behavior. In an article, Østergaard & Jantzen (2000) discuss the evolution of consumer research from a traditional approach of consumption to an interpretive approach that takes into account the effects of the society. The four behavioral perspectives are buyer behavior, consumer behavior, consumer research and consumption studies which are based on how the consuming individual behaves. It is important to emphasize that there is no wrong perspective and that these perspectives can coexist at the same time depending on the product and service (Østergaard & Jantzen 2000).

The first perspective is buyer behavior in which the consumer is viewed as an animal in a metaphorical sense (Østergaard & Jantzen 2000). In this perspective, the consumer acts on its fundamental needs brought on by external stimuli. This was the main approach to understanding consumers and creating marketing approaches in the early 1960s (Østergaard & Jantzen 2000). The second perspective is consumer behavior in which the consuming individual is metaphorically explained as a computer. The relationship between a human being

and the world is approached as ongoing information processing in which the human being learns attitudes towards the environment (Østergaard & Jantzen 2000). Unlike buyer behavior theory in which a consumer operates solely on needs, consumer behavior ‘introduces the presupposition that the ideal state of mind for the single human being is an equilibrium where there is a harmony between a person’s attitude and beliefs and the actual life in a given environment’ (Østergaard & Jantzen 2000, p.16). As any interaction changes the balance between a human’s attitudes and beliefs, and the environment, the human is constantly in the information processing phase.

On a similar note, Heding et al. (2009) elaborate that a consumer is a cognitive individual and creates informed decision about purchase and consumption. The brand knowledge model proposed by Keller (1993) focuses on this theory of consumer behavior and describes how brand image is effected by various information provided by the environment which is why various marketers provide relevant information on advertisements and online platforms to appeal to their specific consumer segments.

The third perspective is consumer research in which the consumer is no longer rational, but instead is emotionally and narcissistically determined. The consumer is looking for new experiences via consumption (Østergaard & Jantzen 2000). ‘The consuming individual, in this approach, uses the consumption of products and services as bricks in the construction of meaningful life’ (Østergaard & Jantzen 2000, p.17). This evolution in the way consumers consume has been identified as a main factor that lead to the rise of Airbnb and other shared economy companies. In their book, Botsman & Rogers (2010) discuss that the need for travelers to delve in the local culture and meet new people for a better experience is one of the reason why Airbnb has had such phenomenal growth.

The fourth perspective is consumption studies in which the consumer is not seen as a single entity but is influenced by the society (Østergaard & Jantzen 2000). The first three perspectives viewed the consumer as an individual and the consumption pattern were viewed from the consumer’s interest. In this final approach, the consuming individual is metaphorically viewed as a tribe member whose consumption is motivated by symbolism of what the product or service represents to the tribe (Østergaard & Jantzen 2000). This is a relatively new approach to consumption in which consumers of today consume based on what the society considers worth buying.

In relation to the above-mentioned consumption patterns, it is important to highlight the purchase decision consumers face during hotel selection. As the research is limited to and focuses on the consuming individual that utilize branded hotel chains, the following section elaborates on literature that explain the cognitive workings of leisure travelers.

### **3.3.2.1 Consumers in the Hotel Industry**

There is a huge body of work on hotel performance and its effects on repeat purchase. One such research conducted by Lockyer (2005b) elaborates on the purchase decision consumers go through when selecting accommodation. According to him there are certain ‘must haves’ during selection and ‘trigger points’ that influence choice of the hotel. In his study Lockyer (2005b) mention that cleanliness of accommodations is a must have but there are certain trigger points such as price, location and facilities that may influence behavior depending on the situation. For example, if there is an emergency and the customers need a night to stay, price will not be an important factor. Similarly, if a member of the family is in the hospital and they need a place close to the hospital, location will have far more importance. In short, Lockyer (2005b) claims that hotel selection is a complicated decision that can be changed based on situations.

Lockyer (2005a) conducted a similar study in which the perceived importance of price was evaluated on hotel selection. The research states that price can be influenced by three main areas which are availability, trigger points and hotel on-sight attributes such as cleanliness, facilities, location, staff service, and other attributes. Though if asked separately participants in Lockyer (2005a)’s research claim that the most important factors influencing hotel choice are cleanliness, as well as safety and security.

A study conducted by Chow et al. (1995) on leisure travelers, claims that consumers tend to evaluate intangible elements from tangible cues. In this case, intangible elements in a hotel purchase decision would be dependability, security and quality of service. In their research, it was concluded that past experience, behavior of staff and service quality have an influence on dependability. Similarly, price, behavior of staff, appearance of facilities and past experiences have an influence on service quality. In short, positive interaction with various aspects of the hotel brand creates associations in the consumer’s mind and creates a higher chance for the consumers to select respective hotel.

Furthermore, these associations create a certain brand identity in the minds of the consumer where perception of the brands are made. The next part focuses on a detail framework regarding brand identity and its role in the creation of positive brand image.

### 3.3.3 Brand Identity

The archaic understanding of brand identity has been a static superficial corporate representation. However, a more recent social constructionist perspective, with a more interaction-based approach between consumers and organization, has become part of brand identity (Heding et al. 2009). In this dynamic view, the identity is co-created both internally (corporate) and externally (consumer). According to Heding et al. (2009), brand identity is made up of four components: organizational identity, corporate identity, image, and reputation. Corporate identity and organizational identity represent theories that are used by the organization for the creation and maintenance and research of brand identity internally, while reputation and image represent theories used to build, manage, and research the brand identity externally (Heding et al. 2009).

‘Corporate identity is an assembly of visual, physical and behavioral cues representing the company, making it immediately recognizable to consumers and other stakeholders’ (Heding et al. 2009; p. 56). A corporate identity focuses on visual means to build brand equity in the form of graphic design such as logos, name, color etc., and on creating the right behavior, culture and expression inward. The brand represents a unified visually and enforces a strong culture among the employees that interact with the end consumers (Heding et al. 2009). Organizational identity, the second component of brand identity, refers to the behavioral and cultural aspects effecting brand identity. ‘The organizational identity provides a cognitive and emotional foundation on which organizational members build attachment’ (Heding et al. 2009; p. 57). The ‘living the brand’ construct is part of this perspective. Employees create strong bonds with the brand, which play an important part in creating a strong brand identity.

The most essential part of brand identity is its corporate image or brand image. ‘The aim is to project one single image to all stakeholders, ensuring a consistent perception of the brand image among stakeholders’ (Heding et al. 2009; p. 59). As mentioned in the dimensions of brand knowledge, brand image formation influences consumers in a positive or negative way (Keller 1993). This shows that the new socio-constructionist approach towards brand identity incorporates the knowledge created in the consumer’s mind. Corporate reputation takes a lot longer to form because it is based on what the company has done over time and how it has



behaved rather than the short term effect created by advertisement in order to change or enhance brand image (Heding et al. 2009).

According to Heding et al. (2009), organizations need to focus on all the key elements to achieve a positive brand identity, because most of the time, what organizations think their brands identify is, is not the same as what consumers identify with. This discord is very common and various models have been created in order to enable companies to bridge the gap (Heding et al. 2009). The AC2ID framework is one theoretical model that helps identify identity gaps amongst various entities and provides guidance to managers to align the inconsistent brand identity. In their book, Heding et al. (2009) elaborate that AC2ID is an abbreviation of the following:

- *Actual*: the actual identity, organizational behavior and everyday reality of the organization.
- *Communicated*: the brand identity that is communicated through various marketing activities.
- *Conceived*: refers to the brand image and how the stakeholders perceive it to be.
- *Ideal*: represents the optimum position the brand is in the market at any given time
- *Desired*: What the management and leaders of the brand desire it to be

These five types of identities are also reflected on the above-mentioned themes of identity. Desired and communicated identity overlap with corporate identity, whereas actual identity can be compared to organizational identity (Heding et al. 2009). Similarly, conceived identity and ideal identity overlap with brand image and reputation, respectively (Heding et al. 2009). In this research brand image is the main component that is being investigated and hence, the need of a model that can effectively measure identity gaps.

An approach to brand identity alignment with the help of AC2ID framework may require a more detailed, task oriented method that may focus on the actual business model and work processes. Taking into account disruptive innovation and a resulting brand image crisis, the following section is dedicated to providing a possible value creation models that may guide managers to create an effective business model and a unified brand identity.

### 3.4 Responses to Disruptive Innovation

From an innovation as well as a strategic perspective, and as already touched upon, there are a number of ways for established and incumbent firms to response when facing the threat of



external disruptive innovation. Some responses are more radical and involves the transformation of a company's whole business model. Such a transformation might not just transform the activities, structure, and/or governance of the company in question, but might also affect the company's value proposition as well as change the firm's perception of their customers (Amit et al. 2012; Osterwalder et al. 2014). However, other responses, such as the implementation of a corporate innovation catalyst, do not require the same type of radical approach (Anthony 2012).

### 3.4.1 Business Modell Innovation

An obvious and somewhat ambitious possible response for an established firm would be to engage in business model innovation, building a completely new business model that fosters disruptive innovation and that is supported by top management (Christensen & Raynor 2003).

A business model is an organization's approach to generate revenue at a reasonable cost, and incorporates assumptions regarding both how it will create value as well as capturing value (Gambardella & McGahan 2010). Moreover, business model innovation occurs when a firm adopts a novel approach to commercializing its underlying assets. According to Gambardella and McGahan (2010), business model innovation stemming from new technology trends and trajectories, occurs concurrently across a sector's markets, upstream and downstream industries, and thus, eventually affects its overall architecture. Furthermore, companies that innovate their business models to take advantage of new markets have the potential to take the lead in developing new knowledge-exchange industries, and also enjoy unprecedented opportunities simultaneously and dynamically, to develop underlying resources grounded in knowledge capital that can serve as the basis of a sustainable competitive advantage from a long-term perspective (Gambardella & McGahan 2010).

Amit et al. (2012) defines a business model as a system of interconnected and interdependent activities that determine in what way and how a firm generates value and interacts with its customers and other stakeholders. Therefore, a business model can easily be described as an activity system that is constructed to satisfy the needs and the demands of a specific market, the needs of the specific company, as well as the needs of the company's related stakeholders (Amit et al. 2012). In order to create a new business model that creates a long-term sustainable competitive advantage, Amit et al. (2012) highlights three different ways such a business model innovation could occur – *new content*, *new structure*, and *new governance*.

By adding novel activities in the activity system that is a firm's business model, new content is created. Amit et al. (2012) refer to this form of business model innovation as the creation of new activity system content. This content is the actual activities that are being performed throughout the activity system, the business model (Amit et al. 2012). To link this content, these activities in novel ways, is another way of innovating a business model. Amit et al. (2012) refer to this as the construction of a new activity system structure. The structure of a business model, describes how the different activities, the content, within the activity system are linked and in what order they are performed or occur (Amit et al. 2012). Lastly, the third way that Amit et al. (2012) identify as a possible way of engaging in business model innovation is related to the different players and stakeholders of the activity system. By changing or adding one or more parties that perform any of the activities, the activity system will get a new layout. This process is referred to as changing the governance of the activity system (Amit et al. 2012). A governance of an activity system is thus determined by which players or stakeholders that act, perform and that are involved in the different activities of the activity system (Amit et al. 2012).

According to Amit et al. (2012), the above-mentioned elements; content, structure, and governance, are the building blocks to the business model of any company. If one of the elements is changed enough, or several elements are changed, it is possible that the whole business model is innovated upon (Amit et al. 2012). Furthermore, since these three elements are highly interdependent, in order to be able to change the governance of an activity system, it might also be necessary to introduce new content to the activity system, for example (Amit et al. 2012).

Moreover, there are several methods for companies to engage in when trying to create a business model that can serve as a basis for long-term sustainable competitive advantage. Amit et al. (2012) identifies four major interlinked value drivers of business models; *novelty*, *lock-in*, *complementarities*, and *efficiency*. Novelty captures the degree of business model innovation that is embodied into the activity system. Lock-in is the creation of business model activities that create switching costs in order to profit from customers staying and transacting within the system, e.g. Nestlé and their Nespresso capsules. Complementarities are the value-enhancing of the interdependencies between the different activities performed within a business model. By offering complementary services or products to an already existing product or service, the value of the total service offered will increase. Finally, efficiency refers to cost saving through the inter-connections of the activity system, e.g. discount retailing in combination with an activity system that supports a low-cost strategy. Developing effective

logistics and processes could, for example, help to keep costs lower than industry-average, which in extension would create a competitive advantage. (Amit et al. 2012)

Moreover, all these value drivers have important synergies between themselves. For example, a lock-in activity might be enhanced if it is connected to a complementary service, or a novel activity. (Amit et al. 2012)

In conclusion and according to Amit et al. (2012), entrepreneurs as well as managers and CEOs for large global firms need to look beyond product and process innovation, and also consider how to innovate their business models. Business model innovation can create entirely new revenue streams and exploit previously untouched opportunities. However, to change and innovate an entire business model is no easy matter, but rather complex compared to just optimizing individual activities within the activity system. With this in mind, Amit et al. (2012) states that managers should consider six questions before innovating their activity system.

1. What perceived need can be satisfied through the new business model design?
2. What novel activities are needed to satisfy these perceived needs? Meaning, in what way can the content of an activity system be innovated?
3. How could the required activities be linked to each other in novel ways? Meaning, how should the structure of the activity system be arranged?
4. Who should perform each of the activities that are part of the business model? What novel governance arrangement could enable this structure? Meaning, how should the governance of the activity system be structured?
5. How is value created through the novel business model for each of the participants?
6. What revenue model fits with the company's business model to appropriate part of the total value it helps create?

These six questions summarize the findings of Amit et al. (2012). The above questions also help managers to comprehend the true characteristics of their company more clearly. They also help managers to arrange the content, the structure, and the governance of their business models. Furthermore, the business model innovation approach and the relating six questions presented by Amit et al. (2012) promote a holistic and systematic approach towards innovation, in contrast to making isolated and individual innovation decisions.

In conclusion, a business model consists of three elements; content, structure and governance. Together, these elements form an activity system (Amit et al. 2012). Value drivers, such as lock-in and novelty, helps to innovate their business model. By asking the questions presented

by Amit et al. (2012), managers can evaluate their business model innovation. However, there are of course other ways to visualize and describe a business model. One example is Osterwalder's et al., (2014) business model canvas and the value proposition canvas. This will be more thoroughly presented in the upcoming section.

### 3.4.2 The Business Model Canvas and Value Proposition Design

A business model can be visualized by using a business model canvas. By constructing a business model canvas, managers are able to see and clarify the underlying processes of the business model. In other words, a business model canvas helps managers to create value for their businesses (Osterwalder et al. 2014). In that sense, the business model canvas describes how a firm creates, delivers and captures value (Osterwalder et al. 2014). As seen in Figure 6, the business model canvas consists of several dimensions; *customer segments*, *value propositions*, *channels*, *customer relationships*, *revenue streams*, *key resources*, *key activities*, *key partnerships*, *cost structure*, *profit*.

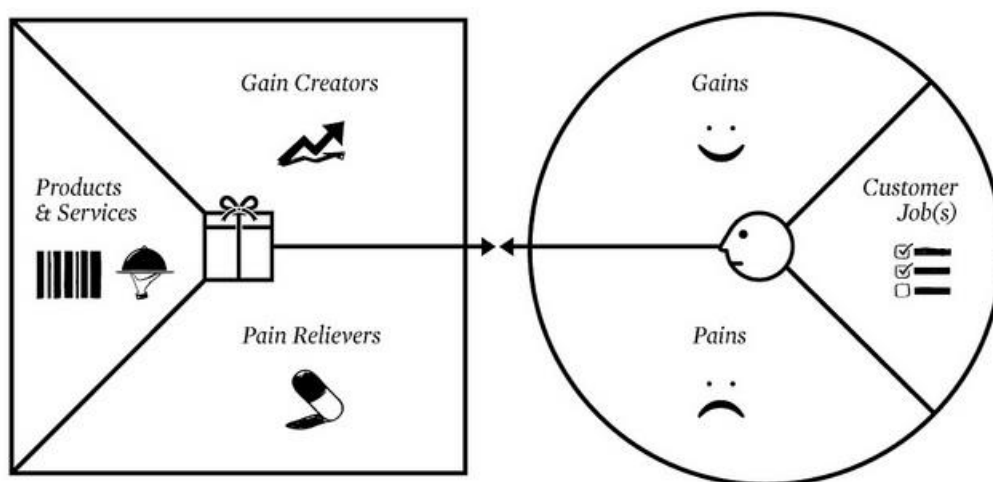


**Figure 6.** *The Business Model Canvas (Osterwalder et al. 2014)*

*Customer segments* are easily explained as the group of people or organizations a firm aims to reach as well as create value for with a dedicated value proposition. *Value propositions* are based on a bundle of products and services that create value for a specific customer segment. *Channels* is the way that the value proposition is communicated and/or delivered to the customer segment. This is done through communication, distribution, as well as sales channels.

*Customer relationships* is the type of relationship that is established and maintained with each customer segment, explaining how customers are acquired and retained. *Revenue streams* is the result of a successfully offered value proposition to a customer segment. *Key resources* are the most important assets required to offer and deliver the previously described elements. *Key activities* are similarly the most crucial activities a firm needs in order to perform well. *Key partnerships* are similarly the most important partnerships a firm has that bring in external resources and activities. A *cost structure* is easily explained as all the costs incurred to operate a business model. Finally, the *profit* is calculated by subtracting the total of all costs in the cost structure from the total of all revenue streams. (Osterwalder et al. 2014)

In relation to the business model canvas, Osterwalder et al., (2014) presents the *Value Proposition Canvas*, which helps firm to create value for their customers. As seen in Figure 7 the Value Proposition Canvas consists of two dimensions; the *customer profile*, where the aspects and characteristics of the specific customer segment is clarified, and the *value map*, where it is described how the firm intends to create value for that specific customer. When these two dimensions or sides meet each other, *fit* is achieved. In other words, the firm should design a set of value propositions to attract customers. That is, customers that the firm has studied and observed, in order to assume and verify the customer's characteristics and needs (Osterwalder et al. 2014).



*Figure 7. The Value Proposition Canvas (Osterwalder et al. 2014)*

More specifically, the Value Map consists of three dimensions. First, it presents a list of all the products and services a specific value proposition is built around. Secondly, it describes how a firm's products and services create customer gains. Finally, it shows how these products and

services alleviate customer pains. Similarly, a Customer Profile also consists of three dimensions. First of all, it highlights the possible gains, the outcomes customers want to achieve, and the concrete benefits they are seeking. Secondly, what the customers are trying to get done in their work and their lives, as expressed in their own words, is described through customer jobs. Finally, the pains and what the customer deems to be risks, bad outcomes, or obstacles related to customer jobs, are also described. (Osterwalder et al. 2014)

As mentioned, when the value map meets the customer profile, or in other words; when the products and services of the firm produce pain relievers and gain creators that match at least one of the jobs, pains, and gains that are important to the specific customer segment, fit is achieved (Osterwalder et al. 2014). In other words, fit is achieved when the customer gets excited about the value proposition of the company. In order for this to happen, firms need to prioritize, addressing the most important jobs, eliminating extreme pains, and creating essential gains that customer care about (Osterwalder et al. 2014).

Fit is achieved in three different stages. At first, the firm may reach *Problem-Solution Fit*, which is achieved when the firm have evidence that customers care about certain jobs, pains, and gains, and when they design a value proposition to address these. However, it is not for certain that the customers care about the value proposition. Secondly, the *Product-Market Fit* is reached. Now, the firm has evidence that the value proposition is cared about by the customers and that it gets traction in the market. However, according to Osterwalder et al., (2014), no value proposition, however great, can survive without a sound business model. Moreover, a great value proposition without a matching business model may actually lead to suboptimal financial success or even failure. This leads us into the last and third stage – *Business Model Fit*. This is achieved when the firm has evidence that the value proposition can be embedded in a profitable and scalable business model. To achieve this the firm needs to design a value proposition that creates value for the customers and a business model that creates value for the organization. (Osterwalder et al. 2014)

However, as mentioned, a strategic response to an external disruptive innovation might not have to be as radical as creating an completely new business model and/or re-designing the firm's value proposition internally. As will be presented in the upcoming section, another possible response is to develop new core competencies with the help of a separate and independent organization (Bower & Christensen 1996).

### 3.4.3 Corporate Catalyst Innovation

As mentioned, another possible response that established firms can engage in when faced with external disruptive innovation is to develop new core competencies (Christensen & Raynor 2003). Furthermore, Bower and Christensen (1996) argues that it is necessary to create a separate and independent organization to foster the disruptive technology, far away from the mainstream customers. In other words, in order to cope with an external disruptive innovation, established companies should, if possible, develop new core competencies, preferably away from their main organization.

This notion is supported by Markides and Geroski (2004). They state that it is rare for big established firms to create new radical markets or products, such as Airbnb. Instead, these markets and products are created by radical innovation, which they define as an innovation that introduces major new value propositions that disrupt existing consumer habits and behaviors. Furthermore, these innovations undermine the competences and complementary assets on which existing competitors have built their success (Markides & Geroski 2004). As a result, and as already touched upon when discussing disruptive innovation, such innovations are rarely driven by demand or immediate customer needs. Instead, they result from a supply-push process that originates from those responsible for developing new technology (Markides & Geroski 2004). It is very hard for incumbent firms to replicate these radical markets and innovations in-house. However, the companies that create brand-new markets are almost never the ones that end up consolidating and dominating such markets (Markides & Geroski 2004). Therefore, Markides and Geroski (2004) argues that "big" established firms should not try to create radical markets and innovations on their own. Instead, they should focus on consolidating young markets into big mass markets. This can be done by creating networks of feeder firms, e.g. young entrepreneurial companies and startups, subcontracting the creation of radical new products to the markets and for startup firms to subcontract the consolidation of these products to big established firms (Markides & Geroski 2004).

A similar approach is given by Anthony (2012). Anthony (2012) supports the notion that big companies seldom create radical, disruptive innovations anymore. Instead, venture capital-backed entrepreneurs are the ones doing it. However, Anthony (2012) argues that due to the increasing ease and the decreasing cost of innovation, startups now face the same short-term pressures that have constrained innovation at large companies. At the same time, large established companies are embracing open innovation and less hierarchical management, which creates business models that play to the unique strength of big companies (Anthony

2012). As a result, Anthony (2012) argues, we are entering the fourth era of innovation. In this era, innovations will often involve business models, corporate catalysts can have transformational impact, and the entrepreneurial approach can be mixed with the unique capabilities of the large established firms (Anthony 2012). Established firms can therefore partner with these startups, using them as agile corporate catalysts. This creates mission-driven leaders who corral corporate resources that are outside their traditional span of control to address sprawling challenges (Anthony 2012). In this manner, the established firm can form networks within and outside the company in order to solve big, and often global, problems (Anthony 2012). In other words, a corporate catalyst, also defined as a *corporate garage*, works as an autonomous, entrepreneurial department outside the company that focuses exclusively on creating growth through innovation.



## 4. Methodology

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*In this chapter, the methodology used throughout this thesis will be presented and discussed. First, the thesis's scientific research philosophy and approach, which explains the research perspective and reality of the thesis, will be defined. Secondly, the research strategy and the methods used in this thesis will be presented. More specifically, methods as well as processes concerning data collection and the subsequent data analysis will be stated and discussed. Lastly, the credibility of the thesis's methodology and findings will be reviewed, and the validity and reliability of the thesis methodology will be discussed. A discussion concerning the ethics and morality of the used methodologies and data will also be provided.*

### 4.1 Research Philosophy and Approach

According to Saunders et al. (2009), researchers can engage in and reflect on research in two different broad ways – ontology and epistemology. Each of these two approaches influence and affect the way researchers approach and conduct their research process, but in different ways (Saunders et al. 2009). Epistemology is defined as the relationship between the researcher and his or hers surrounding environment and reality, while ontology is defined as the nature of that reality (Carson et al. 2001). This thesis aims to use empirics and data, in other words facts, as means for analysis. With this in mind, this thesis undertakes the positivism approach, as the thesis does not take the researchers and authors own beliefs and ideologies into account. Moreover, from an ontological point of view, the thesis exists under the notion that there exists a single objective reality, separated from the beliefs of the researchers (Carson et al. 2001). In extension, from an epistemological perspective on the positivism approach, the research and methodology of this thesis has been conducted without the involvement of any ideologies or values (Carson et al. 2001). This means further that the researchers have had an external relationship to the process of data collection, as oppose of themselves being part of the phenomenon that is examined.

However, Boyd and Crawford (2012) state that claims regarding objectivity and accuracy often are misleading. While it is true that the data itself can be regarded as raw and objective, it is, according to Boyd and Crawford (2012), the interpretation of the data and the context of that interpretation that might lead to biases and subjectivity. In that manner, it might be unavoidable that the context of this study ultimately affects the research. Taken to the extreme, it can then be argued to no study can ever be performed objectively, since everything always will have a

context. Furthermore, since all individuals, including the authors of this thesis, through experience have created a set of individual pre-existing perspectives and biases, the question regarding objectivity becomes even more complex. On the other hand, the positivism approach recognizes that reality consists of what is available to the senses, acknowledging the effects that a specific context might have on the research (Hughes 1990).

Usually, research philosophies are correlated with a specific research approach. Positivism, which is the research philosophy used in this thesis, is usually linked to the deductive research approach, since the deductive approach has a structured methodology and well-defined hypothesis to be tested. This relationship is also true for this specific research, as the quantitative and descriptive nature of the study mixes well with the deductive approach. Furthermore, and in line with Saunders et al. (2009), the research operationalizes relevant concepts in order to ensure validity of the data as well as clarity of definitions. And as mentioned, the researchers are independent of the studied topic (Saunders et al. 2009). However, due to the composition of the research question being tested and the nature of the studied topic, the researchers will not deduce any hypothesis from particular theoretical considerations (Bryman 2012). Furthermore, this research is less concerned with being able to generalize the result of the study, as the focus of the research is very descriptive (Saunders et al. 2009). With this in mind, as well as the fact that this thesis will use two different main methods, big data sentiment analysis and netnography, which will be more thoroughly presented in upcoming sections, this thesis adopts a mixed methodological approach, with emphasis on deduction.

## 4.2 Research Strategy and Methods

The research in this thesis is based on theories concerning disruptive innovation, brand image and consumption perspectives, the sharing economy as well as secondary data and empirics related to the tourism accommodation industry. These theories as well as the secondary data have been guiding in constructing the research questions, aiming to examine the effect external disruptive innovation might have on consumers' brand image of a traditional company in the tourism accommodation industry – a branded hotel chain. This section of the thesis outlines the research strategy which has been implemented to answer the research question and create a probable strategic response.

The theories selected in this study have been examined through multiple research methods. The deductive approach is often linked to quantitative research methods, which is one of the

research methods in this research. However, this research also requires obtaining a deeper knowledge regarding consumers' brand perception, which requires the conduction of qualitative research methods as well. Conclusively, and as mentioned, this research adopts a mixed methods approach, which, in addition, contributes to attaining a less biased view of the positivistic research philosophy.

The chosen research question, theories, and frameworks have been examined through two main types of methods – big data sentiment analysis and netnography. Big data sentiment analysis is used to identify consumer brand image of the selected case company, identifying the polarity, subjectivity and sentiment of the consumers engaging and using the specific company's Facebook page (Mohammed, 2013). Furthermore, in order to deepen the understanding for the public opinion on the specific Facebook page, two complementary quantitative data categories have been collected and analyzed. First, a keyword analysis on the most frequently used keywords on the Facebook page *Best Western Hotel & Resorts* has been performed. Secondly, related social media big data has been collected, from the same Facebook page, and analyzed. This related social media big data consists of the total number of likes, comments, as well as posts.

Furthermore, as a complement to this very quantitative approach, and in order to acquire more in-depth and qualitative insights and knowledge regarding the consumer brand image of Best Western, netnography has been adopted as a research method. 'Netnography is participant-observational research based in online fieldwork. It uses computer-mediated communications as a source of data to arrive at ethnographic understanding and representation of a cultural and communal phenomenon' (Kozinets 2010; p. 60). Netnography works as a much faster, simpler, and less expensive research method than traditional ethnography as well as more naturalistic and unobtrusive than focus groups or interviews (Kozinets 2002).

The sub-proposition, concerning possible strategic business responses to the supposedly competitive growth of Airbnb, relies on deep online research into the previously mentioned secondary data and an extensive literature review in regard to relevant theories. Furthermore, the results generated from sentiment analysis and netnography acts as a basis of analysis here. Consequently, the research methods and the data collected proved to be helpful in ensuring the triangulation of the findings of this research.

Conclusively, the combination of big data sentiment analysis and netnography becomes a powerful mixed research method that helps this research to examine consumer's brand image

in response to disruptive innovation in the tourist accommodation industry. In addition to this, insights collected from secondary data, such as market size, major industry and company events, provided a context for the consumer sentiment data. The combination of these three approaches reinforces the triangulations of the findings.

#### 4.2.1 Big Data and Sentiment Analysis

As mentioned, big data sentiment analysis performed on the consumers and users that are active users on Best Western's official Facebook page has provided insight and knowledge into the discussion concerning brand equity, brand identity and disruptive innovation. In other words, the sentiment analysis allows for gathering information about what other people think (Pang & Lee 2008).

Big data and sentiment analysis is an effective way of capturing consumer sentiment (Mohammed 2013). To capture consumer's true opinions, perceptions, and preferences have long been very difficult for marketing researchers (Mohammed 2013). In contrast to traditional marketing methods, such as focus groups and face-to-face interviews, sentiment analysis conducted with social media big data is both readily available and free (Mohammed 2013). Furthermore, the consumer generated data that is available on social media, such as Facebook, is also free of bias that might be introduced by the interviewer in case of personal interviews (Mohammed 2013).

However, according to Boyd and Crawford (2012), big data can lose its meaning or objectivity when taken out of context. In that case, the data can be modeled and reduced to what can fit into a mathematical model, which might destroy the value of the data (Boyd & Crawford 2012). This is where netnography comes in. In order to provide more context and deeper insight to the findings of the sentiment analysis, the more in-depth research method netnography can be used. It provides the research with more information regarding the symbolism, meanings and patterns that the big data approach might not take into account (Kozinets 2002).

#### 4.2.2 Netnography: Pure or Partial Netnography?

As a relatively new qualitative research method, netnography is derived from ethnography which is the participation in and observation of communities and cultures. The method of ethnography covers a broad range of research methods such as, creative interviewing, discourse analysis, visual analysis and observation (Kozinets 2010). The emergence of internet and online platforms has shifted the interaction with consumers from an analog world to a digital platform as the concept of time and space has changed. Due to this, Kozinets (2010) claims

that ethnography can be extended to include netnography. With this extension, the researcher acknowledges the presence of an online component that yields rich insights to consumer behavior and perception. Although, there are certain situations where netnography can also be considered as an independent research method. In such a case, data collection and analysis occurs entirely on an online platform including online participation, observation, visual analysis etc. (Kozinets 2010). Therefore, netnography can be used both as a ‘partial’ method that works as a part of ethnography, and as an independent method for research.

According to Kozinets (2010), there are certain conditions that justify using a purely netnographic approach or a partial one depending on the research focus and questions that the researcher wishes to investigate. A research can be conducted on two different types of communities to determine the extent of netnography applied. The first one is research on *communities online* which is to study ‘some phenomenon directly related to online communities and online culture itself, a particular manifestation of them or one of their elements’(Kozinets 2010, p.63). Research projects that investigate *online communities* tend to have a primarily netnographic focus, as these communities exist entirely online and an ethnographic research seems rather pointless. The second type according to Kozinets (2010) is *communities online* in which studies take a particular social or communal phenomenon as their focal area of interest and extend it to understand the phenomenon in a digital space. In these studies, the researcher requires the use of partial netnography that acts as a supporting and secondary role that complements the findings through ethnographic research.

In this research, the investigation has been performed exclusively and entirely online and therefore, pure netnography is the method of choice. However, it is important to point out the fact that the research uses two methods in order to answer a single research question. Where sentiment analysis provides a quantitative result to the social media page, netnography has been applied in order to give depth to the numbers. In short, netnography is also acting as a supplementary research method that tries to complement sentiment analysis.

#### 4.2.3 Social data

As already discussed, certain aspects of this study and its respective methodology requires the use of social data from the social media platform Facebook. According to Mukkamala et al. (2014), social data from social medias and platforms, such as Facebook, can be further categorized into (1) Social Graphs and (2) Social Text. Social Text concerns the linguistic and communitive aspects of social data, e.g. specific topics discussed, sentiments expressed, or

keywords mentioned (Mukkamala et al. 2014). At the other end of the spectrum, social graphs relate to the identification of the actors involved, what actions and activities they undertake, and the artifacts they create (Mukkamala et al. 2014). In extension, social graphs relate to social media interactions and activities such as posting, liking, tagging, sharing, to mention a few activities related to Facebook (Mukkamala et al. 2014). Since this study is aiming to explore the consumer perception of a brand, the quantitative aspect, as well as the qualitative approach of netnography, of this methodology will aim to explore the sentiment of relevant social media users. Therefore, text analysis, and more specifically sentiment analysis will be performed, which means that this study will focus primarily on Social Text. However, as mentioned, complementary statistics such as Facebook likes, comments, and posts, have been gathered. In that sense, social graphs will also make its mark on this study. Nevertheless, the quantitative aspects of this study will indeed primarily focus on Social Text, while Social Graphs only will be used as a source of complementary information.

The qualitative aspect of the research focuses on one social media platform which is the Best Western's Facebook page to bring forth context to the numbers from sentiment analysis platforms. Therefore, netnography is applied as a basis to answer the research question and provide guidance for the sub-proposition.

### 4.3 Data Collection

The empirical data was collected from April 2009 – March 2017 and include insights into consumers' brand image of Best Western, before, during, and after the emergence of the disruptiveness caused by the sharing economy and in extension Airbnb.

#### 4.3.1 Sentiment Analysis Data Collection

The sentiment analysis was conducted, using data extracted from Best Western International's official Facebook page; *Best Western Hotel & Resorts*. Furthermore, the same type of data has been extracted from Airbnb's official Facebook Page – *Airbnb*, as complementary data, with the purpose of comparison. By using the data extraction program *Facepager*, the data was extracted from the Facebook pages. As already mentioned, big data sentiment analysis is an effective way of capturing consumer sentiment, perception and preferences (Mohammed 2013). It is easily accessible through social media and free of cost (Mohammed 2013). Furthermore, the data is also free of the potential bias that an interviewer, conducting a focus group or a face-to-face interview, could introduce into the data (Mohammed 2013).

As mentioned, the reasons for extracting the data from Best Western International's Facebook page are pretty straightforward. First of all, branded hotels, such as Best Western, are known for their brand consistency and service quality, as well as being the main revenue generators in the tourist accommodation industry (Douglass 2015). Furthermore, being located in over a 100 countries and territories, as well as having a collection of seven unique brands targeted to different consumer groups, Best Western caters to the various segments in the market, offering accommodation to all types of travelers (Best Western 2017). With this in mind, Best Western appears to be a well-suited representative of the incumbent firms of the tourist accommodation industry. Therefore, it made sense to collect the data, the sentiment, produced by Best Western International's own consumers at their official Facebook page.

The data extracted consist of text messages, which in extension can be divided into four different categories; *page posts*, *page-post-comments*, *user posts*, and *user-posts-comments*. Page posts are the text messages posted by the official page, Best Western Hotels & Resorts, itself. The page-post-comments are the comments and replies on the page posts made by people. User posts are the posts posted by people, not the page itself. The user-posts-comments are the comments and replies on these non-page-posts. Moreover, the text messages and posts that have been extracted have been posted on the Facebook page Best Western Hotels & Resorts between 2009-04-21 and 2017-03-13, which captures all the activity on the specific Facebook page, from its creation in 2009 until now. By using this time-span, the study is able to capture all the sentiment expressed on the Facebook page.

The data extracted from Airbnb's official Facebook page have the same kind of categorization as the data extracted from Best Western. However, the data extracted from Airbnb do not capture the same time frame, since the page didn't started until 2010.

The total dataset that has been extracted, both from Best Western and Airbnb, has been processed, filtered and analyzed using Microsoft Office Excel and Python. The preparation of the raw data in this dataset was conducted in several steps.

1. As already mentioned, the study uses sentiment analysis. Therefore, the focus of the study is the content of the posts and comments, meaning that all other types of actions, e.g. likes, reactions, have been deleted. This was done because of the massive size of the dataset. The data would not simply be workable had not the irrelevant data been deleted.



2. In order to avoid bias in the form of spam, i.e. data compiling error or bot activity, all obviously duplicated comments have been deleted.
3. The excel-files containing the data have been converted into the csv-format according to date and comment, enabling sentiment analysis to be performed in Python using the Python library Textblob, which will be more thoroughly discussed in upcoming sections.

#### 4.3.2 Keyword Analysis and Related Big Data Statistic: Data Collection

As mentioned, to further expand and deepen the analysis of this study, in addition to the sentiment analysis, related social media big data has been collected. This data can be divided into two categories; keywords, i.e. the most frequently used words, observed at the Facebook page *Best Western Hotels & Resorts*, and data containing what previously have been referred to social graphs, i.e. different form of social media activities such as likes or comments, also extracted from the Facebook page *Best Western Hotels & Resorts*.

Both categories of data have been collected using the data extraction program *Facepager* between March and April 2017. The data for the keyword analysis data stems from all the text messages existing on Best Western's Facebook page. The related social media big data can, as mentioned, be described as social graphs. More specifically, statistics on three kinds of social media activities have been collected; (1) the total number of posts done by the page itself, (2) the total number of comments, and (3) the total number of likes.

#### 4.3.3 Netnography: Data Collection

In a study, netnography can be used in order to observe the consumers' textual discourse as well as participate in the dialog to gather relevant data (Kozinets 2002). In this research, it is used to gather online data available on the Best Western Facebook page. Posts and comments made by Best Western were analyzed from June 2009 to March 2017. Consumer posts and comments were also interpreted to evaluate the interaction between the organization and consumer.

Bryman & Belk (2011) provide four roles that a researcher can take in order to conduct ethnographic research which are *complete participant*, *participant-as-observer*, *observer-as-participant* and *complete observer*. These roles depend on the level of attachment a researcher has with the project with *complete participant* being the most involved and *complete observer* as the most detached a researcher is when collecting data. In this study, the researchers' roles are as *complete observers* of the discussion taking place on Best Western's Facebook page. On



a similar note, Kozinets (2010) mentions an observational approach which implies that the conversational data on online platforms should be treated as content analysis which is the main aim of netnography in this research.

According to Kozinets (2010), in netnographic research three different types of data can be collected to analyze. The first type of data is called *archival data* which are ‘data that the researcher directly copies from pre-existing computer mediated communications of online community members’ (p. 98). The second type is *elicited data* which ‘the researcher co-creates with cultural members through personal and communal interaction’ (p. 98). The third type is *fieldnote data* which are the ‘fieldnotes that the researcher inscribes regarding their own observations of the community, its members, interactions and meanings, and the researcher’s own participation and sense of membership’ (p. 98). In this research, archival data of the Best Western Facebook page from the year 2009 to 2017 are collected and captured for netnographic purposes.

As the data is quite large and expanded over 8 years, a qualitative research tool called NVivo was used. Through the option of NCapture, the entire dataset was captured and imported in the program. The collection of posts and comments was close to 200,000 entries including spam. Other than textual record, visual images were also collected with regards to the posts and comments. A main benefit acquired through this process was its affordability. Another benefit is that all the data on Facebook is publicly available which resulted in no problems of access.

## 4.4 Data Analysis

The data collected through the different methodologies have been analyzed coherently to acquire the most relevant information.

### 4.4.1 Sentiment Analysis: Data Analysis

After the cleaning and preparation of the raw data extracted from the Facebook page *Best Western Hotels & Resorts*, the total dataset consisted of 318 256 text messages, which allow this study to reap the benefits of big data analysis – volume, velocity, and variety (McAfee et al. 2012). The study is able to use a large volume of data, that is very much up to date, as well as consisting of several sources of information, e.g. comments, - posts, and replies from different actors. In other words, the dataset is sufficiently interesting to perform this kind of analysis – sentiment analysis.

Sentiment Analysis is conducted with a natural language processing (NLP) application, which uses computational linguistics and text mining in order to identify text sentiment, often in the form of positive, neutral, or negative sentiment (Mohammed 2013). In that sense, sentiment analysis can be regarded as an automated knowledge discovery technique, aiming to find hidden patterns in a large amount of data (Mohammed 2013).

When performing sentiment analysis, a crucial step in the analysis is the categorizing of words (Mohammed 2013). There are two general methods available for sentiment orientation identification; the corpus-based method and the lexicon-based method (Miao, Li & Zeng 2010). The corpus-based method is, however, seldom used when analyzing sentiment (Mohammed 2013). However, both the corpus-based method as well as the lexicon-based method require a pre-defined dictionary or corpus of subjective words (Mohammed 2013). Therefore, in order to calculate the sentiment in this thesis, the relevant text is compared to a lexicon, or a dictionary, in order to determine the strength and the score of the sentiment (Mohammed 2013). More specifically, this study uses TextBlob, a Python library for processing textual data (TextBlob 2017). TextBlob can be used for natural language processing (NLP) tasks such as part-of-speech tagging, noun phrase extraction, and most importantly for this study; sentiment analysis (TextBlob 2017).

With the help of TextBlob and Python we are able to score each text message, determining if the comment is positive, negative or neutral. The algorithm used by TextBlob and Python does indeed consider polarity and subjectivity in this process. After this process has been executed, and the actual sentiment analysis on the dataset has been performed, we aggregate the total number of positive and negative sentiments on a day-to-day basis using PivotTables in Microsoft Excel. By doing this, the study is able to show variations in sentiment over time throughout the studied period. However, the quantity of text messages varies over time, with some time periods containing more posts and comments than others. With this in mind, and in accordance with previous researchers using sentiment analysis, e.g. O'Connor et al., (2012), this study calculates a Positivity to Negativity (PN) ratio as:

$$PN - ratio = p/(p + n)$$

Where:

- $p$  = Text messages with positive sentiment
- $n$  = Text messages with negative sentiment

With this in mind, a PN-ratio that is higher than 0,5 shows that there is more text sentiment with positive sentiment than those with negative sentiment, while a PN-ratio that is less than 0,5 shows that there are more text messages with negative sentiment than positive.

#### 4.4.2 Keyword Analysis and Related Big Data Statistic: Data Analysis

Both the keyword analysis data and the related social media big data, i.e. the total number of posts, the total number of comments, and the total number of likes, extracted from the Facebook page *Best Western Hotels & Resorts*, have been analyzed, cleaned and organized using Microsoft Excel.

The keywords have been identified using the online tool Mutato. With the help of Mutato, all text messages existing on Best Western's Facebook page have been broken down into words. The number of occurrences for each word have then been identified, and the words have been ranked from the most frequently used word to the least frequently used word. Of course, the most frequently used words are often words that have no clear independent significant meaning, e.g. "have", "the", or "I". Obviously, these words have been filtered out, in order for the analysis to be as insightful as possible. A list of these removed words can be found in Appendix I.

In order to identify different possible differences between different time periods, this process has been performed for two types of time periods; years and quarters. This means that this study has measured the most frequently used keywords for each year, from 2009 to 2017, as well as the most frequently used keywords for each quarter, quarter one to quarter four. By using Excel, a word frequency rating of the 50 most used words, for each of the mentioned time periods, that have been constructed.

Similar to the keywords analysis, the related social media big data has been organized in a comparable manner. The data extracted with the use of Facepager, i.e. the total number of posts, comments, and likes, have been divided into two time periods; year and months.

#### 4.4.3 Netnography: Data Analysis

The data collected through NVivo capture option was analyzed by reviewing the posts and their respective comments in relation to the posts. The text messages and accompanying images (when necessary) were studied throughout the dataset. The initial steps of data analysis consisted coding of the messages by creating nodes. Every node entails a theme or a topic that was mentioned by the consumers.

Other than messages made by the consumers related to the Best Western brand, the researchers encountered spam in the form of advertisements from various entities regarding a new product or business idea. In short, any text message, link or image that did not have any relationship with the Best Western brand was considered spam and handled by ignoring it as it did not seem relevant to the project.

Once the nodes were created of both positive and negative sentiments made by consumers and Best Western team, mind maps and word tree of the nodes were created. This process resulted in various findings that are outlined in the next chapter.

## 4.5 Credibility of Findings

This study is aiming for a high level of reliability and validity. Generally, the reliability of a study is considered high if similar independent experiments shows similar results (Gustavsson 2003). The validity is the level of relevance of the study as well as the level to which the study actually measures what it is supposed to measure. Since this study uses two main methodologies, one with a more quantitative approach and another that is more qualitative, the credibility of each methodology will be discussed separately in the two upcoming sections. However, already, it should be mentioned that the fact that the study uses two complementary methodologies reinforces the triangulation of the overall methodology and strengthens the credibility of the findings. Finally, the final section of this methodology chapter will discuss the ethical and moral aspects of this study.

### 4.5.1 Quantitative Credibility

The data used in the sentiment analysis is so-called primary data, directly extracted from Facebook. The data consist of actual text messages written by users and no data points have been removed, excluding obviously duplicated text messages, e.g. spam, which have been removed. With this in mind, the reliability of the data and methodology can be considered high. However, there are some aspects to both, the data and the methodology that should be considered.

First of all, since the data has been treated and cleaned out manually in Microsoft Excel, there is of course the risk of human error. However, in order to prevent this, random controls and sample tests have been performed a number of times, in order to increase the reliability of the study. Besides, and as Mayer-Schönberger and Cukier (2013) argues, with big data the need for exactitude decreases. As the scale of a dataset increases, the number of inaccuracies is bound to increase as well, but the relative importance of these small inaccuracies becomes

smaller, as the bigger picture remains the same (Mayer-Schönberger & Cukier 2013). Since the main dataset consists of over 318 256 data points, we feel confident that the reliability of the study is still relatively high, despite any potential human errors.

Secondly, and as mentioned, this data uses primary data, or in other words; raw data. While it is true that data, and especially raw data is objective, the data can lose its meaning or objectivity when taken out of context (Boyd & Crawford 2012). As already touched upon, there is always a risk that data is modeled into what can fit a mathematical or theoretical model, which of course somewhat destroys the value of the data gathered (Boyd & Crawford 2012). Furthermore, and related to the topic of context, all the data, in the form of text messages, extracted are posted in a specific context – the context of the Facebook page *Best Western Hotels & Resorts*. Moreover, a majority of the text messages are replies and comments to specific posts. This means that few or no text message, extracted from the specific Facebook page, expresses any "true" sentiment, independent of any previous topic of discussion. However, this is a sacrifice that is deemed to be necessary in order to answer this study's research question. Furthermore, the complementary method used in this study, netnography, should provide a more objective context to each text message, hopefully eliminating any potential biases.

Finally, when classifying the sentiment of each text message, using the lexicon provided by TextBlob and Python, it is probable that several text messages will be rated incorrectly by TextBlob. With a machine learning approach, which this study uses, this is more or less inevitable and will of course affect the reliability of this study negatively. However, once again we refer to Mayer-Schönberger and Cukier (2013) and the sheer size of the dataset.

When reviewing the validity of this study, and especially the methodology related to sentiment analysis, it is important to consider that no causal relationship is measured. Big data systems and models will often have a hard time understanding why something is happening (Mayer-Schönberger & Cukier 2013). Instead, big data enables us to explore "the what", the correlating relationship. However, according to Mayer-Schönberger and Cukier (2013) why a certain event takes place might not be necessary to find out. Sometimes, it is enough to just know that something is indeed happening, without understanding the cause of that event. This can even create a new understanding of the specific phenomenon in question (Mayer-Schönberger & Cukier 2013).

In conclusion and regarding the reliability of the quantitative aspects of this study, it is acknowledged that the study has certain minor flaws. However, due to the size of the dataset, the fact the data is of the primary kind, and the complementary- and context-providing effects of netnography, the reliability has to be considered high.

#### 4.5.2 Qualitative Credibility

Qualitative research methods that focus on explaining cultural and social phenomenon, require a different set of measurements to identify their credibility. Kozinets (2010) mentions the four basic evaluative criteria to judge a qualitative research which are the *positivist*, *post-positivist*, *postmodern* and *post-structure*. A *positivist position* suggests that one set of criteria, such as psychometric criteria of reliability and validity, should be applied to all research methods. The *post-positivist* position suggests that evaluation criteria specific to qualitative research needs to be developed and applied. The *postmodern position* suggests that the character of qualitative research implies that there can be no judgement for qualitative methods and finally, the *post-structure* suggests that an entirely new set of evaluative criteria should be constructed separate from positivist and post-positivist positions based on the nature of the project that stresses 'pragmatic and subjective criteria such as subjective understandings, feelings, caring and emotionality' (Kozinets 2010; p. 161).

Taking into account the above mentioned positions, Kozinets (2010) proposes 10 netnography evaluative criteria that capture these four positions one way or another. In some cases, these criteria contradict one another. Of these criteria, *Coherence*, *Rigor* and *Groundedness* are the evaluative criteria that fit with this research's netnographic purposes. *Coherence* is 'defined as the extent to which each recognizably different set of interpretations in the netnography is free from internal contradictions and presents a unified pattern' (Kozinets 2010, p.163). The next criteria which will be an evaluative factor for this research is *Rigor* which 'is the extent to which the text recognizes and adheres to the standards of netnographic research' (Kozinets 2010, p.164). This means that the netnographer has done his or her methodological homework. The third criteria to evaluate this research is *Groundedness* which is 'defined as the extent to which: 1) the theoretical representation is supported by data, and 2) the links between data and theory are clear and convincing' (Kozinets 2010, p.166).

The aim of this project is of course to portray a highly credible netnographic research and as such this study aims to establish a high quality on these evaluative criteria. *Coherence* although not sufficient on its own is communicated through the results. The method of netnography

follows the guidelines and standards of high quality qualitative research. It follows the research question, data collection and analysis and ethical standards mentioned by Kozinets (2010) thereby having a high rigor criteria. The analysis part connects the theoretical framework with the empirics to show that the project focuses on groundedness of the research.

#### 4.5.3 Ethics and Morality in the Project

Lastly, the question of ethics and morality should be discussed. Through this study's two main methods, netnography and sentiment analysis, comments, posts, and other text messages found online, produced by regular people, have been examined. However, unlike "regular" experiments, where the experiment participants are being told that they are part of an experiment, the people behind the text messages used in this study are not aware that they are being monitored. This could be seen as somewhat controversial.

For example, in 2014, Facebook performed an experiment with the purpose of examining emotional contagion (Luca 2014). The study showed that users who see more negative content than others are more likely to produce negative post or comments themselves (Luca 2014). However, many critics at the time argued that Facebook stepped over an ethical line in their experiments (Luca 2014). Another example is the experiment performed by the internet dating company OKCupid, where perceived compatibility was studied. OkCupid found that telling people, falsely, that they're compatible is a good way to get them to converse more online (Luca 2014). Once again, it was argued that OKCupid had stepped over ethical boundaries, since they had played with their users' feelings without permission (Luca 2014). The difference between these two online experiments and the experiments performed in this study is the fact that the methodologies in this study do not implicate any form of interaction or disruption with the studied individuals. In that sense, it could be argued that the ethical aspects of this study are more difficult to challenge. Furthermore, according to Luca (2014), it should be noted that almost every website performs experiments and that it is something that occurs almost daily. Luca (2014) continues and argues that the biggest risk from the Facebook- and OkCupid experiments is that companies or researchers will conclude that online experiments are too risky.

However, the question of ethics regarding the absence of awareness, concerning their participation in an online experiment, of the individuals being part of this study, still stands. While it is true that there might be some questions regarding ethics still looming over this study, there are some factors that act as counterpoints to that notion. First, to inform every individual

of their participation in this study would be an almost impossible logistic task, since there are approximately at least 350 000 people whose text messages are being examined. Secondly, it should be noted that all individuals being part of this study are anonymous, since no names or similar personal information have been collected. Finally, it could be argued that all text messages, comments and actions being published on public forums online are part of the public domain and opinion, meaning that the user per definition gives his or her permission to view, review, and examine that public action. This, however, could of course be debated.

In short, we can see no reason important or strong enough to question either the reliability, the validity, or the ethics of this study to the extent that the study would be deemed non-credible or unethical, and in extension unsuitable to perform.

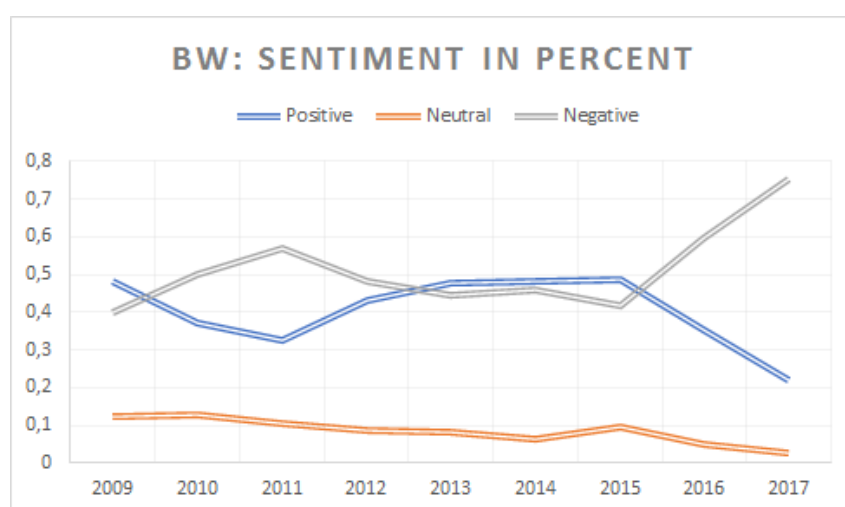


## 5. Findings

*In this chapter, the empirics and results discovered with the use of the methodology will be presented. First, the quantitative results, relating to big data and sentiment analysis will be presented. In relation to this, other complementary statistics, such as the Keyword Analysis, will also be examined. Finally, the findings stemming from the more qualitative methodology, netnography, will be presented in an effort to explain and provide a context to the results of the sentiment analysis as well as the keyword analysis. These findings will be discussed further and analyzed, in relation to the practical framework and the theoretical framework of this thesis, in chapter six of this thesis.*

### 5.1 Sentiment Analysis Results: Best Western

As discussed, TextBlob and Python have characterized each text message found on the Facebook page *Best Western Hotels & Resorts*, as either negative, neutral or positive in its sentiment. As shown in Figure 8 and Appendix E, the majority of the text messages have been labelled as negative, with just more than a third of the text messages being labelled as positive. Relatively few, about 8 percent, of the text messages were labelled as neutral. In total, of the total of 318 255 text messages, 126 548 of the text messages are labelled as positive, 25 287 are labeled as neutral, and 166 420 are labelled as negative. In relative terms, that means that 39,7 percent of the text messages were positive, and that 52,3 percent of the text messages were negative.

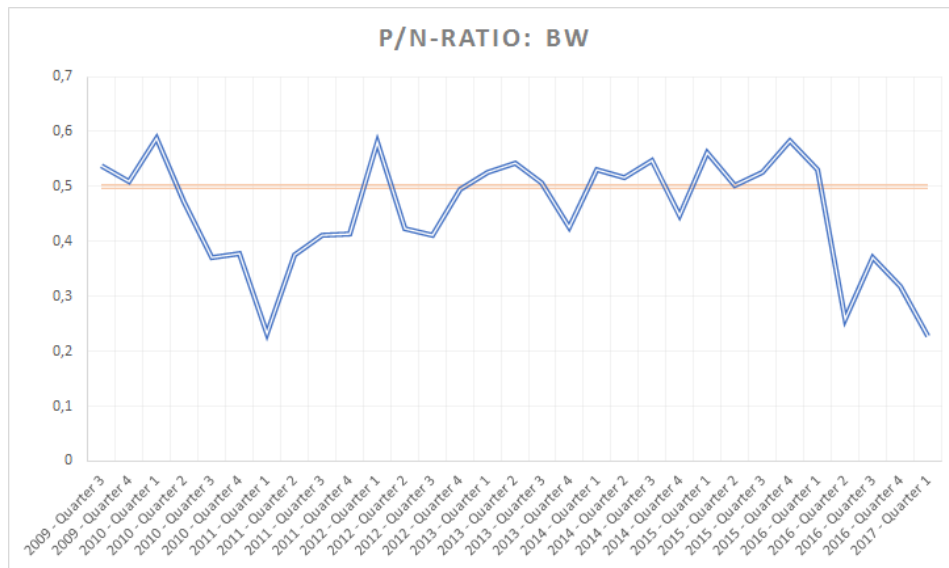


**Figure 8.** The share of the text messages, found on the Facebook page *Best Western Hotel & Resorts*, per year that are either labelled positive, negative, or neutral

Furthermore, the share of negative or positive text messages fluctuates a great deal over time. For example, as shown in Figure 8 and Appendix E, between 2010 and 2011, at least 50 percent of the text messages are labelled as negative. However, between 2012 and 2015, less than 50 percent of the text messages are labelled as negative. In 2016, however, the negative comments are once again the majority. As shown, the neutral text messages fluctuate relatively little, staying within the interval 2,5 percent to 12,5 percent. The positive text messages varies between 22 percent and 48,5 percent. Finally, the negative text messages fluctuate between 39,8 percent and the extreme 75,2 percent.

In short, it appears as there are three major shifts in the sentiment found on the Facebook page *Best Wester Hotel & Resorts*. First, in 2009 until 2011, the trend is that the share of negative text messages is growing. After 2011, and until 2015, the trend is more stable and the share of positive respective negative text messages are about equal. However, in 2015, a major shift occurs. Now a radical trend appears to be in place, where the negative text messages are increasing rapidly, while their positive counterparts are decreasing at a similar rate.

The ratio between positive and negative text messages, the P/N-ratio, paints a similar picture. In Figure 9, the P/N-ratio is shown for each quarter between quarter three, 2009, and quarter one, 2017. Once again it is shown that between 2010 and the first quarter in 2012. However, from quarter one, 2012, to the last quarter in 2012, the P/N-ratio fluctuates between above and below a P/N-ratio of 0,5, while never going below 0,4 or above 0,6. After the last quarter in 2015, the P/N-ratio starts to drop rapidly, going from a P/N-ratio of 0,53 in the first quarter of 2016, to a P/N-ratio of 0,26 the following quarter, and reaching its lowest observation of 0,228 in the first quarter of 2017.

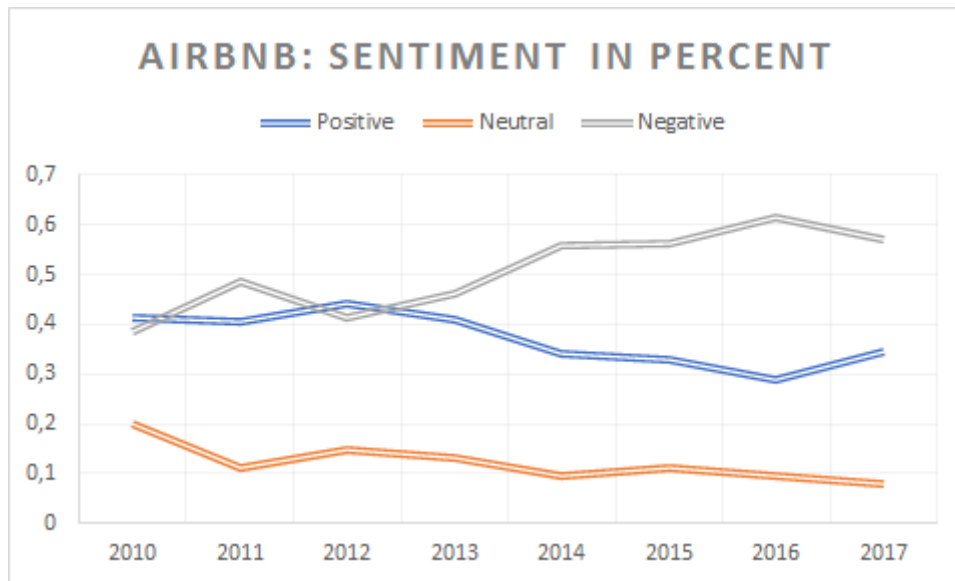


*Figure 9. The P/N-ratio of Best Western per quarter during the time-frame Q3-2009 to Q1-2017*

## 5.2 Sentiment Analysis Results: Airbnb

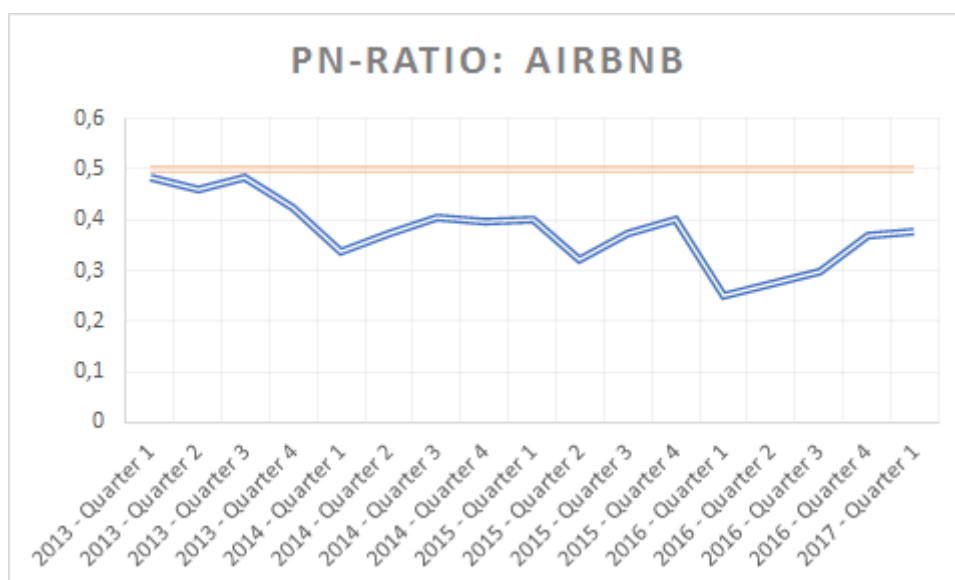
Compared to the sentiment found on Best Western's Facebook page, the sentiment stemming from Airbnb's official Facebook page is generally more negative. In total about 58 percent of the text messages extracted were labelled as negative, compared to the 52 percent of Best Western. Furthermore, the positive text messages accounted for 32 percent of the total text messages analyzed, while the neutral text messages accounted for approximately 10 percent.

Compared to the sentiment of Best Western, the Airbnb sentiment appears to fluctuate less. While the total share of the negative text messages of Best Western fluctuates between 39,8 percent in 2009 to 75,2 percent in 2017, the corresponding numbers for Airbnb only fluctuates between 38,7 percent, in 2010, and 61,4 percent in 2016. However, as seen in Figure 10 and in Appendix F, there appears to exist a stable trend starting in 2012 and onwards, where the share of the negative text messages increases steadily, while the positive text messages decreases at a similar pace. It should also be noted that there appears to be a trend shift between 2016 and 2017, as a decrease, from 61,4 percent to 57,2 percent, in the share of the negative text messages, as well as an increase in the share the positive text messages, from 28,8 to 34,7 percent, can be observed.



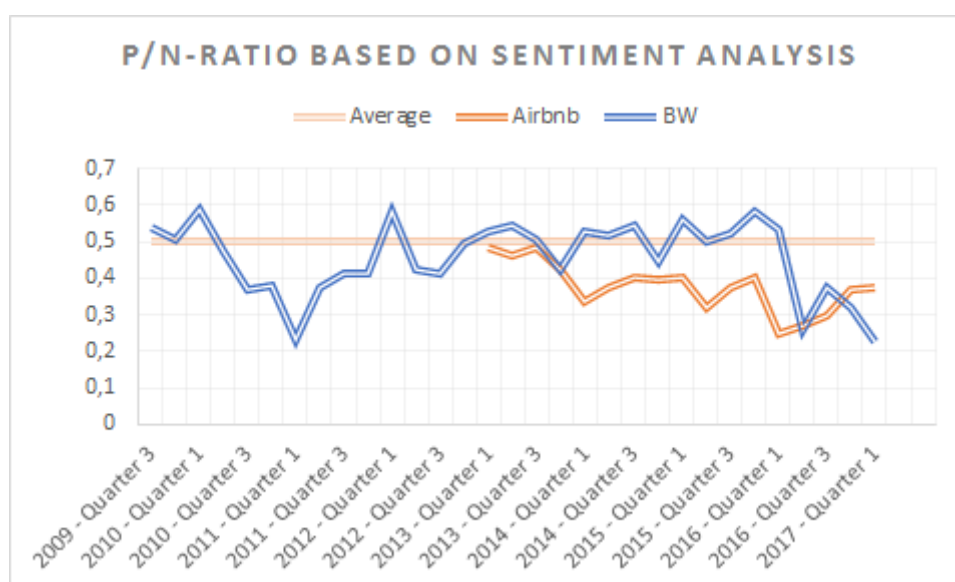
**Figure 10.** The share of the text messages, found on the Facebook page Airbnb, per year that are either labelled positive, negative, or neutral

The P/N-ratio, which has been measured between the first quarter in 2013 to the first quarter in 2017, is also more stable and less fluctuating compared to Best Western's corresponding P/N-ratio. However, as can be observed in Figure 11, there is a steady downward trend, stretching from the first quarter in 2013 until the first quarter in 2016. However, once again, a trend shift is visible between the first quarter in 2016 and the first quarter in 2017, when the P/N-ratio increases from a P/N-ratio of 0,249 to 0,377.



**Figure 11.** The P/N-ratio of Airbnb per quarter during the time-frame Q1-2013 to Q1-2017

When comparing the two P/N-ratios of Best Western and Airbnb, it is visible that Airbnb, generally, has a lower P/N-ratio value. However, it should be noted that the P/N ratio of Best Western fluctuates to a greater extent, having higher peaks and lower bottoms than Airbnb. This is made visible in Figure 12. Finally, there is a very weak positive correlation between the P/N-ratio of the two companies, since they correlate with a value of 0,333, meaning that the respective P/N-ratios follow a somewhat similar pattern.



*Figure 12. The P/N-ratios of Best Western and Airbnb per quarter during the time-frame Q3-2009 to Q1-2017*

### 5.3 Keyword Analysis Results

The keyword analysis show, as expected, that the two most commonly used words are "best" and "western". As seen in Appendices G and H, these two words are the most used words per quarter as well as every year, except 2017. In 2017, the most popular word appears to be a hashtag; "traveltriviatyesdayvancouver". It is probably safe to say that this hashtag relates to some form of marketing campaign. Furthermore, it should be noted that only the first quarter has been measured in 2017, which means that the sample is relatively limited.

When excluding the words "best" and "western", a great deal of words relating to travelling and vacation, without any positive or negative undertone, can be observed. For example, and as seen in Appendices G and H, words such as "travel", "hotel" and "beach" are consistently among the top words for each year and each quarter. Furthermore, specific travel destinations, such as "Washington", "Vancouver", and "Columbia" are among the top words each year and each quarter. This is especially the case for the most recent years, i.e. 2014-2017. A possible

interpretation could be that Best Western themselves posts questions or starts hashtags concerning these specific travelling destinations.

Words that represents positive and negative emotions are also present in the top 50 words in almost every time period measured. For example, "love" and "great" is consistently some of the most frequent words used during each time period measured. However, words slightly related to negativity, such as "no", "not", "need", and "never" are also present in the top 50 words throughout the different time periods. However, it should be noted that the more positive words appear to be more frequently used than their negative counterparts. Furthermore, strongly negative words, such as "bad" and "hate", are very far down the list. This is more or less true for every time period measured.

When comparing different years to each other, no distinct differences are detected. However, as mentioned and as shown in Appendices G and H, it appears as if words related to specific travelling destinations are more common between 2014 and 2017, with an increasing frequency trend towards 2017, compared to earlier years. Otherwise, there are no apparent explanations to the fluctuations per year in the sentiment analysis of Best Western in the keyword analysis performed per year.

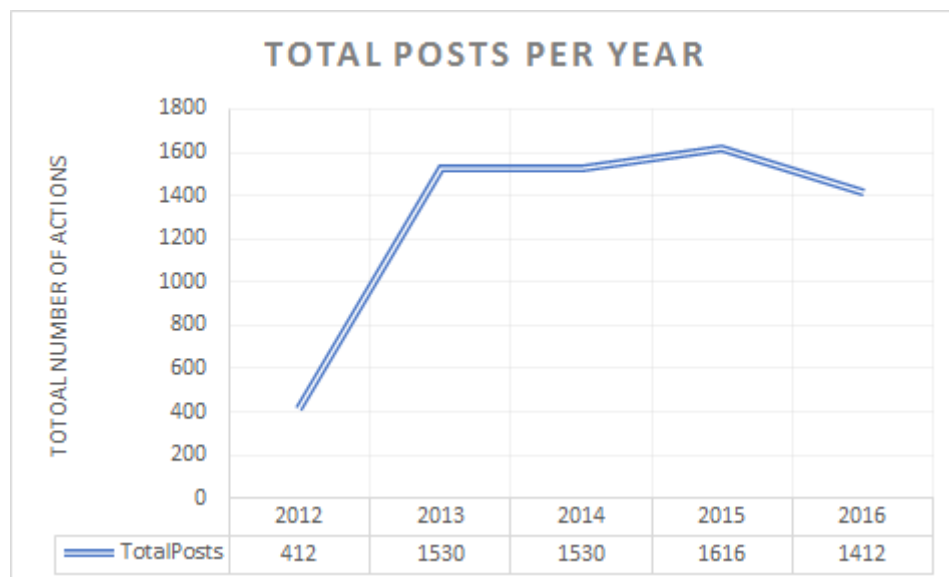
The top words divided into each quarter, similarly, do not show any distinct pattern. As seen in Appendices G and H, the difference between each quarter is minor. For example, words associated with positive sentiment, such as "love" and "great, are consistently some of the most frequent words used each quarter. "Love" comes in 3<sup>rd</sup> in quarter one, 3<sup>rd</sup> in quarter two, 5<sup>th</sup> in quarter three, and 3<sup>rd</sup> in quarter four. "Great" ranks 9<sup>th</sup> in quarter one, 9<sup>th</sup> in quarter two, 12<sup>th</sup> in quarter three, and 15<sup>th</sup> in quarter four. Meanwhile, any words that can be considered to be strongly negative sentiment are far away from the top. However, words that could be argued to be associated with negative sentiment, such as "need", "never", and "no", are closer to the top. These three words are all within the 40 most frequent words for each quarter. Furthermore, it appears as some sort of trend is existing, where these words are more frequent in quarter one. While, "need", "never", and "no" fluctuates between rank 16 and 36 in quarters two, three, and four, they stay between rank 4 and 14 in quarter one.

Conclusively, the results from the keyword analysis do not paint a distinct picture, relationship, or development. Each time period measured have similar words in the top of the most frequent used words. However, some minor trends and developments can be observed upon a closer look.

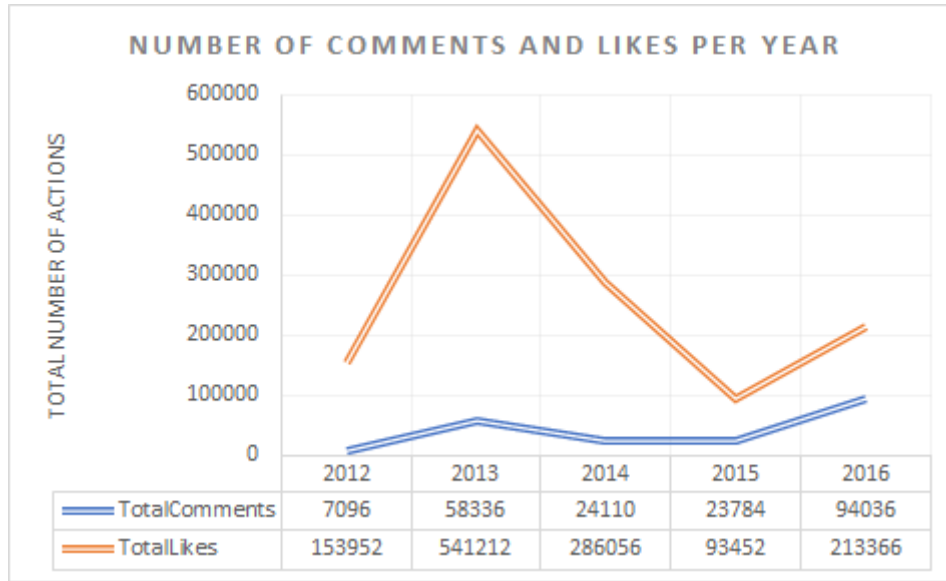
## 5.4 Related Statistics

Besides sentiment analysis, the total number of actions performed on the Facebook page *Best Western Hotels & Resorts* have also been reviewed between 2012 and 2016. As seen in Figure 13, the number of posts, i.e. original text messages posted by the official page itself, increased drastically from 412 in 2012 to 1530 in 2013. However, after 2013 the amount of posts each year have been relatively stable, at the most fluctuating approximately 200 units between 2015 and 2016.

Actions performed by users, and not the page itself, such as comments and likes, however, fluctuates more. As seen in Figure 14, the total number of comments does indeed increase from 7096 in 2012 to 58336 in 2013, which is in line with the increase in posts during the same period. However, after 2013 the total number each year decreases again, and doesn't increase above 2013 year's level until 2016, when to total is 94036. Interestingly enough, and as seen in Figure 14, the development of the total number of comments each year is separate from the development of the total number of posts each year, with the exemption of 2012-2013. The total number of likes shows a similar pattern, and appears to be more linked to the total number of comments than to the total number of posts. The total number of likes increases from 153952 in 2012 to 541212 in 2013, and then decreases until 2015 when the total likes each year increases from 93452 to 213366 in 2016.



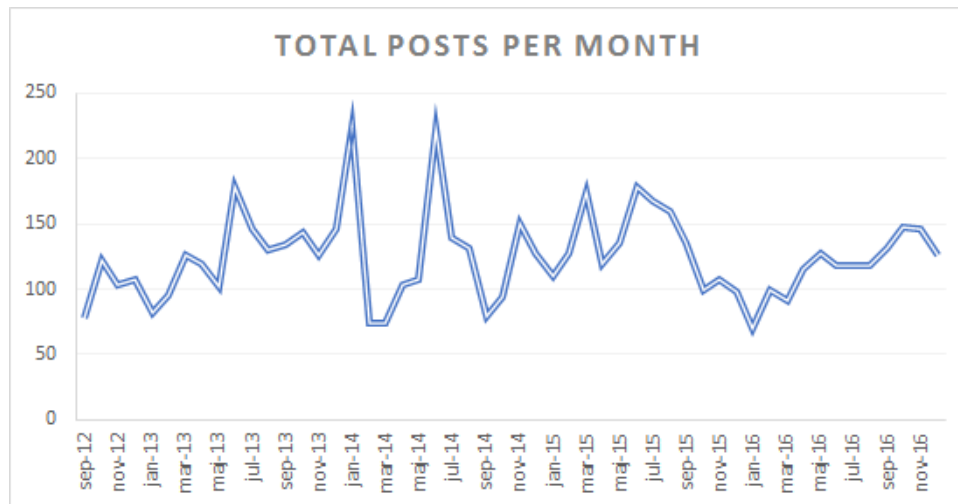
**Figure 13.** The total number of posts, made by the Facebook page *Best Western Hotel & Resorts*, per year



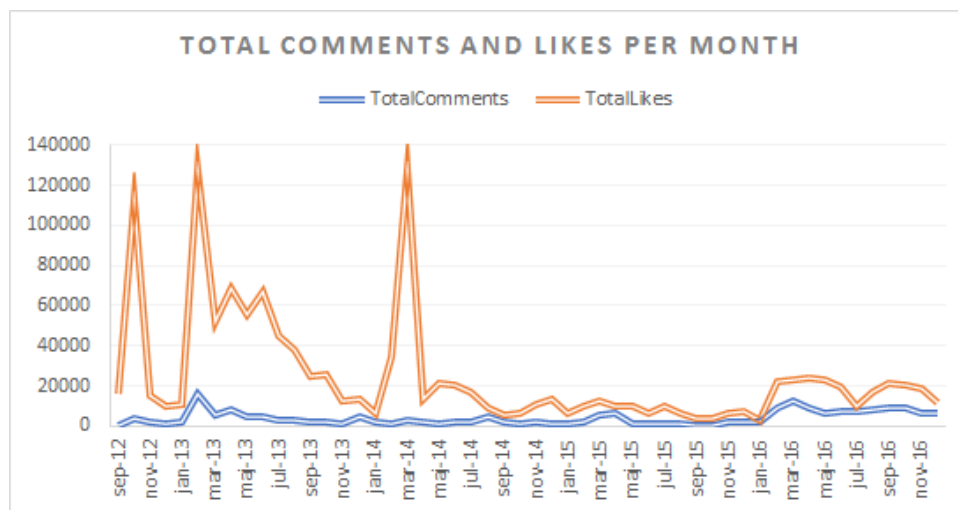
**Figure 14.** The total number of comments and likes, found on the Facebook page Best Western Hotels & Resorts, per year

In Figure 15 and Figure 16, the same numbers are divided into months. As seen in Figure 15, the total posts each month fluctuates a great deal over time. However, when taking a closer look, it is observed that five out of the seven months with the highest amount of posts occurred during the summer months, i.e. during June, July, or August. Furthermore, three of the top four months occurred in June. In contrast, and as shown in Figure 16, the total comments each month do not follow the same pattern. Only three of the top ten months occurred during either June, July, or August. Moreover, neither summer month is represented in the top six months with the most total comments. Unsurprisingly, the total number of likes each month paints a similar picture. Once again, only three of the top ten months occurred during one of the summer months. Furthermore, only one summer month (June) is represented in the top seven months containing the most likes.





*Figure 15. The total number of posts, made by the Facebook page Best Western Hotels & Resorts, per month*



*Figure 16. The total number of comments and likes, found on the Facebook page Best Western Hotel & Resorts, per month*

## 5.5 Netnography Results

The purpose of the Best Western page has been used by the company as a communication platform with its consumers. Best Western's Facebook team utilizes the page as a way to promote its loyalty programs and market various hotel accommodations. From a consumer's point of view, the platform is used to provide feedback, complain about certain problems, share experiences and ask questions related to the brand. Therefore, this section is divided into two parts with one focusing on Best Western main posts and actions, and the second focusing on consumer's sentiment.

### 5.5.1 Best Western Posts

Posts made by Best Western continually focus on price deals in order to gain room bookings. The offers range from \$10 to \$100 USD gift cards that can be won through competitions and spending a night at a Best Western hotel. The following is a typical post made by Best Western that encourage consumers to avail limited time offer price deals:

*'Get amazing deals on walking cities with today's Countdown to Savings deals. These limited time offers are gone at midnight (EST). Book now! <http://bit.ly/OMk7Af>' - Best Western team post.*

Appendix Q shows a collection of posts made by consumers regarding Best Western's prices. Other than price deals, Best Western's actions also entail offerings in the form of hotel facilities. This has lead consumers to interact more on their page and as a result create positive sentiment comments such as “Best Western is the Best!” (Consumer comment).

There has been a high level of loyalty and reward offers made by Best Western to its regular customers that are part of the loyalty program. Similar competition and deals are offered to the consumers in order to generate future bookings from loyal customers. The following is a comment that has been observed as a post repeatedly used:

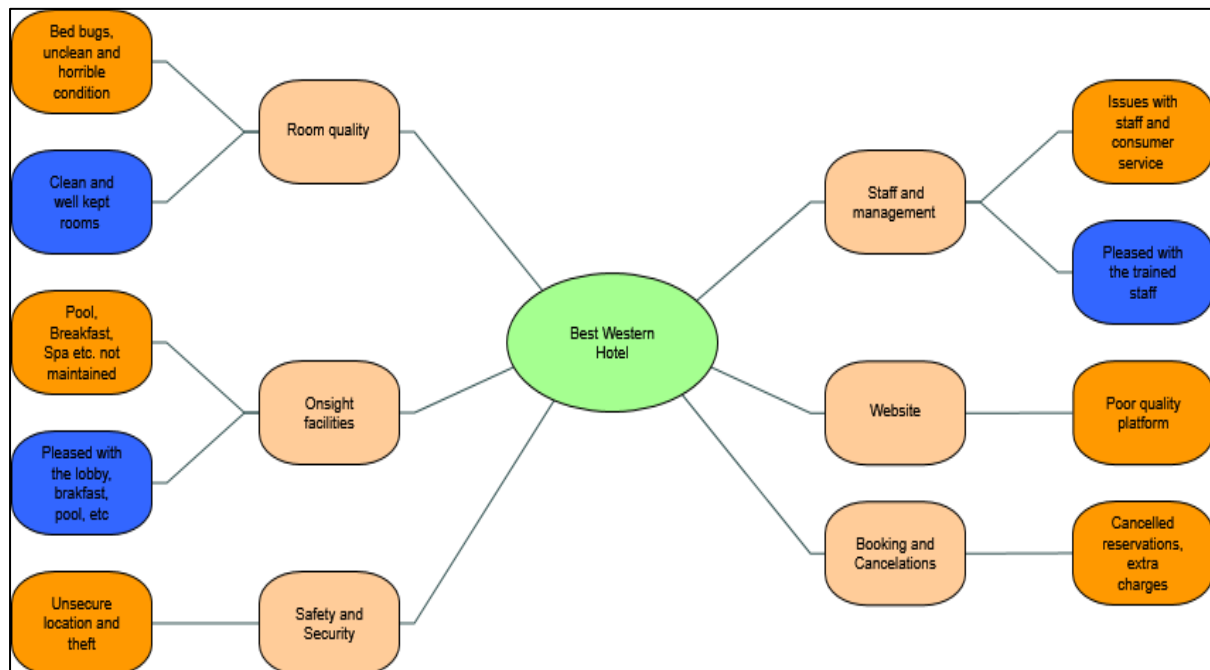
*'Business travelers and Best Western go together like handshakes and hellos. Go. Get. Rewarded. On your next work trip with instant rewards like status matching and exclusive discounts. <http://bit.ly/2mBACB3>' – Best Western Team Post regarding reward points and deals for its members*

Negative sentiment comments by consumers regarding loyalty programs have also been observed by the researchers. Reward program posts, result in consumers complaining about their points not being accounted for. Consumers also have had problems with free night stays which they earned due to reward points. One consumer commented that he was treated poorly and that he had to stay in a horrible room because he availed a free night with his loyalty points. Appendix R shows comments made by consumers regarding loyalty and reward programs offered by Best Western.

### 5.5.2 Consumer Posts and Comments

Coding of the entire dataset resulted in the creation of themes that cover the main negative and positive sentiment of the consumers. Figure 17 shows a visual representation of the main themes. As shown in the image, consumers' text messages on the Facebook page focus on

rooms, on-sight facilities, safety and security, staff and management, website, and booking and cancellations.

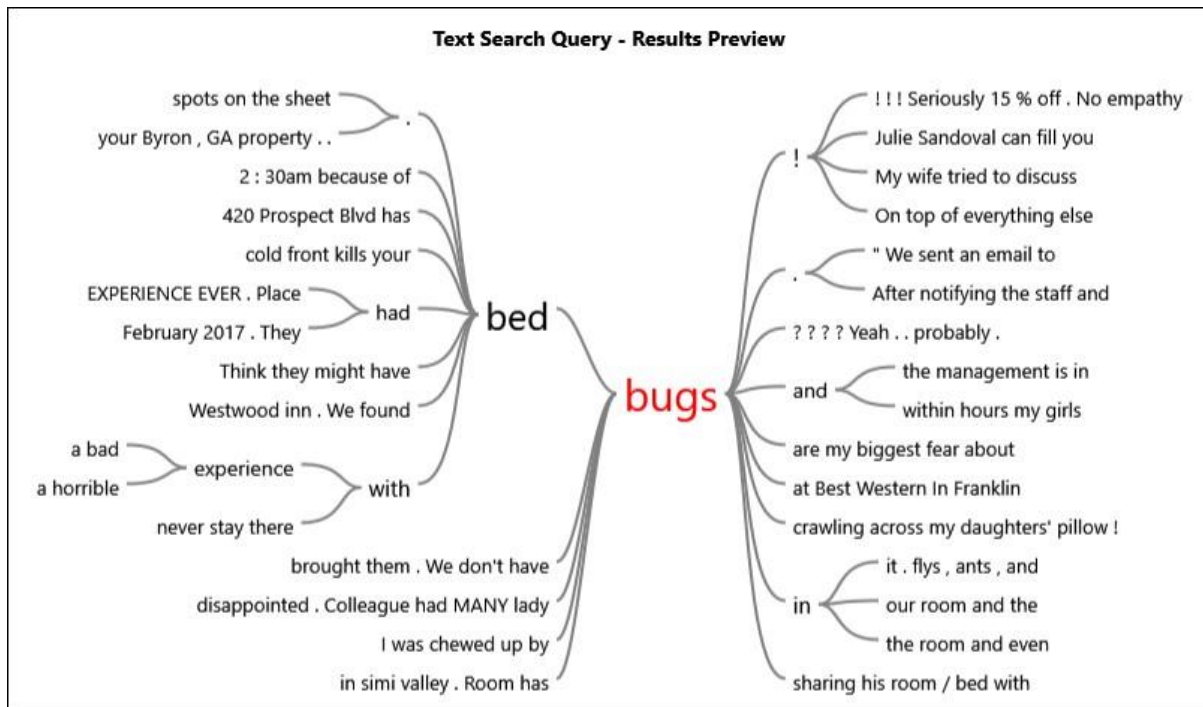


*Figure 17. A visual representation of the most discussed themes and topics in the netnography study. A topic with the color blue represents positive sentiment, while a topic with the color orange represents negative sentiment.*

As the purpose of netnography in this research is to understand the context behind the negative and positive comments, these themes outline the sentiment consumers experience when interacting with the Best Western brand.

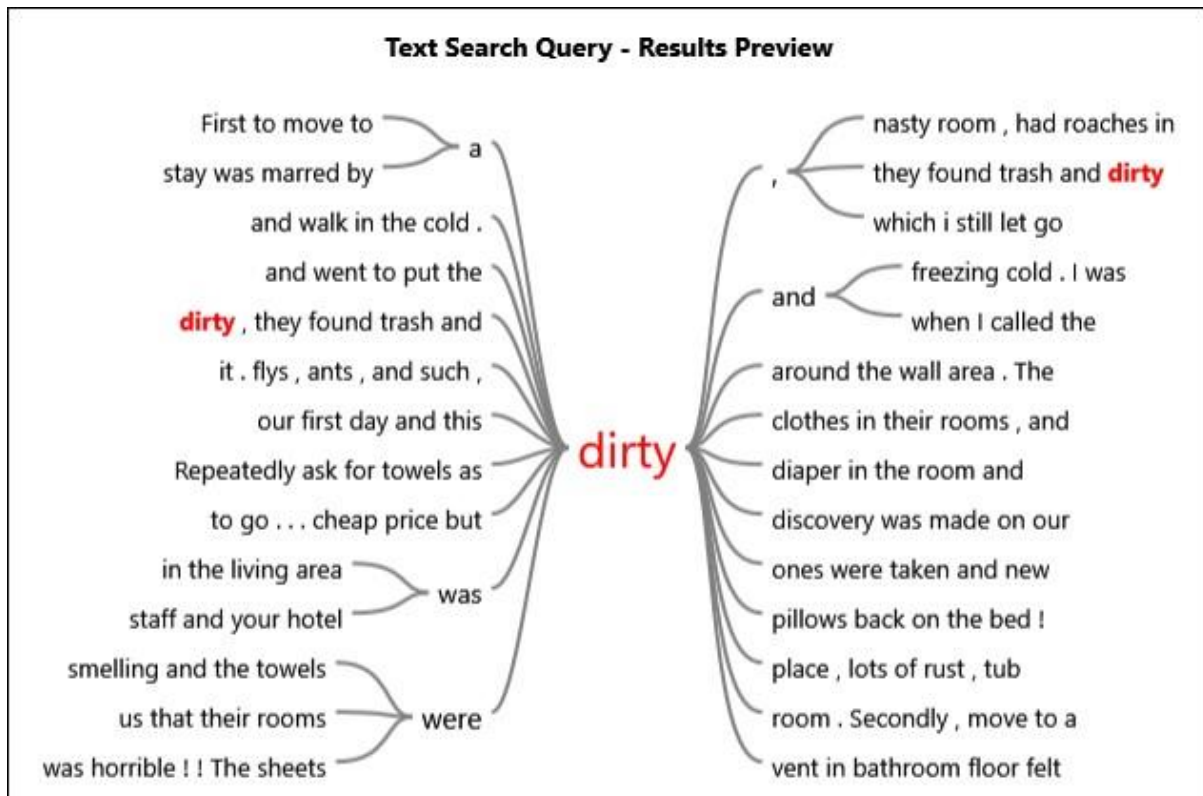
### 5.5.2.1 Room and On-sight Facilities

As mentioned previously, the entire dataset was coded in NVivo and nodes were created of main topics that have a direct relation to the brand. One recurring theme was the discussion of accommodation facilities. The main sentiment surrounding this topic was negative as the consumers were highly unsatisfied with the level of cleanliness of the room. A main issue was the presence of bed bugs and the unhygienic conditions of the rooms when given to the guests. Figure 18 shows a word tree created of the word ‘bugs’ and as shown, there has been a high level of discussion regarding bed bugs. Appendix K shows the entire node of rooms and all the comments that focus on rooms.



**Figure 18.** A word tree with the main word "bugs" and connected words and sentences

Consumers also reported the rooms to be dirty and not cleaned at the time of check-in which shows the lack of maintenance on the hotel's part. Figure 19 shows a similar word tree for the word 'dirty' as that was the most recurring word observed to describe the rooms. The image shows the description of the entire room such as mentioning that the bathroom floor was dirty. It was also observed that dirty clothes, diapers etc. were in the room. In such occasions, most consumers demanded to have a different room but most of them were denied by saying that there weren't any other rooms available. To communicate emotions, consumers used uppercase letters as well as exclamation points.

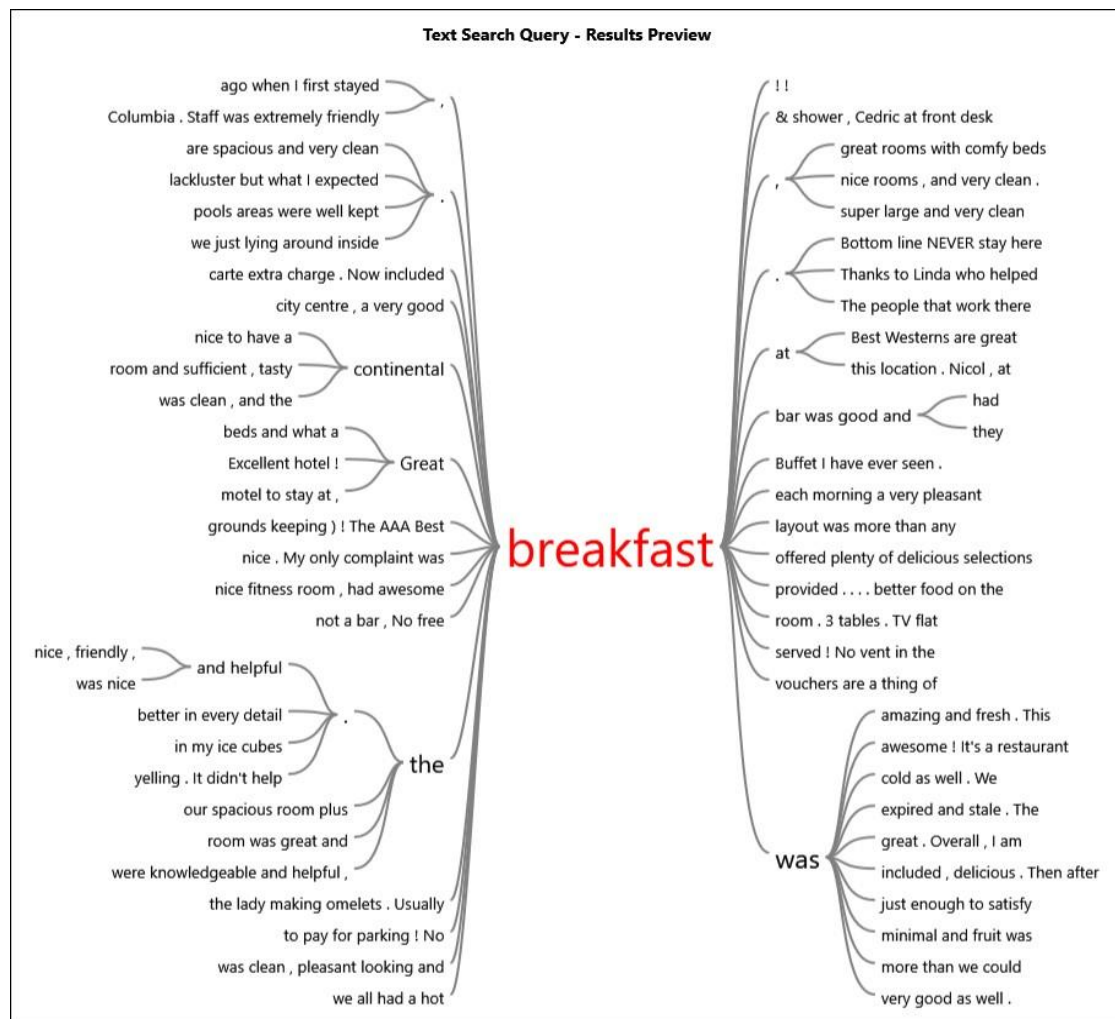


*Figure 19. A word tree with the main word "dirty" and connected words and sentences*

There was also positive sentiment expressed by customers. Generally, consumers tended to elaborate more on the negative sentiment and positive sentiment was more general such as 'a great hotel' or 'enjoyed ourselves and will come again'. There were some consumers that mentioned clean rooms.

Other than rooms, consumers also mentioned on-site facilities such as pool, breakfast, spa and workout room. According to the messages, consumers were promised the availability of the above-mentioned facilities but were told that they are not available during check-in. Appendix O shows a collection of comments regarding on-site facilities that were mostly negative. Most of the complaints were about the pool. The consumers mentioned that the pool was a main attraction for choosing the brand and the fact that it was 'not working' created a negative experience for them. Appendix P shows a collection of messages regarding pool facilities. At times when the pool was available, the consumers complained about the high chlorine levels and the heater not working. As a result, consumers had an unsatisfied experience with the brand and which lead to comments such as 'will never come here again'.

Posts and comments regarding Breakfast facilities at certain hotels were also made. Figure 20 below shows a word tree of the word 'breakfast'. It was observed that most of the messages regarding breakfast service were positive.



**Figure 20.** A word tree with the main word "breakfast" and connected words and sentences

Generally, comments regarding rooms and facilities started from 2010 onwards and were mainly positive but it was observed that negative sentiment regarding this topic increased rapidly from 2014 to 2017.

### 5.5.2.2 Staff and Management

There has also been high negative sentiment regarding the services provided by Best Western's staff and management at various hotels. The words to describe them have been 'rude' and 'unhelpful'. Interaction with the staff for room service has lead them to have an unsatisfactory experience. On the other hand, consumers have had very positive experience with the staff as well. The words to describe them have been 'friendly' and 'good'. A word tree of the word 'staff', in Appendix T, shows a combination of positive and negative comments. The following is a negative comment posted by a consumer regarding staff and management that escalated from dirty sheets:



*“The sheets were dirty and when I called the front desk to report the problem, she asked if I wanted new ones so I could make the bed! When I said that wasn't my job, she offered to move us and the room she moved us to was under construction. She moved us back to the old room and changed the sheets and went to put the dirty pillows back on the bed! When asked why she wasn't changing the pillow cases, she said you just said the sheets!! The next day asked to speak with the manager on duty and was told there was no manager! Never received a call from the manager and when I called the corporate office, their response was to offer a coupon for a discount and when I said that wasn't good enough, the customer care representative said to me, well you did stay the night!! This was a classless hotel all the way up to the corporate headquarters in Phoenix!! Wouldn't recommend this hotel to anyone EVER!!!!”*

The above post was made in the year 2017 and the Best Western team responded to it immediately. It was observed by the researchers that the consumers expect basic accommodation services provided by the hotel when they visit and want friendly and accommodating staff, and managers. Other than using the words ‘friendly’ and ‘good’ consumers have posted positive sentiment messages about certain events in which the staff members have gone out of their way to provide superior customer service. One such example is as follows regarding an employee at Best Western:

*“Thank you so very much to Kirsten from your new Visalia Sequoia Gateway hotel. My sister is traveling 6 hours to our house and ran into an emergency and has to stop halfway. Kirsten got her booked for a hotel tonight with zero hassle and was VERY helpful. Give Kirsten a raise! (or at least a good review for when raises are considered)”*

There has been more negativity for the managers or management of the hotels. It overlaps with accommodation, hotel facilities and staff attitudes. When faced with problems, consumers try to report to the managers and prefer the issue to be solved by them. In the case of Best Western, consumer have complained that the managers have not been on the premises when asked to speak to them. Customers have also claimed that managers were ‘unhelpful’ or ‘did nothing’. The negative comment regarding staff at Best Western that is shown previously, goes on further as follows:

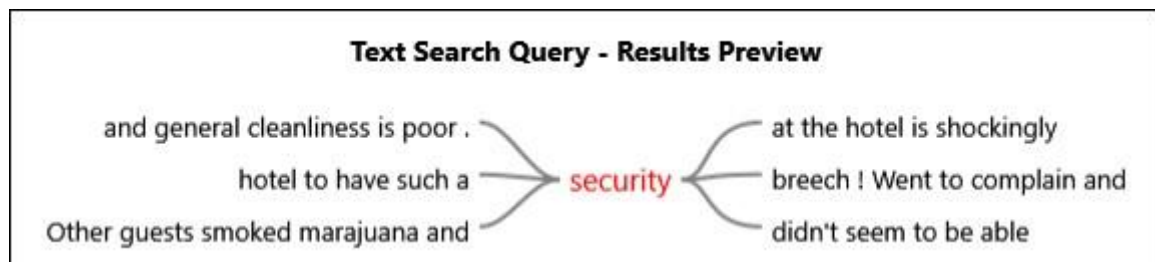
*“The next day asked to speak with the manager on duty and was told there was no manager! Never received a call from the manager and when I called the corporate office, their response was to offer a coupon for a discount and when I said that wasn't good enough, the customer care representative said to me, well you did stay the night!! This was a classless hotel all the*

*way up to the corporate headquarters in Phoenix!! Wouldn't recommend this hotel to anyone EVER!!!!”*

Appendix T shows a word tree for ‘manager’ and Appendix J shows a collection of all comments and posts made by consumers about staffs and managers. Similar to messages about rooms, both negative and positive text messages regarding staff and management have exclamation marks and uppercase letter. This conveys the intensity of the emotion that the consumers felt. Topic of staff and management was discussed more often along with rooms unless a unique event took place. The tendency of negative sentiment regarding hotel employees also increased during the year 2013 onwards but before that the sentiment has been positive.

### 5.5.2.3 Safety and Security

Consumers have faced problems of room security, safety in parking facilities and theft while staying at Best Western hotels. The posts and comments have been about doors locks which has lead guests to be worried about their valuables. Consumers have also complained about money and other valuables missing from their luggage. For these issues, they have tried to contact the head offices and have not received any benefit in return. The Best Western Facebook team has tried to respond to these claims as quickly as possible. Figure 21 shows an image of a word tree that covers a few comments related to security.



*Figure 21. A word tree with the main word "security" and connected words and sentences*

A typical comment made by consumer that has experience security issue is as follows:

*“Woke up next day left the room early and physically shut the room door as no automatic close. Came back 2300 after a long day and came back to the room and our door was WIDE open!!!! We had all our belongings out and this is not acceptable! It looked like the maid had not closed the door. I am furious! I do not pay to stay in a hotel to have such a security breach! Went to complain and yet again was in a queue of others complaining.”*



At the same time, there has been positive sentiment regarding safety and employee behavior. Guests have also been given back their valuables and lost items in hotel rooms which has pleased them a lot. One such comment made by a Best Western customer is as follows:

*“I was very tired and left my DIAMOND pendant on the table after a long day. My son knocked it off under the bed and I didn't realize it until I got home. This necklace is very important to me, and when I frantically called the manager when I realized the day we got home, she promptly checked and an honest maid had found it and returned it to the front desk. They mailed it to me right away, and I have it safely home now. I was so impressed with the honesty and professionalism of this hotel, I plan to write the president and send a reward to the maid for doing the right thing.”*

In terms of security, it was observed that it wasn't an issue for consumer since the early years of Best Western's Facebook page but was discussed a lot more since the year 2014 onwards. Rooms, On-sight facilities, staff and management, and hotel security are all topics that describe the positive and negative experiences consumers faced at various hotel locations.

#### **5.5.2.4 Website**

The above themes capture the on-sight and accommodation related sentiment of Best Western hotels but customers have also talked about Best Western's website. Almost all of the comments regarding this topic has been negative. It was observed that consumers use the website for information about the brand's policies, view their individual reward points etc. The consumers complained that it doesn't work which has made it difficult to plan their trips. They have been forced to use traditional means such as calling the customer services representation in order to get the information which according to the customers is 'a big hassle'. One such comment regarding the website is as follows:

*“Well last night I called up to book a reservation with an agent because it was denied when I tried to do it online.”*

The consumers have also used the word 'sucks' to describe the quality. Appendix S shows a word tree for 'website' that captures all the comments regarding it. In order to improve the website, Best Western launched a new one and that did not improve the quality either. Consumers continued to comment that they were facing issues and were not able to get access. Customers were not able to check their loyalty points, join the loyalty program and cancel or book a reservation. A typical negative post about the new website is as follows:

*“What is going on with your website?? Ever since you guys changed it I can't get on it most of the time. I keep getting access denied. The few times I can access the site all I get is a spinning wheel and I can't get into my account. Simply stated the new site sucks. My husband and I average about 150 nights a year at Best Western normally but lately we have been using Marriott as we don't have problems accessing their site. I know I'm not the only person having this problem. If you can't work out the kinks on the new site then put the old one back in place.”*

This shows that consumers are frustrated with the new website. Though a lot of the similar comments were posted before the launch of the new website but the recurring messages about website have increased after the new launch, shown in Appendix L. The increase in negative sentiment regarding website was relatively recent, approximately 2012 and the issue has gained intensity since then.

#### **5.5.2.5 Bookings and Cancellations**

Issues about bookings and cancellations have also been a recurring theme on the Facebook page. Part of the complaints overlap with website issues as consumers cannot book or cancel reservations. One such comment made by the consumer addresses this issue:

*“Whoever rebuilt your website should be fired. Several times it has not allowed me to complete a reservation, and it never allows user to put in special room requests. Total failure on your part.”*

The website is not the only cause for complaints regarding cancellations. Consumers have also faced situations where they have to cancel reservations but were still charged for a stay. Other than these consumers have been charged by Best Western hotels when they have been not even reserved a stay there. They have claimed that their card information is wrongfully used to get money. According to the customers, it has been a lot of trouble to get the wrongfully charged money back. Similarly, consumers have complained that they have been charged more than the agreed upon amount. In all of these cases, the comments mentioned that they were never informed of these charges and the customers had to find out by looking at their bank statements.

These situations have created a high negative experience with the Best Western brand and in such situations the customer care team has responded by claiming that all Best Western are privately owned and they have their own policies. A post made by a consumer on similar note is as follows:

*“I booked at a Best Western hotel through booking.com with a rate that had free cancellation. I cancelled my reservation weeks in advance, and yet Best Western still charged me for the hotel (a "no show"). I spent way too much time on the phone with many different people, as they attempted to figure out why I was charged anyways (this is after spending hours on the phone with my bank as well). Finally, over two weeks later, I am refunded the money, only to find that I have not been refunded the full amount! How is it possible that the manager could see what I was charged, and yet submit a different amount for the refund? I'm not waiting on the phone again to try and deal with this, but this is honestly ridiculous and I shouldn't have been charged in the first place. Definitely won't be booking with Best Western again soon if this is the kind of hassle that ensues, just to get money back that should never have been taken (don't give them your credit card info, apparently, as they can't be trusted to not use it when they shouldn't).”*

Consumers have faced a lot of cancellation issues when using online travel agencies such as Booking.com or Hotel.com. Appendix M shows a collection of posts and comments made by consumers that outline their negative experience while cancelling, booking or paying for a stay at Best Western. These negative sentiments regarding this theme was not observed in the early year of 2009 but started from 2010 and escalated from 2012 onwards with regards to the website and payment issues.

#### **5.5.2.6 Inconsistent Brand Quality**

A trend of inconsistent service quality has been observed as consumer who are loyal members have complained about certain locations that offer good customer services while others are negatively effecting the Best Western brand.

*“I wish your hotel branding was more consistent. In my opinion a BW Plus should provide the same amenities no matter where it is. One should be able to expect certain amenities for each brand/group a BW falls into.”*

In response, Best Western has claimed that all their hotels are privately owned and as such they cannot affect the workings of the respective hotels. A comment made by a customer on the Facebook page emphasizes this point:

*“I'm a Reward Member and I know that all hotels are independently owned, but on the outside you can read Best Western. I'm in tourism marketing and I'm a travel consultant and after these personal experiences with this given hotel and this customer care behavior of this brand I'm about to give up being a loyal BW customer any longer.”*

Similar to this, consumers have said that there are other brands out there for them to choose from. The most common competitors that the consumers have mentioned are Holiday Inn, Marriott and Hilton. The competitors have been brought up in messages when negative comments have discussed accommodations, website issues and bookings and cancellations. Other than loyalty program members, Best Western had previously had a high-quality image in the minds of the consumers. Recent problems with the brand has made consumers comment about Best Western not being the same anymore. One such comment captures this aspect rather clearly:

*“Upsetting because I have thought Best Western has meant quality for me for the last ten years”*

It has been observed that the brand has suffered on two levels. Firstly, its brand image which has been claimed inconsistent and secondly, overall perception of quality has suffered. Appendix N shows a collection of all the comments outlined regarding brand image. Comments regarding brand image and brand quality are rather recent, starting from 2015 onwards.

## 6. Analysis

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*This chapter of the thesis analyze the findings stemming from the research methods in relation to the practical framework and theoretical framework of this study. Furthermore, this chapter also provides a more general discussion regarding the results and empirics. The analysis consists of two main parts. First, the current situation, in relation to consumer brand perception and disruptive innovation, is examined. Secondly, and in extension to the analyzed current situation of Best Western, possible strategic responses will be presented and examined in relation to the findings that have been previously presented.*

### 6.1 The Current Situation of Best Western

There should be no doubt that Airbnb is disrupting the travel, tourism, and hospitality industry. Especially, the tourist hospitality industry has felt, and are still feeling, the effects from the disruption of Airbnb. Furthermore, since Best Western have to be considered to be heavily involved in the hospitality industry, it would not be unreasonable to argue that Airbnb is disrupting Best Western as well. For example, the fact that David Kong (2015) himself, the CEO of Best Western, publishes a blog-post concerning the rise of Airbnb, writing about how Airbnb is changing the game, should be as good a proof as anything that Airbnb is indeed threatening Best Western's competitive advantage as well as their position in the market place.

However, although the above statement is probably true, it appears as the rise and disruption of Airbnb is yet to make a distinct impact on the consumer brand image of Best Western. As shown, few or no direct evidence can be found in the findings of the sentiment analysis indicating some form of causation between the rise of Airbnb and the consumer brand perception of Best Western. For example, and as seen in Figures 8 and 9, it is only until recently, meaning from 2015 and onwards, that there appears to be a negative trend in the sentiment of the consumers being active on Best Western's official Facebook page. However, Airbnb has been growing rapidly and steadily since 2012. Furthermore, nor the findings from the keyword analysis show any indication that Airbnb would affect the mindsets of the consumers being active on the official Facebook page of Best Western. On the contrary, as seen in Appendices G and H, several of the top words for each time period measured were in fact of a positive nature. At the same time, strongly negative words and words directly relating to Airbnb are nowhere near the top of the list. Moreover, and as shown in Appendices G and

H, this picture of the situation remains intact over time, as there appear to be no difference between the measured years or the measured quarters.

Finally, when comparing the sentiment analysis and the PN-ratio of Best Western to the sentiment analysis and PN-ratio of Airbnb, it is clear that there exist no negative correlation between the two. In fact, Airbnb's PN-ratio follows a relatively similar path to Best Western's PN-ratio, correlating positively at 0,333.

Conclusively, at first glance, the quantitative tests of this study do indeed not show any direct relationship between the rise of Airbnb and the consumer brand perception of Best Western. However, there are some aspects to these results that require a closer look.

First of all, in regard to the results presented in the keyword analysis, it is not unreasonable to argue that the analysis does not paint an entirely pure picture. While it is true that the positive words do indeed top the list of the most frequently used words for each time period, as mentioned, words such as "no" and "don't" are also present in the top. This might indicate that the text messages observed on Best Western's Facebook page are more negative than what the keyword analysis indicates. In that sense, it would not be unreasonable to think that several of the text messages containing the positive word "like", also could contain the word "don't", in reality making the whole text message more negative. However, the "like" in this sentence will, of course, still be accounted for, although it does not reflect the true sentiment of the text message. With this in mind, we cannot rule out that the results from the keyword analysis are skewed towards a somewhat unrealistic positive result, when in reality the result might be more negative.

Moreover, the related big data statistics, showing the social graphs, the social media actions, undertaken on Best Western's Facebook page, also show an interesting phenomenon. As seen in Figures 13 and 14, there seems to exist a mismatch between the number of posts posted by Best Western themselves compared to the number of comments and likes, produced by users, as no strong correlation exists. Moreover, the keyword analysis shows that from 2015 and onwards, Best Western increases their marketing efforts by, for example, creating various hashtags.

Furthermore, as shown in Figures 15 and 16, there is also a discrepancy between the most active months in terms of posts compared to the most active months in terms of likes and comments. It appears as if Best Western put a lot of marketing efforts into the summer months. From the netnography research it appears as if these efforts relate to Best Western targeting

their loyalty program members and offering discounts and price deals to their customers which shows that Best Western focuses on generating value for its consumers through a low cost strategy. The posts also focus on promoting certain hotel locations and facilities at a price discount. The promotion has generated opportunities for consumers to either provide feedback or complain about loyalty program of Best Western as outlined in Appendix R. Best Western has continuously tried to attract business travelers and family groups through their social media platform. However, the consumers seem to be less receptive during these months compared to the rest of the year. This could indicate that Best Western has a skewed and incorrect picture on how to market themselves towards their customers. Furthermore, the development in recent years, when the user-activity seem to have decreased despite the fact that Best Western appear to have increased their online marketing efforts, indicates the possibility that Best Western may be in the process of losing the attention of their consumers.

Finally, the sentiment analysis does, as mentioned and as shown in Figure 9, show a relatively significant trend-shift from 2016 and onwards. With this in mind, the findings stemming from the netnography research become even more interesting. The fact that Best Western's consumer express doubts, concern, and general negative sentiment regarding topics such as their Best Western's website, the quality of the hotel rooms, the staff and management, or booking, cancellations and payment issues, should be worrisome for Best Western, especially considering the relative increase in the negative sentiment during recent years.

Considering the above, and considering the findings from the netnography research, three topics will be more heavily discussed. First of all, considering the digital and sharing economy context of Airbnb and the fact that the netnography findings indicate that Best Western's customer are dissatisfied with Best Western's capabilities in the digital economy, Best Western's place in these areas will be further discussed. Secondly, the competitive advantage of Best Western, in relation to Airbnb and the rise of the sharing economy in general, will be examined. Finally, with regards to the two previous topics, an analysis on the future outlook of Best Western will be examined and discussed.

### 6.1.1 The New Digital Era and the Sharing Economy

As shown in the findings from the netnography analysis, consumers had few positive things to say about Best Western's website or bookings and cancellations made online. Both of these areas are, of course, related to the more general and broader topic of digitalization. While this might be a relatively common problem for most major companies, it also displays Best

Western's, in the eyes of their customers, dissatisfactory efforts in the areas of digitalization. Furthermore, considering that, and according to Tussyadiah and Pesonen (2015), that digitalization and the internet-based culture have been the creating forces behind the rise of the shared economy, allowing for shared creation, production, distribution, as well as consumption of goods and services between individual consumers, it would not be unreasonable to argue that Best Western's lack of capabilities in the fields of digitalization, as perceived by their consumers, could have had an impact in the rise of Airbnb and other shared economy services. This notion fits very well into the arguments presented by Christensen and Raynor (2003), as well as Christensen (1997). In that sense, it would appear, maybe not surprisingly as it is in accordance with Guttentag (2015), that Best Western previously has failed to acknowledge the importance of the Internet, the digitalization process, and in extension the rise of the shared economy. Instead they listened too much to their main customer groups and segments, putting too much focus into their core business model, allowing disruptive innovation in the form of Airbnb gain a foothold. Now, some years later, Airbnb and the technological disruption of the shared economy, has successfully disrupted the industry, and it now shows in the sentiment, perception, and the demands of the customers, as shown in the findings of netnography analysis.

With the above notion in mind, and from a theoretical perspective, it would appear as if Best Western has indeed fallen into the trap of disruptive innovation concerning the emergence of the shared economy. In that case, the fundamental problem would be that Best Western has failed to properly latch onto the technological trajectory created by the technological paradigm of digitalization (Dosi 1982). At least in the minds of their consumers, as has been shown in the netnography findings.

Furthermore, the fact that Best Western appears to have problem with their social media marketing efforts correlates quite well with the notion that Best Western is lagging behind in terms of digitalization and the Internet in general. As shown in the findings, specifically in Figures 13 and 14, and as discussed previously, the posts posted by Best Western themselves do not correlate very well with the number of comments and likes, generated by the consumers, over time. This could be another proof of Best Western's lack of capability and understanding regarding how to properly communicate and satisfy the needs of their consumers in the digitalized era. In that sense, it would appear as if, when it comes to the topic of digitalization, Best Western's Value Proposition is not able to create a *fit* with the Customer Profile of their customers (Osterwalder et al. 2014). When it comes to digitalization, in this case Best



Western's website and online booking and cancellations, Best Western appear to be more or less unable to create pain relievers, or the products and services that the consumers demand, unsuccessfully eliminating the pains, creating gains, or stimulating the customer jobs (Osterwalder et al. 2014).

The argument that Best Western is lagging behind in terms of digitalization, failing to latch onto the technological trajectory of digitalization, in extension contributing to the devaluation of Best Western's brand image amongst its consumers. Furthermore, as mentioned, and according to Keller (1993), knowledge is stored in sets of nodes and links, with nodes acting as information storage spaces and links, connecting the information together. When exposed to stimuli, such as marketing and advertisements, nodes become activated and the consumer in question might remember what he or she thinks about a specific brand, i.e. the consumer's brand image is influenced (Keller 1993). In Best Western's case, the brand image of the consumers might become negatively affected by the company's incapability in terms of digitalization. The consumers might now associate Best Western with less favorable characteristics and traits, which in turn might affect their overall brand perception of Best Western, in extension affecting the brand equity and identity of the firm. If we are to believe the results of this study, with the overall sentiment becoming increasingly negative over the last couple of years, this development might actually be in effect.

Moreover, supporting the above notion, and as mentioned by Denning (2014), the Internet, and the digitalization process in general, are re-inventing the economy in three waves. The third and final wave has created social networks in which the new and younger generations have a choice between access rather than ownership of products and services. Furthermore, according to Denning (2014), this development will only become stronger, as especially the young generation prefers the economy of access created through digitalization. This should be bad news for Best Western, as it indicates that the negative sentiment regarding their current capabilities in digital areas might be perceived as even more unsatisfactory as time moves along.

Other than Best Western's weak position in the digital world, the organization is also losing its competitive advantage in the hotel industry, battling amongst its direct competitors such as Holiday Inn and Hilton. The next section provides a deeper analysis of consumers and Best Western's deteriorating brand image in the hotel industry in general.

### 6.1.2 Losing the Competitive Advantage

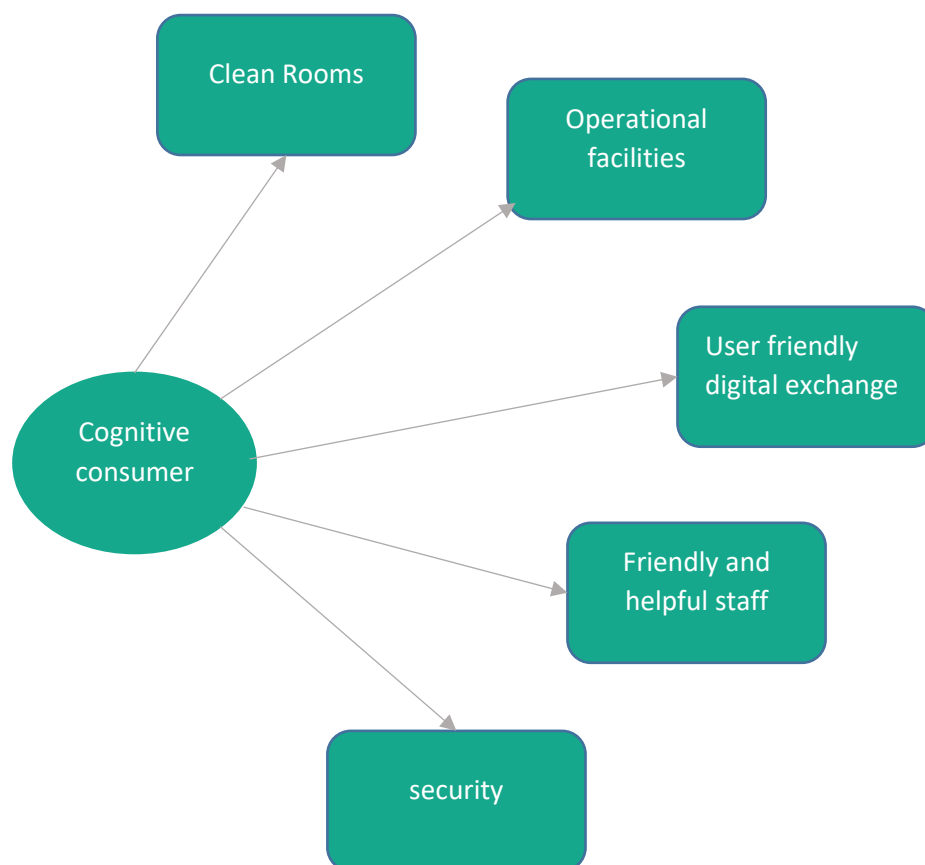
The accommodation sector consists of various entities competing to gain market share. As mentioned in the practical background, the hotel industry's main revenue generators are branded hotel chains (Douglass 2015). Best Western, as one of the chain hotels, is competing with market giants such as Hilton, Marriott, Holiday Inn etc. Other than these international hotels, Airbnb is another factor that is revolutionizing the accommodation sector. In short, Best Western is faced with various industry threats. In order to fully understand Best Western's deteriorating competitive advantage, a consumer analysis is required. Therefore, this section will elaborate on the two consumer segments identified through research and will cover their brand image of Best Western.

#### 6.1.2.1 Consumer Segments in the Hotel Industry

The netnography findings and secondary research shows that in the hospitality industry, there are two consumer segments. The first group is identified through netnographic research as a *cognitive group*. The findings show that these consumers expect branded hotels to provide good quality service in terms of accommodation, employee attitude, safety and security of the brands and online and offline facilities of the hotels. In this day and age, a negative interaction with an employee, even an unhelpful employee, is considered below par. The themes outlined in the finding represent the frame of mind the consumers have when interacting with hotel staff and managers, and when evaluating rooms. The cognitive individual here is continuously processing information (Østergaard & Jantzen 2000) from their stays with various hotels and now have certain standards that they perceive as basic customer service. The cognitive segment wants clean rooms with all facilities in working order, they want helpful staff and manager, they desire safety and security in the hotels. The most important part here is that they expect a brand to mean something. The theme of inconsistent brand identity shows that the average travelling consumer wants the Best Western brand to have the same quality in every hotel that they visit.

The consumer here is very knowledgeable and understands the difference in quality based on what the brand stands for. For example, Best Western Plus (one of Best Western's chain) communicates itself as a hotel that offers better quality service with higher room rates as compared to other Best Western hotel brands. Once advertised, the consumer expects that advertised services to meet their expectation and when they don't the negative sentiment created leads the cognitive consumer to look and evaluate other options in the hotel industry, of which there are many. One factor that motivates consumers in the hotel accommodation

industry is price. Due to this, consumers are willing to join loyalty programs, participate in Best Western's competition to avail gift cards and are outraged when they have booking and cancellation issues. Figure 22 shows the key factors that the cognitive group takes into account when dealing with hotel stays or any accommodation need. Hygienic rooms and friendly staff have been the most discussed topics by consumers on the Facebook page as shown in Appendix K and J. If not the most important attributes, these factors have had a high impact on the brand image of Best Western and have lead consumers to claim that they will forego the brand.



**Figure 22.** The key factors that the cognitive consumers take into account when dealing with hotel stays or any accommodation need

This group follows the *consumer behavior perspective* consumption pattern in which the consuming individual is metaphorically viewed as a computer that creates a list of pros and cons and evaluates the brand after every stay (Østergaard & Jantzen 2000). In the hotel industry, the cognitive individual wants certain facilities to be provided by international brands such as website and on-sight facilities which is why these topics were discussed as feedback on the Facebook page. As mentioned previously, the consumer behavior group interacts with

the world continuously and updates the information stored (Østergaard & Jantzen 2000), therefore, brand image is created through every interaction with the Best Western brand.

The second group identified in the hotel industry is one that is looking for something more than what Best Western and other hotel chains can offer. This group of consumers is after a unique experience while travelling through different locations. Interaction with locals and creating meaningful memories through their stays all over the world, is the main selling point for this *experiential consumer group*. (Østergaard & Jantzen 2000) has referred this approach of consumption as *consumer research*. The consumer is a narcissistic and emotional human (Østergaard & Jantzen 2000) who is seeking a pleasurable experience for himself in order to have a higher quality travelling experience. It is this desire that Airbnb has captured and promotes. According to (Botsman & Rogers 2010) this trend has been mainly observed among the young who prefer the chance to meet locals and experience new cultures than to use hotel services that mainly cover tourist spots. What is of particular interest is that Airbnb offers affordable accommodations as compared to branded hotels which is a main attribute for the cognitive group of consumers that utilize hotel services.

Of the two groups that have been identified in the hotel industry, the analysis shows that the cognitive group outlined above have a stronger presence at the Best Western's Facebook page. Through netnography findings, the researchers were able to identify the current brand image of the Best Western that effects the perception and identity of the brand.

#### **6.1.2.2 Brand Image of Best Western**

The findings show that Best Western was considered a quality brand. Various comments made by consumers shows evidence that it was considered a brand that promoted superior service quality. The negative sentiment revolves around issues consumers have faced about the brand and its recent intensity shows a decline in customer service as well as brand consistency. By incorporating Lockyer's (2005b) research regarding hotel purchase decision and the netnography findings, it is safe to claim that a huge amount of Best Western consumers have a negative brand image of the company. The consumers have issues with cleanliness, staff and management, security and have complained about inconsistent service quality. Through sentiment analysis, it is observed that negative interactions with the brand have been increasing in the last few years. A similar research done by Chow et al. (1995) states that past experiences with the brand, on-sight facilities, and staff have an effect on how consumers perceive the brand to be in terms of dependability and service quality. Findings show that a high number of

consumers considered the Best Western staff to be rude and unfriendly, rooms to be dirty and contain bed bugs, and on-site facilities to be lacking.

Taking into account (Keller 1993)'s model of brand knowledge and its main dimensions, the brand image of Best Western has deteriorated. As elaborated previously, brand image is the evaluation of a brand's associations in terms of favorability, uniqueness and strength (Keller 1993). Negative interactions with the brand has created less favorable but strong associations of Best Western, especially when compared to the services provided by other hotels. Thus ultimately damaging the brand image of Best Western. There has also been positive sentiment regarding the same topics that shows that some hotels are performing well which leads to inconsistent service quality and can have a high impact on the brand identity of Best Western.

#### **6.1.2.3 Brand Identity Crisis**

Best Western continuously promotes itself as a brand that strives for high customer satisfaction. As a company that is celebrating 70 years of hospitality and is an award-winning hotel, the company caters to all customer segments in the accommodation sector (Best Western 2017). The Best Western brands has a collection of 7 unique brands and all are independently owned and operated with each brand offering its own personality and style, but all share the same commitment to delivering superior customer service, exceptional value and modern amenities (Best Western 2017). Netnography findings also show that the brand considers its self as a company that strives to provide superior customer service, though the consumers are of a different opinion. However, customers consider it a brand that cannot provide basic hospitality service. In this regard, the Best Western claims of having independently owned hotels that operate without the guidance of the brand.

This conflicting brand identity crisis can be analyzed by the AC2ID Model (Heding et al. 2009). As elaborated in the theoretical section, AC2ID framework is an abbreviation and is outlined in terms of Best Western as follows:

- *Actual*: Branded hotel chain in over 100 locations with 4100+ hotels (Best Western, 2017). All hotel locations are privately owned and operated.
- *Communicated*: Best Western portrays itself as a brand that strives to provide superior customer service and high quality accommodations (Best Western 2017).
- *Conceived*: The consumers are starting to have a negative image of the brand. They have reported that the brand provides unsatisfactory customer service in various aspects.

- *Ideal*: An award-winning brand and has a reputation of a quality brand. Has reported \$ 4.0 billion USD in North America in revenue (Best Western 2016).
- *Desired*: Evidence suggests from marketing activities that managers desire the brand to be at the lead in the hospitality industry.

The model shows that there is a gap between what consumer perceive Best Western to be and what the managers desire and communicate. This identity gap is creating an identity crisis and if not resolved, it will affect revenue, brand equity and the future of the company.

The deteriorating brand image in the minds of the consumer segments outlined above and the brand identity crisis shows that the competitive advantage of the brand is damaged. It is no longer perceived as an award-winning brand, but as one that has lost its core values and forgotten the basic rules of customer service in the hospitality industry. In order to recover from the damage the brand needs to first make some major changes in the business model, as this discord is creating a gap between the organizational goals and what the consumers want from the brand. The value proposition canvas proposed by Osterwalder et al. (2014) provides a guideline to create 'fit' which could satisfy both parties.

### 6.1.3 A Worrying trend?

Besides the topics presented above, regarding digitalization as well as Best Western potentially losing their competitive advantage, the fact of the matter is that the sentiment regarding Best Western as a brand is becoming more and more negative, quite rapidly as well. As previously discussed, the negative sentiment of the Best Western consumers active on the company's Facebook page has been increasing in recent years, meaning between 2015 and 2017. This have been shown in both the results from the sentiment analysis as well as the results from the netnography analysis, and is particularly visible in Figures 8 and 9.

An easy-to-make assumption could be that the increasingly negative sentiment of Best Western is due to the rise of the technological trajectory of the sharing economy, and in extension the disruptive effects of Airbnb. However, Airbnb has been around longer than that. As shown, it is not until 2015, and even more so in 2016, that the sentiment of the consumers starts to decrease at a rapid rate. That would then indicate that the technological trajectory of the sharing economy and Airbnb is separated from the increasing negative sentiment of Best Western. Furthermore, is there even any need for Best Western to worry? As stated, the whole global hotel industry is expected to grow from 493 billion USD in 2015 to 550 billion USD in 2018 (Euromonitor 2017). Moreover, the rate of which consumers are travelling has doubled from

527 million in 1995 to 1.19 billion in 2015, and is expected to exceed 1.8 billion 2030 (UNTW n.d.). However, when taking the theoretical framework regarding disruptive innovation, presented by Christensen (1997) as well as Christensen and Raynor (2003), into account the picture becomes clearer.

The fact of the matter is that Best Western faces an increase in negative sentiment from their customers. As stated previously, disruptive innovation often takes time. While established firms, such as Best Western, are focusing too much of their attention on their top-end customer, trying to accommodate their needs and demands, a fertile breeding ground for disruptive niche innovations and technologies might be created for the low-end segments (Christensen & Raynor 2003). As stated by Guttentag (2015), which is supported in this study, this development applies to the case of Best Western and the incumbent hotel industry as well. This means in extension that the disruptive technology that is the shared economy and Airbnb needs time to gain a foothold in new- or low-end markets, allowing for the improvement cycle to improve the product and service in order to disrupt the high-end market from beneath (Christensen 1997). As stated, when this happens the disruptor crushes the prevailing incumbent firms, successfully disrupting the whole industry. With this in mind, it could be argued that Airbnb is yet to completely disrupt the whole industry, and that the company and the sharing economy's technological trajectory “only” are in the process of doing so. In that case, Best Western could probably expect the increase in negative sentiment to continue.

The above notion is supported by the fact that Airbnb and the sharing economy sector is still expected to grow. As stated in the practical framework, even though Airbnb has experienced immense growth since the founding of the company, there is still room to grow, as a huge population does not utilize the services of the company or are part of the shared economy in general (Travel Weekly 2015). Since only 10 % of the United States travelers have heard of and have used the service before, and 23 % of the United States travelers have heard of it and would consider using it, it would appear as Airbnb, and the sharing economy in general, has room to grow in the upcoming years. That is, of course, bad news for Best Western and the rest of the incumbent firms in the industry.

Moreover, as previously discussed, the fact that consumer perceive Best Western to be lagging behind in terms of digitalization, as well as the company's traditional customer segment, the cognitive consumer groups, are beginning to question the value proposition of Best Western, is yet another indication that the observed increase in negative sentiment is not a coincidence,



but the beginning to a more long-lasting, or even permanent, development in consumer brand image. Related to this is the statement done by Holding et al. (2009), claiming that corporate reputation takes a lot longer to form because it is based on what the company has done over time and how it has behaved rather than the short-term effect created by advertisement in order to change or enhance the brand identity. With this in mind, it could be argued that the continuous negative sentiment and its ultimate negative affect to the brand identity of Best Western, actually is lagging behind the technological and strategic development, and that its just until recently that Best Western's failures concerning digitalization as well as their inability to satisfy the demands of their core customer segments, are starting to show in regard to consumer brand equity and brand identity.

Furthermore, as is often the case, financial measurements often lag behind consumer-focused measurements, such as consumer brand image. If this is true for Best Western as well, and the trend that has been observed in the sentiment during recent years continues, it is probable that the financial measurements will start to trend down as well, which would be in line with the theoretical frameworks related to disruptive innovation.

Finally, if this notion holds true, and considering Best Western's apparent problems with digitalization as well as their current competitive advantage, it would not be unwise for the company to try to re-invent themselves. Therefore, in the upcoming sections of this analysis, ways in which Best Western might be able to do just that will be further discussed.

## 6.2 Strategic Responses

As discussed, the current situation of Best Western, in regard to threat that is the new technological trajectory of the shared economy as well as the current consumer brand perception, indicates that some sort of change is needed for the organization. Furthermore, the dissatisfaction that the cognitive consumers, which is the main customer segment of Best Western, have with Best Western's current value proposition might eventually lead to Best Western losing their competitive advantage and ultimately their position in the marketplace. On top of that, it would appear as other customer segments, such as the experiential consumers, are already moving away from the incumbent hotel industry and towards sharing economy services, such as Airbnb.

Since the emergence of the technological paradigms of the digitalization and in extension the sharing economy, Best Western appear to have a hard time positioning themselves. Moreover, this means that the company are insecure on whom to battle against; should they try to fight



off new disruptive entrants such as Airbnb, or should they try to win the battle against the other incumbent branded hotel firms? In a situation where it is unclear on what horse to bet on, it is probable that a company's core competencies suffer, as management have a hard time prioritizing what needs to be done. As shown in this study, in the case of Best Western, this development appears to have made its mark in consumer brand perception, ultimately damaging the brand image of Best Western.

In short, two main pain points of Best Western's current situation can be identified. First of all, due to the company's insufficient efforts in the fields of digitalization, Best Western appear to be losing ground the up-and-coming sharing economy industry, where Airbnb is a major player. Secondly, possibly as a consequence of the former, Best Western is losing their traditional position in the marketplace, as the cognitive consumer segment is starting to lose faith in the hotel chain. Finally, the combination of these two pain points creates a vicious cycle, where Best Western becomes stuck and lost in the marketplace, not being able to maintain any unique position or competitive advantage. And as mentioned, the sentiment analysis indicates that this trend might become even worse as time moves along.

The already mentioned problems of Best Western illustrates the need for a change of direction. In the upcoming sections, two suggestion for possible responses are presented. First, the more holistic solution of Business Model Innovation is presented. Secondly, the somewhat incremental suggestion of corporate catalyst innovation is discussed.

### 6.2.1 Business Model Innovation: Changing the Activity System

As suggested by Christensen and Raynor (2003), a suitable, although ambitious, possible strategic response when facing disruptive innovation, or a new technological trajectory, is to engage in business model innovation. Furthermore, in such cases as Best Western, which appears to have problem with their value proposition, Osterwalder et al. (2014) also recommends business model innovation in order to properly achieve fit between the value map and the customer profile.

As mentioned the cognitive consumers, the main consumer segment for Best Western, value quality and stability in terms of accommodation, employee attitude, online access of the brand, safety and security. They also expect that these criteria are met by the branded hotel chains, such as Best Western. As of now, Best Western are unable to provide them this, which in extension means that the company are unable to achieve a fit between their Value Map and the Customer Profile (Osterwalder et al. 2014). As Osterwalder et al. (2014) suggest, to achieve

ultimate fit between the Value Map and the Customer Profile, Business Model Fit is needed. As of now, and evidently showing in the findings of this research, Best Western do not qualify for Business Model Fit. As has been argued previously, the reason for this is Best Western's, in the eyes of their consumers, unsatisfactory capabilities when it comes to the company's supposed core competencies. In order to battle this, this study suggests three strategic changes, with the purpose of improving Best Western's business model, in extension allowing the company to reach Business Model Fit in their Value Proposition Canvas and regaining their position in the marketplace with a unified brand identity.

#### *Recommendation 1: Centralizing the brand*

The Best Western brand has a collection of seven unique sub-brands. As mentioned, these brands are independently operated with each brand offering its own personality and style. As the netnography research shows and as have been mentioned, Best Western's customers, and especially the cognitive consumers are confused by the differences in service, quality and hospitality. This has not only caused confusion, but also frustration and dissatisfaction among the consumers, in extension leading to the cognitive consumers losing their faith in the general Best Western brand and the company losing their position in the marketplace.

With the above in mind, this paper suggest that Best Western should centralize their brands, moving away from inconsistencies created due to difference in service quality and amenities. The centralization will occur on two levels. As the hotels are independently owned and operated, the inconsistencies exist within the brand as mentioned in the finding by a consumer regarding Best Western Plus offering different services and amenities in different locations. The second change would occur by aligning the management of these hotels. Responsibilities given to the management of independent hotels results in a confused brand identity. A post made by consumer explains it rather well that on the outside people see the brand of Best Western and are sorely disappointed when they are faced with low quality service. Should this centralization be implemented, it would not be unreasonable to think that the confusion and the dissatisfaction that the cognitive consumers have, regarding the separation of the brands, would decrease substantially. From a theoretical perspective, considering the Value Proposition Canvas presented by Osterwalder et al. (2014), a centralizing of the brand would indeed create a stronger form of fit between Best Western's Value Map and the respective Customer Profile, since it would be one step closer to what Osterwalder et al. (2014) calls Business Model Fit.

Furthermore, to centralize the Best Western brand would also amplify the level of value-creation potential of the company, as this would mean that at least one of Amit's et al (2012) value drivers would be achieved. First of all, it goes without saying that centralizing would bring a level of *Novelty* to the business model of Best Western. Secondly, it could also be argued that the value driver *Efficiency* would be a factor in this change, as the centralized brand probably would centralize activities such as marketing campaigns, allowing Best Western to control such efforts more.

When examining this suggested change of centralizing the brand from Amit's et al (2012) activity-system perspective, it becomes apparent that the structure, the interlinkages between the different activities of a business model, the content, of Best Western's activity system would change. Naturally, to centralize the brand would mean a more centralized structure. Furthermore, this would also lead to a change in the governance of Best Western's activity system, as the company would move from a decentralized governance to being governed as one (Amit et al. 2012). Finally, Amit et al (2012) argue that three elements of the activity system; the content, governance, and structure, are highly interdependent, meaning that changing one or two of the elements can be enough to change the whole system. With this in mind, this suggested change might also alter the content of Best Western's activity system.

#### *Recommendation 2: Co-operating with Airbnb and the Sharing Economy*

As previously stated, it would appear as if Best Western's consumers are massively dissatisfied with the company's efforts in the digital areas. First of all, the consumers have expressed strong negative sentiment regarding the Best Western's website. Secondly, booking and cancellations, which nowadays mainly are performed online, have also been an apparent problem. In other words, Best Western appear to lag behind the digital development and their consumers expect more from the company.

The notion that Best Western has fallen into the trap of disruptive innovation concerning the emergence of the digital revolution, and in extension the shared economy, appears to be probable, failing to properly latch onto the technological trajectory created by the technological paradigm of digitalization (Dosi 1982). On the other side of the spectrum is Airbnb, a company that partly has built its success on well-functioning and consumer-friendly digital capabilities. With this in mind, this study suggest that Best Western should accept their loss in this digital battle.

Therefore, this study suggest that Best Western should, as already has been done to a small and local extent, start promoting and selling their rooms on services such as Airbnb. While this would mean that Best Western would compete with private landlords, it would also mean that Best Western could exploit the digital capabilities of Airbnb, which is something the Best Western themselves do not have. This could also result in that Best Western establishes a better reach, being able to promote themselves to other customer segments than just the cognitive consumers. For example, the experiential consumers would probably have more interactions with Best Western in this manner. Moreover, the fact that some local Best Western hotels already have started to promote themselves on Airbnb speaks in favor of this action. It would also be reasonable to think that Airbnb would welcome this co-operation, as it would undoubtedly increase the traffic on their platform.

This change would also enhance the level of value-creation potential of Best Western, as Amit's et al (2012) value drivers are present in this suggested change as well. First of all, it is reasonable to think that a co-operation with Airbnb would lead to complementarities, as this would lead to value-enhancing between the interdependent activities that is Best Western's rooms and Airbnb's digital services (Amit et al. 2012). Secondly, it would also lead to efficiency, as Best Western could "outsource" much of their sales activities to services such as Airbnb, which allows Best Western to focus more on their core competencies.

From the activity-system perspective presented by Amit et al (2012) it is somewhat obvious that this suggested change would lead to a change in both structure and governance. First of all, Airbnb becoming the one of the main promoters of Best Western rooms will of course change the governance of the activity system, as it would mean the addition of one more party that perform any of the activities in the activity system (Amit et al. 2012). The structure would also change, since the linkages within the activity system would change as well (Amit et al. 2012).

Co-operating with Airbnb and other shared economy firms would also be an additional step in the direction of Osterwalder's et al (2014) Business Model Fit, as it would allow for Best Western to create a business model that is adapted to the demands and customer pains regarding digitalization that can be found in the Customer Profile.

### *Recommendation 3: Focusing on core competencies*

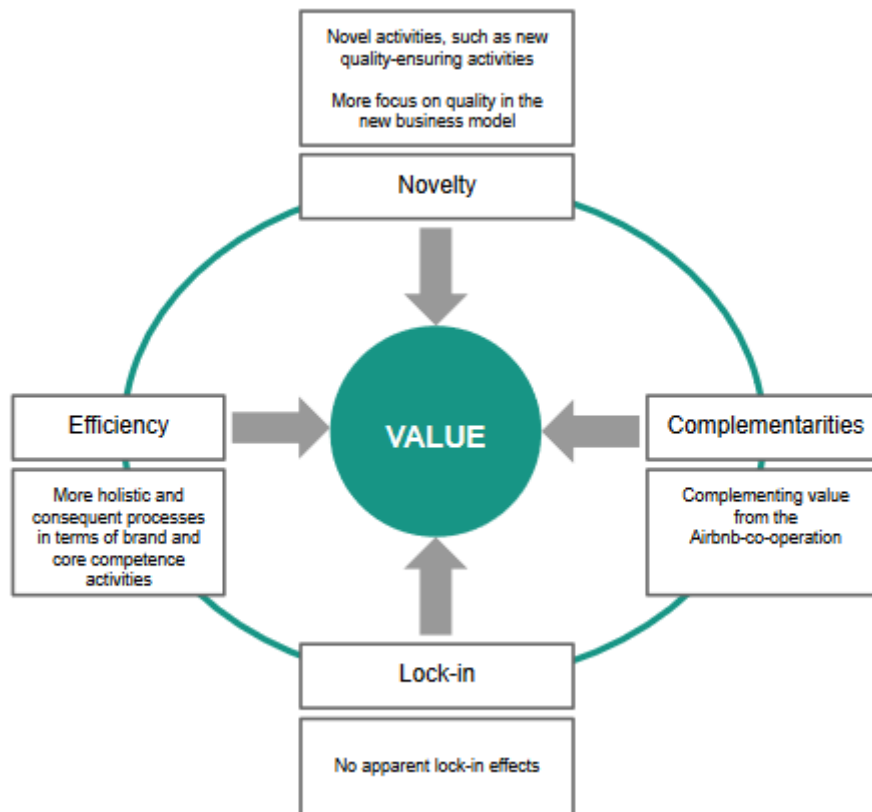
Finally, the previous recommended changes would allow Best Western to actually focus on their core competencies. As has been shown and discussed previously, Best Western's

consumers' expectations regarding room quality, staff and management, as well as safety and security, are not being met. This has led to Best Western losing their competitive advantage, as they are no longer able to satisfy the demands of the cognitive consumers, their main customer segment. As has been discussed, this also means that the company's brand identity is in a crisis.

As already touched upon, this study recommends Best Western to spend even more efforts to develop and maintain a high quality in regard to their core competencies. That is, Best Western should strive and work towards better and more consistent room quality, better and more service-minded staff and management, making sure guests feel safe and secure at their hotels, as well as making sure that hotel facilities, such as pools and spas, are being properly maintained and kept to a high standard. If this is done, Best Western should reach a stronger level of fit between their Value map and the Customer Profile of their customers, especially the cognitive consumers, as once again the business model would be molded, to a greater extent than previously, to the demands of their customers (Osterwalder et al. 2014). Ultimately, this should turn the current trend around, allowing Best Western to regain their foothold and position, as a high-quality hospitality provider, in the market, in extension improving and aligning the brand identity of the company.

As far as value drivers go it could once again be argued that efficiency would be a factor. A more holistic, consequent, and standard approach to the quality of the hotels should indeed create better processes and could ultimately save time and money (Amit et al. 2012). Furthermore, a certain degree of novelty would also be present in this more quality-focused business model, as it is probable that new activities and content, that would ensure quality-enhancing, should be introduced (Amit et al. 2012). Therefore, from Amit's et al (2012) activity-system perspective, it is apparent that an increased focus on quality also would lead to the introduction of new content to the activity system.

Conclusively, the suggested changes to Best Western's business model, or activity system, would indeed enhance value-creation potential of Best Western, as the suggested changes would lead to three out of four of Amit's et al (2012) value drivers, which can be seen in Figure 23.



*Figure 23. The different value drivers that are created through the changes to Best Western's business model, as suggested by this study*

A good way to make sense of the changes that have been presented to Best Western's business model is by answering the six questions regarding the activity system, presented by Amit et al. (2012). This is also a good way to evaluate the business model innovation, as the content, structure and governance of the new activity system will also be made clearer.

1. *What perceived need can be satisfied through the new business model design?*

First of all, with a centralized brand and a stronger focus on quality, Best Western is more well-equipped to eliminate one of the two major pain points of their current situation – Best Western losing their position in the market. Furthermore, these changes should also, to a larger extent than before, satisfy the needs and demands from the cognitive consumers. Secondly, the potential co-operation with Airbnb should fill the competency-hole that Best Western currently has within the fields of digitalization, which in extension should further satisfy the company's customers.

In short, the suggested changes should help to eliminate the current pain points of Best Western, helping the company to improve its brand identity.

2. *What novel activities are needed to satisfy these perceived needs? Meaning, in what way can the content of the activity system be innovated?*

The content of the activity system remains somewhat intact. However, in order to effectively improve the overall quality in Best Western's value proposition, certain quality-enhancing activities and processes should be created. This quality-related content is necessary in order to achieve business model fit between Best Western's Value map and the Customer Profile of the cognitive consumers (Osterwalder et al. 2014). However, at the same time, other forms of content, such as marketing activities currently performed decentralized and locally would be removed from the activity system.

3. *How could the required activities be linked to each other in novel ways? Meaning, how should the structure of the activity system be arranged?*

The structure of Best Western's activity system would change significantly. First of all, the interlinkages between the different activities would change naturally and indirectly when new content and new governance are introduced to the activity system (Amit et al. 2012). Furthermore, the centralization of the brand as well as the co-operation of Airbnb would alter the way activities such as sales, marketing, as well as other content, as these activities are interconnected to each other.

4. *Who should perform each of the activities that are part of the business model? What novel governance arrangements could enable this structure? Meaning how should the governance of the activity system look like?*

As already touched upon, two major changes concerning the governance of the activity system are being presented. The first major shift in governance is related to the centralizing of the brand. The second major shift in governance would be the fact that a larger part of the sales and promotion activities would be performed by shared economy players such as Airbnb. The centralization of the brand will lead to that the governance of the activity also becomes more centralized, since major functions and processes that previously have been regulated by each of Best Western's seven current brands would be controlled centrally

5. *How is value created through the novel business model for each of its participants?*

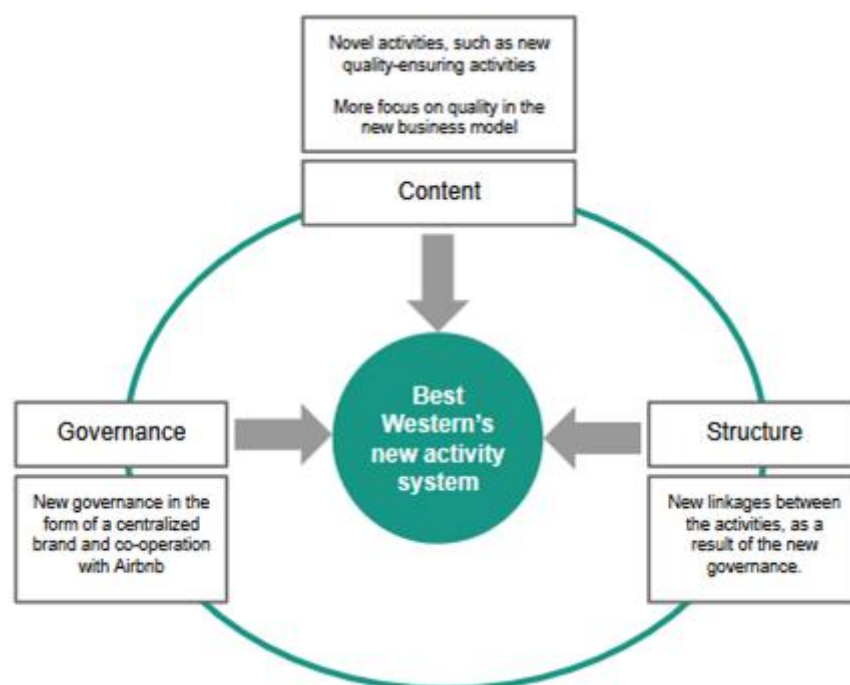
By centralizing the brand and adopting a quality-focused approach, Best Western should be able to regain their position in the industry, as a low-risk and reliable hotel chain with high-quality products and services. This should attract the cognitive consumers who are indeed



demanding these qualities from the hotel industry. Furthermore, the possible co-operation with shared economy firms, such as Airbnb, would also help to eliminate the other one of Best Western's current pain points – the company's incapability in the digital fields, which is something that the likes of Airbnb are good at. A company such as Airbnb should also have no problem with co-operating with Best Western as it would only increase the traffic on their platform. Finally, this co-operation could potentially allow Best Western to further tap into other customer segments, such as the experiential consumers.

6. *What revenue model fits with the company's business model to appropriate part of the total value it helps create?*

The revenue model of Best Western would to a large extent remain the same. The company will still earn revenue in the same old fashion as they always have been – be providing tourists and travelers with temporary accommodation. Furthermore, unlike for example Nestlé, which changed their revenue model upon the introduction of Nespresso to a so-called razorblade-model, profiting on re-occurring consumption of coffee-capsules, Best Western will not have to make such dramatic and radical changes to their revenue model. However, the suggested co-operation with the likes of Airbnb will of course lead to a slight change in the revenue model, as it would require sharing a small portion of the revenue with Airbnb, for example.



*Figure 24. The changes in Best Western's business model from an activity-system perspective*



In sort, this study argues that these changes could help Best Western to overcome the brand identity crisis the company is currently going through and helping Best Western to win back the trust of their main customers; the cognitive consumers. The suggested changes to the activity system can be observed in Figure 24. However, this strategic response mainly focuses on the cognitive consumers, while it to a large extent would ignore the other major consumer segment – the experiential consumers. Therefore, in the following section, an alternative strategic solution that is more adopted to this consumer segment will be presented.

### 6.2.2 Corporate Catalyst Innovation

An alternative and less radical solution is, as mentioned, for Best Western to engage in corporate catalyst innovation. According to Bower and Christensen (1996), it is necessary for incumbent firms to create a separate and independent organization far away from the mainstream customers, in order to foster disruptive technology as well as remaining innovative and competitive.

As have been discussed, Best Western appears to have severe problems with their digital capabilities, which in extension has affected the company's brand image negatively. In order to cope with this problem, an alternative would be for Best Western to put a lot of effort in to their digital capabilities and try to convince the consumers that they are in fact improving in these areas. However, while it is probably true that Best Western need to improve their digital capabilities internally, it is probable that such effort would have little, or at least a delayed, effect on the brand perception of the consumers. With this in mind, it would appear as if an internal solution to this problem would be considered too little and too late.

A more worthwhile option for Best Western could be to engage in co-operation, or investing, in a digital start-up that focuses on the hospitality industry. As mentioned by Markides and Geroski (2004), it is rare and hard for established firms such as Best Western to create new radical products themselves. However, should Best Western choose to engage in product innovation with the help of their own "Airbnb", Best Western could potentially catch up and compete with the likes of Airbnb and Hotels.com. Furthermore, according to Markides and Geroski (2004), it makes sense for established firms such as Best Western to consolidate young markets into big mass markets. If Best Western would, in accordance with Markides and Geroski's (2004) arguments, create a feeder network, consisting out of young entrepreneurial companies and startups, it is more likely the company could re-invent itself and their consumers' perception of their digital capabilities.

Therefore, as an alternative to the previously discussed business model innovation, which mainly focuses on the cognitive consumers, this study also suggests Best Western to engage in what Anthony (2012) calls corporate catalyst innovation, or corporate garage. In this manner, Best Western can form an innovation network that specializes in digital innovation, separated from the main operations of the company. Moreover, this potential strategic action could also lead to Best Western being able to further establish a value proposition that appeals to the experiential consumers, since they to a large extent demand well-functioning and innovative digital services.

Finally, contrary to the previously presented business model innovation solution, this approach would mean that Best Western, to a larger extent, would engage in full-on battle with Airbnb, as well as other digital players, such as Momondo or Hotels.com, which might be a risk full move. Therefore, this study recommends Best Western to prioritize the business model innovation suggestion, which has been previously discussed.

## 7. Conclusion

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This thesis project has primarily aimed to examine to what degree and extent the brand image of Best Western Hotels & Resorts changed before, during, and after the emergence of Airbnb as a disruptive innovation in the hospitality industry. This paper has answered this question through two main methods; sentiment analysis and netnography research. Other data, such as keyword analysis and social media statistics, has also been a factor here. Furthermore, the paper has also provided the reader with a solid knowledge base concerning the hospitality industry, the digital development in the industry, and the sharing economy, in the form of a practical framework. Moreover, theoretical concepts and framework related to both brand theory, such as brand equity, brand identity and brand image, as well as disruptive innovation theory have also been provided in order to establish a solid theoretical framework.

As a complementing sup-proposition, this thesis has also aimed to, based on the findings regarding the main research question, suggest possible strategic responses that Best Western Hotels & Resorts could apply in order to cope with the possible new competitive landscape, as a result of the emergence of Airbnb, and their current competitive position. These suggestions have been based on the analysis that could be performed in regard to this thesis main research question. In other words, the strategic suggestions have been adapted and based on Best Western's current situation in regard to consumer brand perception.

The first section of this paper introduced the topic, which included the definition of the academic problem that has been examined and an explanation of the study's limitations. This was followed by a practical background, covering topics such as the tourism and hospitality industry in general, the digital trend in the sector, as well as the emergence of Airbnb and the sharing economy. The sharing economy was also presented from a theoretical point of view in section three; the theoretical background. In section three, theories concerning disruptive innovation, branding, business model innovation, and corporate catalyst innovation were also covered. Section four described the different methodologies, mainly sentiment analysis and netnography, that have been used to answer the research question and the sup-proposition. Finally, in section five the findings of the above-mentioned methodologies are presented, which have then been analyzed, with respect to the theories and data presented in section two and three, in section six.

Section six and the analysis have been separated into two main parts; the first one discussing the current situation of Best Western in regard to their consumers' perception of the Best Western brand in relation to the emergence of the sharing economy and more specifically Airbnb. As has been discussed, this paper can find no direct correlation between the rise of Airbnb and the consumer sentiment or the consumer brand perception of Best Western. However, certain interesting factors and developments were identified and discussed. First of all, the netnography research showed that consumers perceived Best Western's digital capabilities to be unsatisfactory, which indicated that Best Western was not able to create a fit between the company's Value Map and the Customer Profile (Osterwalder et al. 2014). This was of particular interest considering the digital nature of the sharing economy and Airbnb. Secondly, this paper identified the two main customer segments of Best Western; the cognitive consumers and the experiential consumers. It was shown that the cognitive consumers, which were the most reoccurring customer type, expected more from Best Western in terms of quality regarding the rooms, facilities, and staff and management. This indicated that Best Western had lost, or at least is in the process of losing, their position in the marketplace, as the brand image of the company is being undermined. Furthermore, the sentiment analysis as well as the netnography research showed that during the last three years, i.e. 2015, 2016, and 2017, the negative sentiment and the consumer brand perception of Best Western have increased relatively drastically.

In regard to this thesis's research question, and considering the factors mentioned above, this study cannot, as mentioned, argue with certainty for any correlation between the emergence of the disruptive innovation of Airbnb and the consumer brand perception of Best Western over time. However, it does appear as if the technological paradigm created by the digital revolution and the sharing economy has not only created a technological trajectory where Best Western lags behind, but also a "demand trajectory" that the company has a hard time to keep up with. As a result, Best Western as a company appears to have lost itself in the market, not providing a sufficient value proposition to neither of their main customer segments.

As a strategic response to this development, and based on the theoretical frameworks put forward by, among others, Osterwalder et al. (2014) and Amit et al. (2012), this study suggest that Best Western should engage in business model innovation in order to regain their foothold in the industry. More specifically, three suggestions are made; (1) the centralization of the Best Western brand, (2) co-operation with a sharing economy firms such as Airbnb, and (3) increased focus and efforts in quality. The paper argues that these change to Best Western's

activity system should help restore their position in the industry as well as improving the consumer brand perception of the cognitive consumers, Best Western's main customer segment. Furthermore, as an alternative solution, and in order to create a value proposition that would attract the other major identified consumer segment, the experienced-focused consumers, this paper suggests corporate catalyst innovation.

Conclusively, this study finds no direct link between the rise and disruption of Airbnb in the hospitality industry and the consumer brand perception of Best Western over time. Therefore, it cannot be argued with certainty that Airbnb has directly affected the consumer brand perception of Best Western. However, it appears that the more general development of digitalization and the emergence of the shared economy have created a technological trajectory as well as a demand trajectory that Best Western, to a large extent, has been unable to follow. This appears to have resulted in Best Western losing its position in the industry. As a possible strategic response to this situation, this study suggest that Best Western engage in business model innovation or, alternatively, corporate catalyst innovation, depending on which customer segment, cognitive or experienced-focused, Best Western is the most interested in.

## 8. Future research

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The focus of this research has been to identify whether the disruption that Airbnb and the shared economy have brought on the traditional tourism hospitality industry affects the consumer brand perception of an incumbent firm over time. Due to the study's broad nature, the researchers limited the project to a case study in an industry that has faced many changes. With this in mind, Best Western was the brand that was investigated in terms of Airbnb's and the shared economy's emergence. Therefore, the key attributes of this research are that it is a case study, uses big data analytics and combines it with netnography. Considering these aspects of this paper, the limitation as well the key attributes of the study, it becomes apparent that certain areas and limitations are noteworthy for future research.

First of all, since this paper is limited to a case study, only examining the effects that an external disruptive innovation might cause on consumer brand perception on one specific company, the validity, more specifically the generalizability, of the study suffers to a certain extent. Therefore, one possible way of widening the scope, which can contribute to the growth of literature is to investigate the effects that the emergence of Airbnb and the sharing economy have had on the consumer brand perception of other international hotel chains, such as Hilton, Marriott, Intercontinental, and Holiday Inn, since these were also brands that consumers mentioned when switching from Best Western. In that case, the idea would be to investigate whether there has been a change in consumer brand image with the advent of Airbnb amongst other major competitors in the industry. This might create an outlook of the entire industry. Furthermore, and expanding on that notion, an even more ambitious continuation on this study would be to further expand the objective of study to other industries and markets, in order to truly shed light on the effects on consumer brand perception that external disruptive innovation might have.

Another possible direction for future research would be to further deepen the analysis in the specific case of Best Western, in order to increase the reliability of these results. Although this paper already is able to maintain a high degree of reliability due to its use of both quantitative as well as qualitative methods, it is not beyond improvement. In order to increase reliability and to acquire better insights regarding the context of the consumer sentiment, a sensible direction to take would be to engage even more heavily in netnography research and other qualitative methods. For example, setting up online interviews with the consumers that were

active on Best Western's Facebook page would be one way that can further expand on the context of their sentiment. The interview candidates would of course include a combination of consumers that hold across a wide spectrum, covering both positive and negative sentiments. As mentioned, other qualitative methods would also be of interest if the goal is to further expand on the context of the consumer sentiment. Focus groups or in-depth interviews with consumers could for example be of use. A deeper analysis could yield insights into the current consumer's mind in terms of key triggers in this day and age. Also, this might shed light on the actual extent of Airbnb's influence when discussing travelling.

Finally, as this paper identifies what appears to be a major shift in consumer sentiment in 2015-2017, which could be seen as radical shift in the consumer brand perception of Best Western, it would certainly be interesting to continue to study this development the upcoming five years. If this development is further monitored, it might be possible, to a greater extent at least, to conclude whether Airbnb's and the sharing economy's disruptive effect on Best Western takes time to show in the consumer brand perception, and if the consumer sentiment lags behind the actual technological trajectory.

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## 10. Appendices

### APPENDIX A: Sentiment Analysis Python

```
Textblob.py
1 sourceFile = 'C:/User/Marcus/Desktop/BW1.csv'
2
3 targetFile = 'C:/User/Marcus/Desktop/BW2.csv'
4
5 import csv
6 from textblob import Textblob
7
8 with open(sourceFile, encoding='latin-1' as csvfile:
9     fbDataReader = csv.reader(csvfile, delimiter=',')
10    header = next(fbDataReader)
11    next
12    header = ['Sentiment Label', 'Polarity', 'Subjectivity'] + header
13    with open(targetFile, 'w', newline='', encoding='latin-1') as writeFile:
14        fbTextWriter = csv.writer(writeFile, delimiter=',', quoting=csv.QUOTE_MINIMAL)
15        fbTextWriter.writerow(header)
16        for row in fbDataReader:
17            if len(row) != 1:
18                continue
19            tblob = Textblob(row[2])
20            if tblob.sentiment.polarity > 0:
21                label = 'positive'
22            elif tblob.sentiment.polarity < 0:
23                label = 'negative'
24            else:
25                label = 'neutral'
26            sentilist = [label, format(tblob.sentiment.polarity, '.2f'), format(tblob.sentiment.Subjectivity, '.2f')]
27            fbTextWriter.writerow(sentilist + row)
28    writeFile.close()
```

### APPENDIX B: Aggregate P/N Ratio of Best Western and Airbnb

Quarter		BW	Airbnb	Correlation	Average
2009 - Q3		0,538602941		0,333881968	0,5
2009 - Q4		0,508724832			0,5
2010 - Q1		0,58716104			0,5
2010 - Q2		0,471192661			0,5
2010 - Q3		0,370175439			0,5
2010 - Q4		0,379144642			0,5
2011 - Q1		0,231711712			0,5
2011 - Q2		0,376562928			0,5
2011 - Q3		0,411463612			0,5
2011 - Q4		0,414816016			0,5
2012 - Q1		0,581210718			0,5
2012 - Q2		0,423799127			0,5
2012 - Q3		0,411934379			0,5

<b>2012 - Q4</b>		0,496074089			0,5
<b>2013 - Q1</b>		0,527015058	0,482142857		0,5
<b>2013 - Q2</b>		0,543155026	0,460850112		0,5
<b>2013 - Q3</b>		0,50571003	0,48316913		0,5
<b>2013 - Q4</b>		0,425721352	0,425584256		0,5
<b>2014 - Q1</b>		0,530490086	0,33686067		0,5
<b>2014 - Q2</b>		0,51642888	0,375		0,5
<b>2014 - Q3</b>		0,546928916	0,403309204		0,5
<b>2014 - Q4</b>		0,447112367	0,396729255		0,5
<b>2015 - Q1</b>		0,560687528	0,401826484		0,5
<b>2015 - Q2</b>		0,501821825	0,321650835		0,5
<b>2015 - Q3</b>		0,52513465	0,372195893		0,5
<b>2015 - Q4</b>		0,583695968	0,402691511		0,5
<b>2016 - Q1</b>		0,531059683	0,249155405		0,5
<b>2016 - Q2</b>		0,258624148	0,272677892		0,5
<b>2016 - Q3</b>		0,371956339	0,297410192		0,5
<b>2016 - Q4</b>		0,318271335	0,3704988		0,5
<b>2017 - Q1</b>		0,227705813	0,377248855		0,5

## APPENDIX C: P/N Ratio of Best Western

<b>Month</b>	<b>Negative</b>	<b>Positive</b>	<b>Negative (-)</b>	<b>Net</b>	<b>PN-ratio</b>	<b>Average</b>
<b>2009 - Quarter 3</b>	251	293	-251	42	0,538602941	0,5
<b>2009 - Quarter 4</b>	732	758	-732	26	0,508724832	0,5
<b>2010 - Quarter 1</b>	746	1061	-746	315	0,58716104	0,5
<b>2010 - Quarter 2</b>	1441	1284	-1441	-157	0,471192661	0,5
<b>2010 - Quarter 3</b>	2513	1477	-2513	-1036	0,370175439	0,5
<b>2010 - Quarter 4</b>	2584	1578	-2584	-1006	0,379144642	0,5
<b>2011 - Quarter 1</b>	10660	3215	-10660	-7445	0,231711712	0,5
<b>2011 - Quarter 2</b>	6831	4126	-6831	-2705	0,376562928	0,5
<b>2011 - Quarter 3</b>	11613	8119	-11613	-3494	0,411463612	0,5
<b>2011 - Quarter 4</b>	7220	5118	-7220	-2102	0,414816016	0,5
<b>2012 - Quarter 1</b>	2532	3514	-2532	982	0,581210718	0,5
<b>2012 - Quarter 2</b>	5278	3882	-5278	-1396	0,423799127	0,5
<b>2012 - Quarter 3</b>	3262	2285	-3262	-977	0,411934379	0,5



<b>2012 - Quarter 4</b>	2503	2464	-2503	-39	0,496074089	0,5
<b>2013 - Quarter 1</b>	10680	11900	-10680	1220	0,527015058	0,5
<b>2013 - Quarter 2</b>	7712	9169	-7712	1457	0,543155026	0,5
<b>2013 - Quarter 3</b>	3982	4074	-3982	92	0,50571003	0,5
<b>2013 - Quarter 4</b>	3483	2582	-3483	-901	0,425721352	0,5
<b>2014 - Quarter 1</b>	2510	2836	-2510	326	0,530490086	0,5
<b>2014 - Quarter 2</b>	2237	2389	-2237	152	0,51642888	0,5
<b>2014 - Quarter 3</b>	3939	4755	-3939	816	0,546928916	0,5
<b>2014 - Quarter 4</b>	3523	2849	-3523	-674	0,447112367	0,5
<b>2015 - Quarter 1</b>	4984	6361	-4984	1377	0,560687528	0,5
<b>2015 - Quarter 2</b>	5469	5509	-5469	40	0,501821825	0,5
<b>2015 - Quarter 3</b>	1058	1170	-1058	112	0,52513465	0,5
<b>2015 - Quarter 4</b>	1435	2012	-1435	577	0,583695968	0,5
<b>2016 - Quarter 1</b>	9240	10464	-9240	1224	0,531059683	0,5
<b>2016 - Quarter 2</b>	14786	5158	-14786	-9628	0,258624148	0,5
<b>2016 - Quarter 3</b>	13464	7974	-13464	-5490	0,371956339	0,5
<b>2016 - Quarter 4</b>	12462	5818	-12462	-6644	0,318271335	0,5
<b>2017 - Quarter 1</b>	7214	2127	-7214	-5087	0,227705813	0,5
	166344					

## APPENDIX D: P/N Ratio of Airbnb

<b>Month</b>	<b>Negative</b>	<b>Positive</b>	<b>Negative (-)</b>	<b>Net</b>	<b>PN-ratio</b>	<b>Average</b>
<b>2013 - Quarter 1</b>	203	189	-203	-14	0,482142857	0,5
<b>2013 - Quarter 2</b>	241	206	-241	-35	0,460850112	0,5
<b>2013 - Quarter 3</b>	1259	1177	-1259	-82	0,48316913	0,5
<b>2013 - Quarter 4</b>	467	346	-467	-121	0,425584256	0,5
<b>2014 - Quarter 1</b>	752	382	-752	-370	0,33686067	0,5
<b>2014 - Quarter 2</b>	450	270	-450	-180	0,375	0,5
<b>2014 - Quarter 3</b>	577	390	-577	-187	0,403309204	0,5
<b>2014 - Quarter 4</b>	996	655	-996	-341	0,396729255	0,5
<b>2015 - Quarter 1</b>	1179	792	-1179	-387	0,401826484	0,5
<b>2015 - Quarter 2</b>	2071	982	-2071	-1089	0,321650835	0,5
<b>2015 - Quarter 3</b>	1987	1178	-1987	-809	0,372195893	0,5
<b>2015 - Quarter 4</b>	1154	778	-1154	-376	0,402691511	0,5



<b>2016 - Quarter 1</b>	7112	2360	-7112	-4752	0,249155405	0,5
<b>2016 - Quarter 2</b>	5356	2008	-5356	-3348	0,272677892	0,5
<b>2016 - Quarter 3</b>	4205	1780	-4205	-2425	0,297410192	0,5
<b>2016 - Quarter 4</b>	14160	8334	-14160	-5826	0,3704988	0,5
<b>2017 - Quarter 1</b>	11146	6752	-11146	-4394	0,377248855	0,5

## APPENDIX E: Sentiment of Best Western in Percent Per Year

The first table presents that aggregated numbers of positive, negative and neutral comments per year. The second table presents the respective percentages per year.

	<b>Positive</b>	<b>Neutral</b>	<b>Negative</b>	<b>Total</b>
<b>2009</b>	1278	321	1059	<b>2658</b>
<b>2010</b>	5400	1819	7284	<b>14503</b>
<b>2011</b>	20578	6739	36324	<b>63641</b>
<b>2012</b>	12145	2470	13575	<b>28190</b>
<b>2013</b>	27725	4715	25857	<b>58297</b>
<b>2014</b>	12829	1698	12209	<b>26736</b>
<b>2015</b>	15052	3032	12946	<b>31030</b>
<b>2016</b>	29414	4249	49952	<b>83615</b>
<b>2017</b>	2127	244	7214	<b>9585</b>
	<b>126548</b>	<b>25287</b>	<b>166420</b>	<b>318255</b>
	<b>0,397630831</b>	<b>0,079455154</b>	<b>0,522914015</b>	<b>1</b>

<b>Percent</b>	<b>Positive</b>	<b>Neutral</b>	<b>Negative</b>
<b>2009</b>	0,480812641	0,120767494	0,398419865
<b>2010</b>	0,372336758	0,125422326	0,502240916
<b>2011</b>	0,323345013	0,105890857	0,57076413
<b>2012</b>	0,430826534	0,087619723	0,481553742
<b>2013</b>	0,475581934	0,080878947	0,443539119
<b>2014</b>	0,479839916	0,063509874	0,456650209
<b>2015</b>	0,485078956	0,097711892	0,417209152
<b>2016</b>	0,351778987	0,050816241	0,597404772
<b>2017</b>	0,221909233	0,025456442	0,752634324

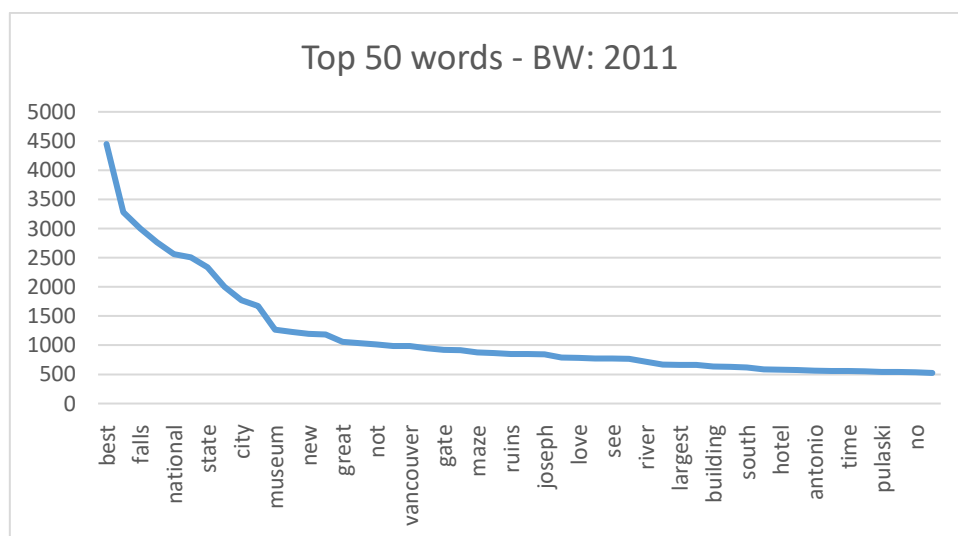
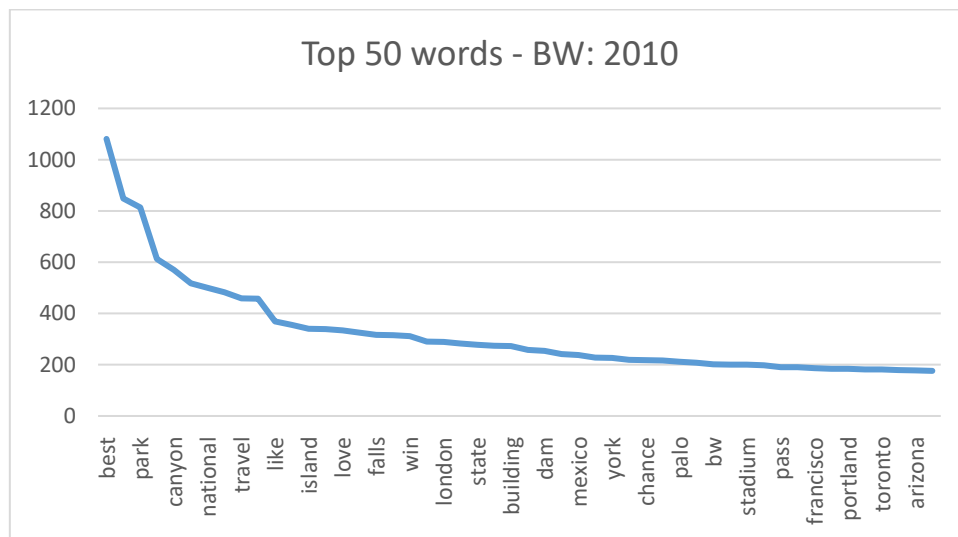
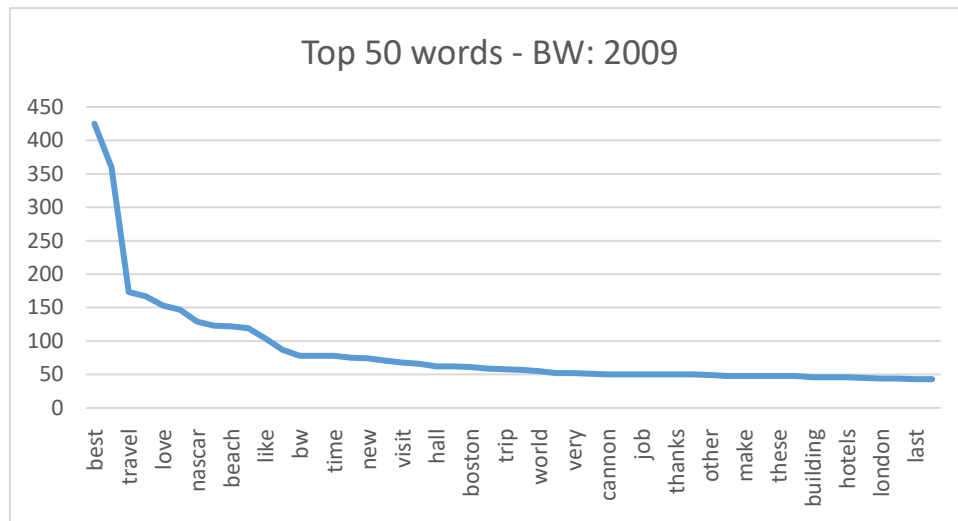
## APPENDIX F: Sentiment of Airbnb in Percent Per Year

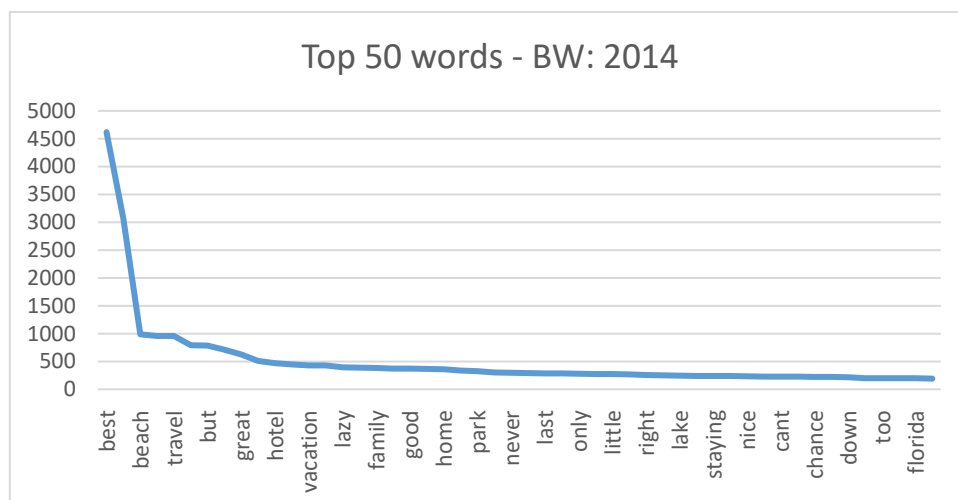
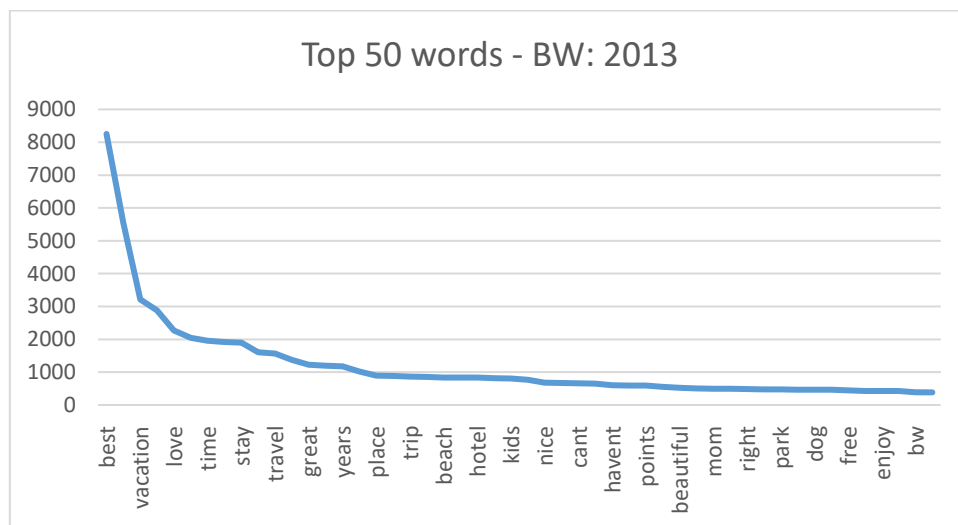
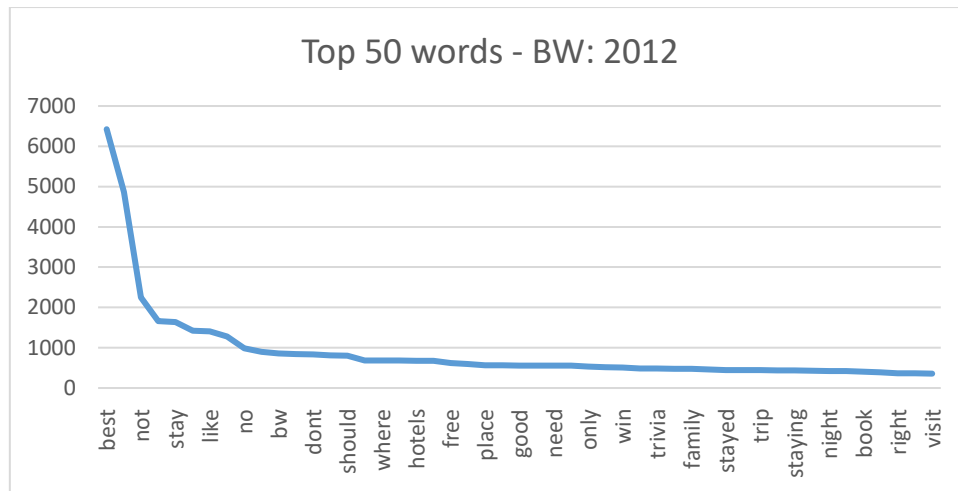
The first table presents that aggregated numbers of positive, negative and neutral comments per year. The second table presents the respective percentages per year.

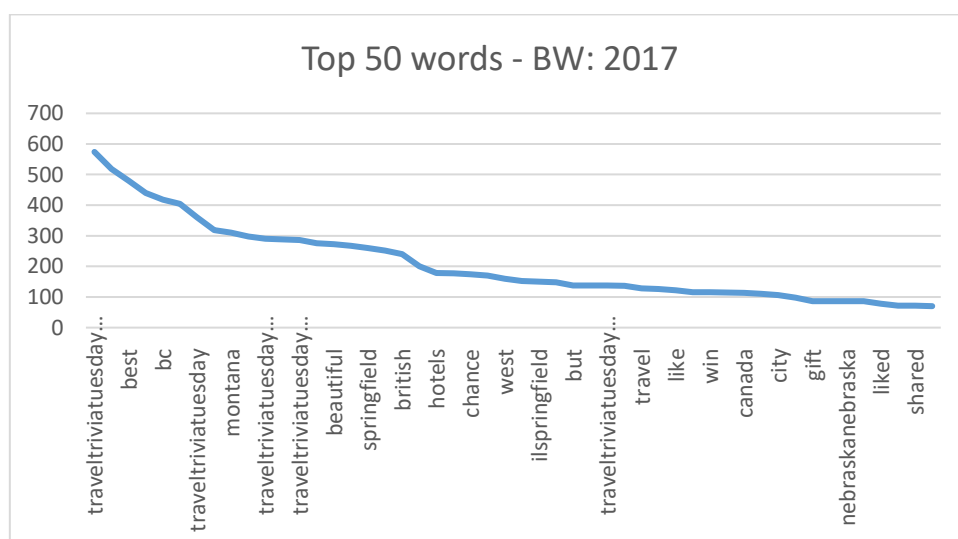
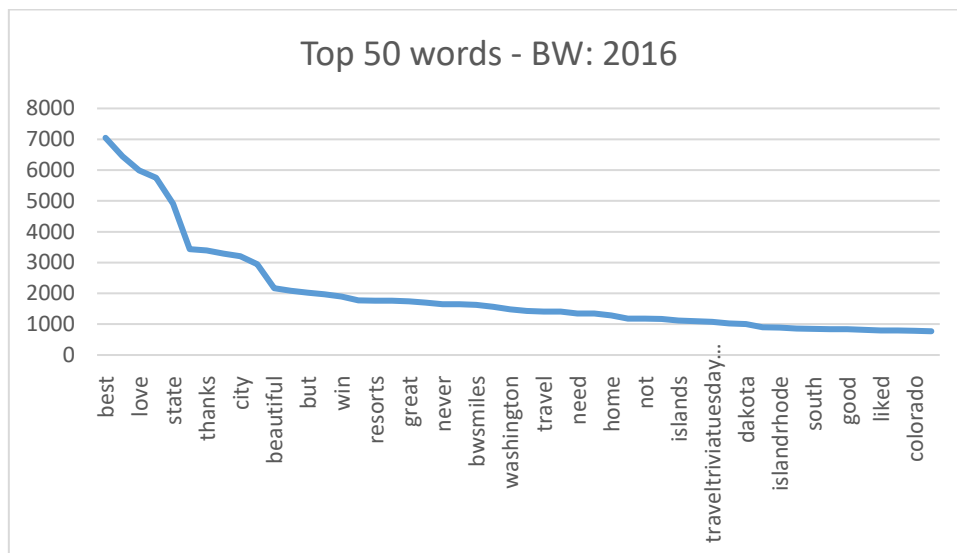
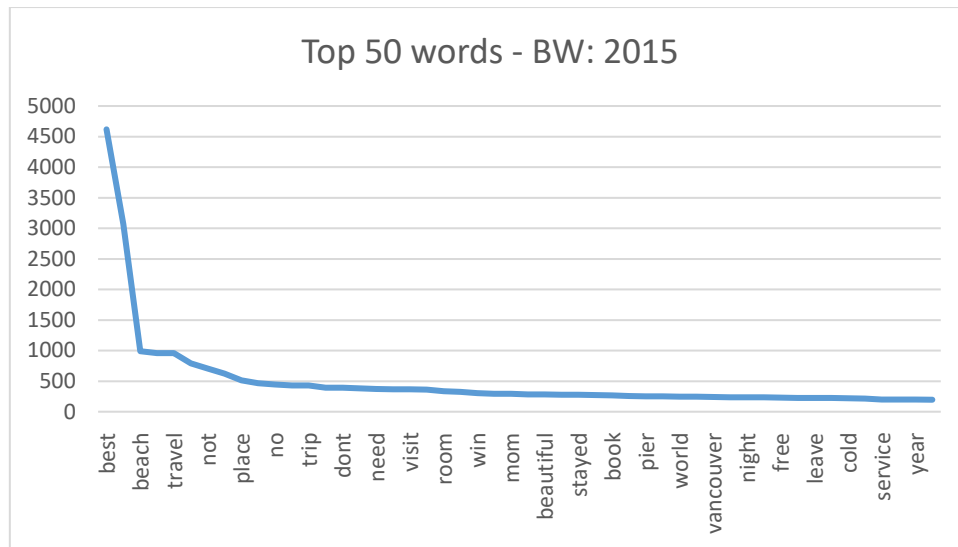
	Positive	Neutral	Negative	Total
<b>2010</b>	194	94	182	<b>470</b>
<b>2011</b>	943	258	1127	<b>2328</b>
<b>2012</b>	15	5	14	<b>34</b>
<b>2013</b>	1918	611	2170	<b>4699</b>
<b>2014</b>	1697	479	2775	<b>4951</b>
<b>2015</b>	3730	1248	6391	<b>11369</b>
<b>2016</b>	14482	4891	30833	<b>50206</b>
<b>2017</b>	6752	1585	11146	<b>19483</b>

Procent	Positive	Neutral	Negative
<b>2010</b>	0,412765957	0,2	0,387234043
<b>2011</b>	0,405068729	0,110824742	0,484106529
<b>2012</b>	0,441176471	0,147058824	0,411764706
<b>2013</b>	0,408171951	0,130027665	0,461800383
<b>2014</b>	0,342759039	0,096748132	0,56049283
<b>2015</b>	0,328085144	0,109772188	0,562142669
<b>2016</b>	0,288451579	0,097418635	0,614129785
<b>2017</b>	0,346558538	0,081352974	0,572088487

## APPENDIX G: Keyword Analysis by Year (2009 to 2017)

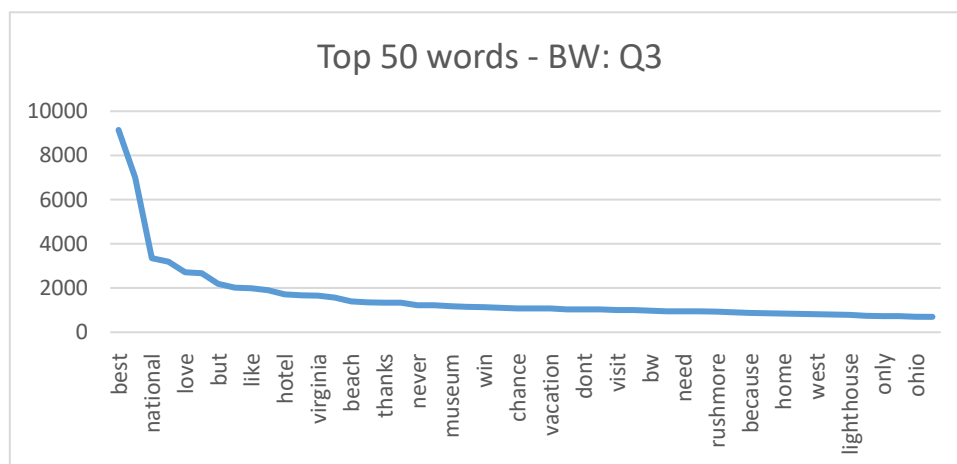
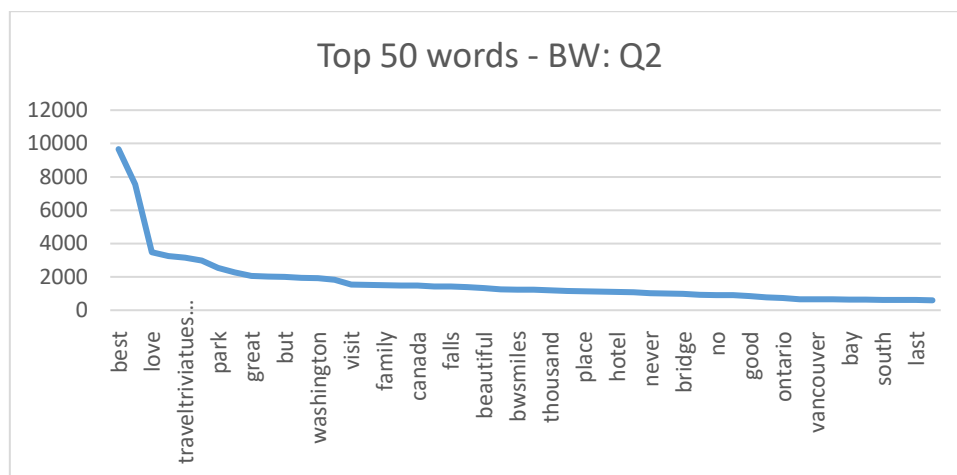
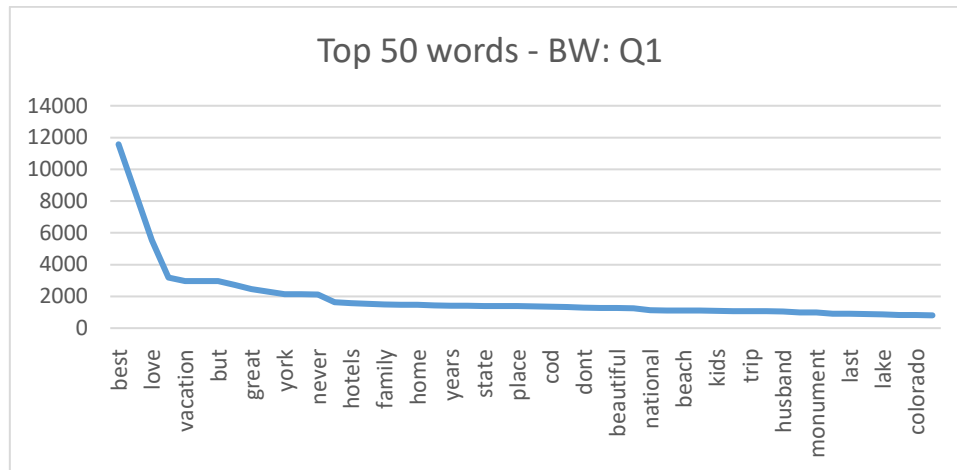


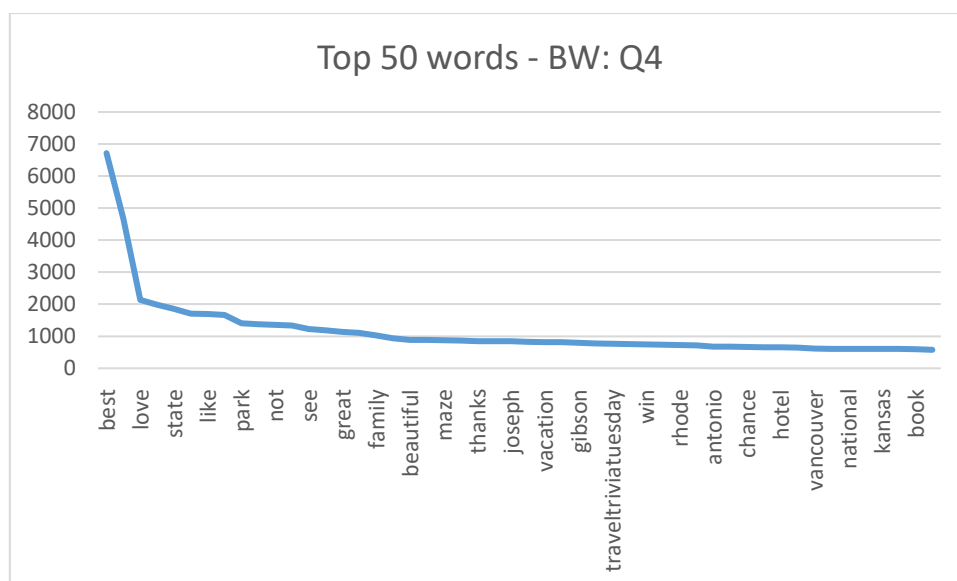




## APPENDIX H: Keyword Analysis by Quarter

The following graphs represent the accumulation of key words that were used in quarter 1 of all the years investigated.





## APPENDIX I: Words Excluded From the Keyword Analysis

The following are a collection words that were removed from the keyword analysis as they were deemed irrelevant.

The, to, and, in, a, of, is, I, you, for, this, it, at, on, my, that, we, was, with, are, have, be, your, would, so, as, all, there, stay, go, can, one, than, see, get, our, will, but, out, or, more, they, just, up, an, do, its, when, am, us, about, if, now, from, me, what, by, has, had, been, ben, some, them, back, where, here, much.

## APPENDIX J: Posts and Comments Regarding Staff and Management

The following messages are posts and comments made by consumers regarding staff and management behavior during hotel stays. 185 references coded.

### Reference 1 – Posted on March 2017

And the clincher - we had a clog in the toilet and I was handed the plunger to fix it myself

### Reference 2 - Posted on March 2017

Front desk folks were nice but maintenance and management really lacked here

### Reference 3 – Posted on March 2017

I am a Diamond rewards member and when I booked the hotel and knowing the hotel I had a special request, only one." As far away from the train tracks as possible" as I knew I would not sleep close to them. Well upon check in nothing said go to my room and they could not have been closer to the train tracks unless I was on the tracks. Apparently, no other room available, this reservation was not done on the day I check in and obviously no one read the requests. Sorry this hotel is definitely on the NEVER AGAIN LIST

Reference 4 - Posted on March 2017

I asked for the manager and she said sorry, I'll give you some point if you want to sign up. No I don't want to sign up. You want to give me rewards? That is the worst resolution I could have been offered.

Reference 5 - Posted on March 2017

Maybe the employees at Best Western should go stay there and take note...

Reference 6 - Posted on March 2017

We're extremely disappointed with the way employees choose to respond to issues that customers have regarding their reservations and stays at this hotel location. Worst customer service ever.

Reference 7 – Commented on March 2017

I've already called Customer Care only to be told the same thing I was initially told by the Front Office Manager at the Best Western Plus Hotel & Suites Atlanta Airport South location. The way this matter is being handled is completely unacceptable and extremely disappointing.

Reference 8 - Posted on March 2017

Thank you so very much to Kirsten from your new Visalia Sequoia Gateway hotel. My sister is traveling 6 hours to our house and ran into an emergency and has to stop halfway. Kirsten got her booked for a hotel tonight with zero hassle and was VERY helpful. Give Kirsten a raise! (or at least a good review for when raises are considered)

Reference 9 - Posted on March 2017

I called the front desk to report the problem, she asked if I wanted new ones so I could make the bed! When I said that wasn't my job, she offered to move us and the room she moved us to was under construction. She moved us back to the old room and changed the sheets and went to put the dirty pillows back on the bed! When asked why she wasn't changing the pillow cases, she said you just said the sheets!! The next day asked to speak



with the manager on duty and was told there was no manager! Never received a call from the manager and when I called the corporate office, their response was to offer a coupon for a discount and when I said that wasn't good enough, the customer care representative said to me, well you did stay the night!! This was a classless hotel all the way up to the corporate headquarters in Phoenix!! Wouldn't recommend this hotel to anyone EVER!!!!

#### Reference 10 – Commented on March 2017

I've been dealing with the "corporate office" since Wednesday & Colin only keeps asking if I've called the corporate office in my nightmare with BW. In total agreement with the worst customer service ever! Good luck to you!

#### Reference 11 - Posted on March 2017

Housekeeping stole my wallet this morning, Manager didn't even want to help, was hiding behind walls. I was starting to like this hotel a lot, my stuff should not come up stolen from my room. I Make minimum income. Only 19 supporting 2 children, I filed a police report but I wish more could be done

#### Reference 12 - Posted on March 2017

Sue who is their Jacksonville manager is the best. Thank you Sue for a wonderful stay

#### Reference 13

Sue and the staff made sure we had what we needed to be comfortable. My husband and I work the East Texas power plants, there are times that we may stay 2 days or something may break and 2 days turns into 5. Sue made sure we had a room to stay in. When we go to work we may find out we need to come back the next day at the last minute. It's just great to know that people like Sue understand this. It makes it so much easier for us. Thank you and Sue for your understanding

#### Reference 14 - Posted on March 2017

Without asking for a discount, I was told that price is usually \$135 but would only charge me \$125. Great. Except was charged \$135.99. I brought it to the clerk's attention and she actually denied ever having told me it would be \$125! Amazing. We always stay at BW when we visit family in Mexico but never again. I really dislike dishonesty.

#### Reference 15 – Commented on March 2017

Good idea! I will have to get a Twitter Account. What I learned about Best Western is that unbelievably, they allow the individual hotels to operate under their own policies and corporate won't intervene. The local hotel

management seems to think that giving a refund for 2 of 3 nights or full credit for a future stay at their hotel is acceptable. They just blame it on "User Error" and don't want to fix it because they already charged the full amount.

#### Reference 16 - Posted on March 2017

The manager, Erica, and her staff were the most accommodating and compassionate group of people I have ever experienced at a hotel. I can't say enough about them. We were unfortunately gathered for a funeral service, some of us traveling 1200+ miles. Erica made us feel like we were at home. We will be back, hands down the best hotel experience ever!

#### Reference 17 - Posted on March 2017

Anyways, we get our trailer today, then sit through 4 wonderful hours of Atlanta traffic only to get to your beautiful hotel and be told they can't help me because their rooms only accommodate 4 people. So now I am left to attempt to find a decent hotel in this area. This is the last thing I want to do after driving for 24 hours on little sleep. Horrible experience I won't stay with u guys again

#### Reference 18 – Commented on March 2017

Management at the hotel said if she doesn't like it she could go stay somewhere else. Real nice customer service you have there!

#### Reference 19 - Posted on March 2017

No one at desk after midnight

#### Reference 20 - Posted on March 2017

When confronted about the situation we were told there was NOTHING they could do and that we weren't getting our money back.

#### Reference 21 – Commented on March 2017

there were repairs being made to all the rooms on my floor and there were debris of wood and nails all over the place, which is not safe for any guest as it is. Furthermore, the repair work went on till 2-3Am at night for 2 consecutive nights. Despite me asking them to stop since it was a very unreasonable hour, they continued working thus rendering me sleepless. I finally got sleep and slept in till 11:30 and was abruptly called and asked to checkout since the checkout time was 11. I mentioned how I've been sleepless due to the work and I was told I can stay in, but clearly by this time I had made up my mind to leave. Upon confronting the manager to explain

and escalate the situation, I was called a liar and was told that I would be shown pictures that the work ended at 9:30. I simply asked to review the CCTV footage as proof, because I know they were working till past midnight since I myself got out to tell the workers to stop. The manager refused to show me the footage and was adamant about just showing me some pictures, which can be from any time of the day

#### Reference 22 - Posted on March 2017

Ladies and Gentlemen, please avoid this hotel by all means. I was one of many staying there for a family wedding and everyone was disappointed. This is one of two videos I will be posting. Also everyone in the staff is extremely rude!

#### Reference 23 – Commented on March 2017

I've already called management who has denied my reimbursement, for both my rooms. There is an open issue, and a no can do attitude from staff and management

#### Reference 24 - Posted on March 2017

My son being 9 left his wallet in the drawer of the room after we had checked out. It being filled with his birthday money from family and friends we called about an hour after departing the hotel to have them get the wallet before someone else took the room. The staff told us that the cleaning crew would have found it and they would go check. Now we checked out at noon. You're not able to get into a room until 3pm. So no one was in the room other than the staff at the hotel. The front desk told us they would contact us as soon as they found it. A day went by and we called back. The front desk told me that they never found it. So I called and asked for the manager on Sunday. (2 days later) She was out so I called back first thing on Monday morning. The manager told me she would check with all the staff and get back with me. Never got a call. My opinion about this place. Stay away. Sad that someone would take from a young boy on his birthday.

#### Reference 25 - Posted on March 2017

I spend only one night at this Hotel with my two boys! Once we get there they ask me to pay a \$100 deposit with the promise that they were going to return it in the next 24 Hours! But that never happens! I call to the Hotel 5 times in 5 days! Almost 2 weeks later they returned the money but they took \$15! I call to the Hotel to ask why and they inform me that they charge me that money because one of the towels was too dirty "Of course I have two 8 years boys" this is ridiculous! So next time you go to this Hotel bring your own towels or you are going to be charged!! Too much!!

#### Reference 26 - Posted on March 2017

THIEF IN THE HOUSE--HOTEL SPRING HOUSE, Rome Italy: Someone affiliated with this hotel franchise, we're guessing the maid, on our second day here, stole a pair of expensive shoes of mine from the room. The hotel is not giving us information about the maid so we can report the incident to the police. This is a small hotel and it is more than likely they know exactly who the maid was that was in the room that day. Don't stay here.

Reference 27 - Posted on March 2017

Don't trust this hotel (Hobart) with your credit/debit card !!!  
They have cleared out my bank account of almost \$500 over the weekend leaving me in financial hardship.  
I cancelled a booking due to illness yet they are calling me a liar and charged me a no show fee.  
Their policy states the first night is charged yet they took it upon themselves to take 3 nights accomodation.

Reference 28 – Commented on March 2017

the best western hotel in la pine oregon have very caring and helpful staff. . .and the place has good amenities. .  
.

Reference 29 - Posted on March 2017

We were so pleased! Every single staff member at the hotel--from John at the bar--to Alex the shuttle driver--to ALL of the front desk people--to even housekeeping in the morning-- was amazingly friendly!

Reference 30 - Posted on March 2017

friendly staff

Reference 31 - Posted on March 2017

What is the policy if a maid accidentally gets bleach on your clothes while cleaning?

Reference 32 - Posted on March 2017

the reception after trying to impose that I stayed for one night in that room (I asked money back for it) had to find another room for me. Obviously the only room they had was a three bed room, not my fault. Fifteen minutes on a "lady" call the room phone and screams that I have to leave the room the next morning. I said do not scream and she hung up on me. She came to my room and literally bang on the door. I have been using Best Western for sometime I never thought this could happen

Reference 33 - Posted on March 2017

My daughter went to the front desk to complain and they were very nonchalant about, offering her no resolution

#### Reference 34

I phoned Best Western Customer Care and they were of no help, saying that the hotel itself would have to rectify the problem as they are individually owned.

Photo of shower walls

#### Reference 35 - Posted on March 2017

the General Manager is aware of this situation but never reach out to me to resolved the issue.

#### Reference 36 - Posted on March 2017

There is a young black man at the desk that usually checks us in. I unfortunately don't have his name, but I want to let you know that he is a great asset to your company. He is amazingly friendly, empathetic in regard to our long day, super efficient and professional. I'm pretty cranky by that point in the day, but he always manages to end it for me on a high note. I can't tell you how much I appreciate that, and I can't thank him enough.

#### Reference 37 - Posted on March 2017

Resepionist was rude!

#### Reference 38 – Posted on February 2017

The worst hotel ever. The walls and ceilings are paper thin. I could have stayed on the Strip for half the cost.

Our first room, I got off the elevator and the floor was filled with pot smoke. It was loud with people and music and babies screaming. I immediately went down to the front desk to change my room.

I told the front desk about the pot smoking, her response, are you sure? Do you know where it came from?

Then she asked if I messed up the bed, if not she could sell the room to someone when didn't mind the pot smell. I didn't find this funny.

They gave me another room, this room has a stadium light outside the window whixh shines directly in which the blackout curtains didn't close all the way.

At 11:30 a couple came in next door, yelling and screaming at our doorway, then on to the room next door. I called the front desk, the response was, I'll ask them to be quiet. I heard their phone ring, and then their response, more yelling. It didn't help.

Reference 39 – Posted on February 2017

. The front desk was NOT helpful.

Reference 40 - Posted on February 2017

when I called your Jamaica ,New York BW @ 5:30 in the morning in a complete panic because my daughter had landed early @JFK & couldn't get into her sublet til noon. I was calling from Az. & Kira @ the front desk was so helpful explaining how to direct my daughter to a free shuttle & she was so understanding about this mom freaking out about her kid in NYC alone & was right there when my kid got there & directed her right to the free breakfast since she'd been flying all night. Thank you BW-that's why I always stay with you

Reference 41 -Commented on February 2017

the staff was very nice.

Reference 42 - Posted on February 2017

They cleaned our room when we had the do not disturb sign on the door..The worker who was there most of the time for the front desk was very friendly, but every time we asked for a discount or to speak to the manager she said "I have to call the owner" would not contact them in front of us, and always said he was busy. We definitely got pushed under the rug.

Reference 43 - Posted on February 2017

The two rooms next to me that were smoking pot were just great. The manager did nothing

Reference 44 - Posted on February 2017

Upon arrival I had to wait 5 minutes for anyone to appear to check me in, during that time the reception desk was totally unattended.

Reference 45 - Posted on February 2017

Very clean, front desk was very nice.

Reference 46 - Posted on February 2017

Just want to say thank you to your staff at your Kalispell location. We had an unexpected emergency with our car on our anniversary night and your manager and staff there were very accomdating and helpful. I have never seen a more customer-oriented staff or greater customer servise.even tho it put them in a position to have wait on payment. Thank you for helping us in our time of need.:)

Reference 47 - Posted on February 2017

Janine was an absolute pleasure to deal with. She went above and beyond to accommodate us, offered us an upgrade due to being a Rewards Member, and was extremely friendly. She even called up to the room to make sure everything was okay with the room a little while after check in. Fantastic experience and an excellent start to our vacation! Thank you, Janine!

Reference 48 -

Best Western is currently our place to call 'Home' and all of the employees sure have made it felt this way - maybe even better since we get a lovely Greeting every day :D. They have been absolutely amazing with their friendly smiles and have been very accommodating. The suites are booked up most weekends but have done their best to save a room for us or move our belongings to a different room

Reference 49

Thank you Best Western for your fantastic service and for employing and training such great individuals!

Reference 50 - Posted on February 2017

Special thanks to Katherine at the front desk and the bellman on 2/8.

Reference 51 - Posted on February 2017

Extraordinarily dissatisfied with Best Western. When we travel now, we will stay anywhere but with them. We have traveled to the same hotel every year for the last 10 years to visit my son. We were just there from Sunday to Tuesday of this week. We went through Expedia and booked and paid in full. When we went to check out, we were told we need to pay in full. When I tried to tell her that we paid already, she accused us of lying and would not let my husband , myself and our special needs child (who was getting into trouble in the lobby) leave and she accused us of stealing services since we did not want to pay. I am not a thief and do not like being accused of one. I called BW and they said it is the hotel's problem where we stayed. The hotel said that it is Expedia's problem. Expedia said that it is the hotel's problem. So now we have paid twice. Currently I want all charges to be dropped even the one that we paid originally and at the hotel because I

don't like being called a thief. So terribly angry. So embarrassed. Not that BW will do anything about this. I really doubt it.

#### Reference 52 - Posted on February 2017

We chose the Best Western Plus Perth for the free breakfast (that is a deal breaker for us). When we checked in we asked about it. The desk clerk said "we don't serve free breakfast" and directed us to the restaurant on site. We assumed we had made a mistake when we booked so went up to our (otherwise very nice) room. There we checked your hotel website and it said,

"Free continental breakfast". Two other websites, including TripAdvisor, Google, and hotels.com also said "free breakfast".

We went downstairs to inform the desk clerk that there must be a mistake because all your advertising says "free breakfast". She was NOT helpful. She said we (my partner and I) must have made a mistake, that it was not on "our" website. We tried to show her but she would not look. We told her it was also on the websites of your advertisers. She said, "we told them to change it".

I said, "isn't it incumbent upon you to make SURE they change it?" She looked at her computer screen and shrugged us off as if to say, "that's YOUR problem".

We are reasonable people. We realize mistakes are made. All we ask is for the people who take our money to at least apologize.

This is what it says on YOUR website:

"There are also a number of complimentary amenities such as; our Salt Water Mineral Spa and hot tub, steam room, fitness room, CONTINENTAL BREAKFAST, and Wi-Fi."

We are not "complainers" but advertising free breakfast and then not delivering it is blatantly false advertising. We suggested there should be an adjustment on our bill. No response. It's unfortunate the desk clerk did not simply say, "we are so sorry. Let me look into this and get back to you. Thank you for alerting us to our mistake." If she had, I would not be sitting here writing this complaint for really, really bad service. Check the third paragraph....

#### Reference 53 – Commented on February 2017

We had a very similar experience at BW in Ottawa two years ago. We also received a similar unapologetic response.

To your point Susan Stewart, at least their training is consistent.

#### Reference 54 - Commented on February 2017

It should not take having to complain publicly on social media to fix this. The "customer service" provided by the desk clerk was appalling. What kind of training or managerial oversight does the staff receive? How long



exactly has the advertised complimentary amenity of continental breakfast not been provided? If your OWN material is still advertising it, what excuse is there?

Reference 55 – Posted on February 2017

I'll be back. Didn't want to leave.

Much better than on reservation website. Staff is more than top notch!

Reference 56 - Posted on February 2017

Nicol, at the reception desk even loaned me mer personal iPhone charger for my phone overnight! I

Reference 57 - Posted on February 2017

the workers give an excellent attention and with very good education

Reference 58 - Posted on February 2017

I called the front desk at the best western Tucson inn and suites to ask for a blanket only to be told " I don't think we have any"! Not Good

Reference 59 - Posted on February 2017

I would recommend NEVER EVER stay in this branch. Worst unpleasant staff. Rude and Ignoring cleaning members. Everyone gives you stories and false promises. You have to fight to get the complimentary items daily in your room. Moody staff.

Reference 60 - Posted on February 2017

Expressed my concern at the front desk and he said basically there is nothing he could do. I guess I can do something by not staying at the BW Plus when I travel.

Reference 61 - Posted on February 2017

The lady at the desk had a bad attitude. Said BW does not take hotel coupon since october even if the book was current for winter 2017 (picked at North Carolina welcome center). Rate was 112\$ + Tx).

Said was false advertising but she did not care. We quit.

I will never stop at this hotel again

Reference 62 - Posted on January 2017

My mom...A POTENTIAL DYING CANCER PATIENT WHO RELIED ON THIS HOTEL FOR PERTINENT AND POSSIBLY LIFE SAVING TREATMENT KICKED MY MOM OUT. Their reasoning? Multiple "incidents" that have involved the smell of marijuana smoke "coming from her room." Let me start out with my major point; my mom is a lung cancer patient. LUNG cancer. LUNG!! If my mom were to have a medical marijuana certificate...which, as a LUNG cancer patient, she would be over qualified for...I can assure and reassure anyone and everyone that any medication my mom is prescribed is not consumed through inhalation. Second of all, these "managers" and employees were far from curious or polite to my mom...A CANCER PATIENT. This is supposed to be here time to get away and focus on her, and instead, my mom was constantly in anxiety attacks due to the harassment from these people. This included a woman who literally swore, was disrespectful, and physically attempted to prevent my mom from closing her hotel room. This is far from the treatment a cancer treatment patient should be receiving.

Reference 63 - Posted on January 2017

The only good part of the stay was a wonderful young woman at breakfast,she told us they called her GerberBaby. She was terrific.

Reference 64 - Posted on January 2017

Sunday 1/22/17 a storm hit South Georgia, this storm has already made national news for how catastrophic it was. My wife, sister in law and mother in law were on their way back from Florida and got caught in the tornado that was coming through Ashburn, Ga. The tornado sirens were going off and the emergency broadcast was telling people to find shelter. So they did, first a gas station who proceeded to kick them out then they came to one of your establishments. Who tried to do the same thing! They tried to kick my family out when all they where trying to do was find shelter! After the employee figured out that they were not going to leave or be forced to leave, they locked the doors..... with 2 other people outside!! The employee proceeded to let those 2 individuals stand out in this storm! After a few minutes of waiting my mother in law opened the door for them to come in since it was apparent that the employee would not. This is beyond me! This storm system was deadly, if you want to know just how deadly check the national news! Why would you try to lock people out when they are trying to find shelter! Why would you try to kick people out! This is unacceptable and it seems not that important to you as a business. I called corporate, all they did was push me off to the hotel it happened at. You as a business should care enough about human life to take notice of this instead of just shrugging it off!

Reference 65 - Posted on January 2017

My grandma was trying to pay for a hotel room over the phone while I was standing there, and the front counter guy caught a nasty attitude with my dear great aunt because he had couldn't understand her the first time she read her number and then proceeded to thrust the phone in my hand and say he couldn't help us. We left. Very disappointed.

Reference 66 - Posted on January 2017

The receptionist, Dee, was fantastic! Also....the breakfast staff, especially Charlene, was dynamite! We will be back to the area in May and plan to stay here again! Well done!

Reference 67 - Posted on January 2017

Staff was extremely friendly,

Reference 68 - Posted on January 2017

I asked for maintenance and a manager and was told there was no maintenance or managers available on weekends

Reference 69 - Posted on January 2017

Requested clean room but they requested us to pay again...never again....left this mess

Reference 70 - Posted on January 2017

I have never dealt with a more discourteous and inept "hospitality" company than this one.

Reference 71 - Posted on January 2017

Is it your practice to not contact a guest back with a major concern with a location? I sent an email directly to the hotel we stayed at this past weekend and still have not heard anything from the Manager there. This is horrible practice if this is the way your treat your guests.

Reference 72 - Posted on January 2017

Best Western staff put everything on the table for us to eat at one time and then disappeared, we could even find anyone in the kitchen to refill coffee

Reference 73 - Posted on January 2017

Thank you so much best Western in norwalk ohio ...my family was displaced during a massive power outage and your manager Susan was super helpful and accommodating

Reference 74 - Posted on January 2017

Cedric at front desk took the time to work out a driving plan to get past stopped interstate. Thanks guys

Reference 75 - Posted on January 2017

My husband travels on business & I go with him, these people are the friendliest people in any if the hotels we've been to. Every employee here smiles & acknowledges you.. from the front desk to maintenance to the woman that clean the rooms !! Terry does the breakfast in the morning - the food & drinks never run out & there is not 1 dirty table in the room- she does what it would take 4 people to do. Terry is friendly & will help you with anything you need- PLEASANTLY- no mumbling or eye rolls. what a pleasure. ALL hotels should be run like this one.

Reference 76 - Posted on January 2017

While not rude, he would not listen to any explanation whatsoever. I even offered to send him a copy of the voucher and the change to my Avis reservation. No was the only word in his vocabulary.

Reference 77 - Posted on January 2017

front desk was not available by phone. general manager will not offer a discount for inconvenience, nor will he return a call to discuss what happened.

Reference 78 - Posted on January 2017

I had a horrible experience from your rude and disrespectful staff

Reference 79 - Posted on January 2017

Happiest and lovelist hotel staff we came across during our whole stay in America! So helpful and happy.

Reference 80 - Posted on January 2017

We were told that the mgnt would contact us and it is now 12/31 and the there has been no attempt to return multiple emails and request for refund was declined by the hotel when contacted by travelocity.

Reference 81 - Posted on December 2016

I want to publicly thank Jack Robertson of Best Western Plus Myrtle Beach 1804 S Ocean Drive for his exceptional help and endurance during our ordeal. Mr Robertson deserves a medal for his patience and willingness to help me and my six grandkids. He truly became our guardian angel. Thank You!

Reference 82 - Posted on December 2016

Not very professional staff

Reference 83 - Posted on December 2016

The staff and ladies at the front desk were very welcoming and helpful,

Reference 84 - Posted on December 2016

Many Thanks to Nicole and Carenza at the Best Western Aspen in Fort Smith AR! During our stay on the weekend of Dec 10, our dog, a social butterfly, repeatedly escaped from our room and decided to tour the halls. These ladies did an awesome job of corralling him and confining him in a room he could not escape from! We truly appreciate you! We will be back on our next visit to Fort Smith!

Reference 85 - Posted on December 2016

The worst people I have ever deal with from the best western plus dtc from Denver !!!!! And the worst customer care !!!!! They don't care about the customer nor solve anything and their manners are terrible !!!! Been threat by the manager and still nothing to do about !!!! Super disappointed of everyone !!!! And super pissed !!!!!

Reference 86 - Posted on December 2016

Lovely stay at abaravon

Thanks to all the staff

Reference 87 - Posted on December 2016

This was a very nice hotel. The desk person, Kim, was so great she brought me an extra blanket and ice. She also called to see if everything was ok

Reference 88 - Posted on December 2016

I arrived at one of your hotels and were greeted by a very friendly desk clerk. She was helpful and prompt and even switched our room for us when she found out that our hot water wasn't working. I had asked her about full

size pillows and she was more than happy to bring 2 of them up to our room for us. We came back tonight and found the pillows gone (no big deal, figured I could just have some more brought to us tonight)

Reference 89 - Posted on December 2016

So I called down to the desk where a different clerk didn't hesitate to tell me that Best Western doesn't have room service. I told her about the previous night and the fact that the pillows had been taken out of the room. Her response was to tell me that they don't have any extra pillows and she was on the other line with someone else. I told her I would call back, but I'm not in the mood for an argument with a bad employee.

Reference 90 - Posted on December 2016

Check-in was easy, and the staff was pleasant. There is one person in particular that I would like to single out. On Saturday morning, we had finished our breakfast, ably looked after by a pleasant woman named Suzanne, when my wife remembered that she forgot to pack bobby pins to keep her mortar board on her head. She asked the front desk lady if they had any, and the desk lady then asked Suzanne if she had any in her stuff. Suzanne said she'd look, and she went into the rear office area. The next thing I saw was Suzanne outside, running to her vehicle. It was 40 degrees, windy and raining! I went outside after her to let her know that we didn't expect her to go out in the bad weather, but by the time I got to her, she had retrieved two of her own bobby pins for my wife to have. THIS was fantastic customer service. Please let the right people know that Suzanne was singled out for going above and beyond, and that she is an excellent representative of Best Western.

Reference 91 - Posted on December 2016

I booked a room for my senior citizen parents (for last night) so they would be close to the airport for an early morning flight (as the weather is horrible). They were scheduled to leave the hotel at 4am this morning (free shuttle) to make their flight and the hotel had told them last night that they were going to have breakfast ready for them at 3:45am before they left!! Seriously!!! THAT there folks is customer service!

Reference 92 - Posted on December 2016

I am just blown away at the kindness they have shown my parents when I am feeling helpless 1200 miles away. They were willing to take care of them like one of their own.

Reference 93 - Posted on December 2016

The woman who answered could not have been more pleasant and helpful. When I checked in tonight the same woman checked me in. Her name is Kimarri. She is charming, helpful and the most customer friendly person I have ever met in a motel I have stayed in many, many motels. Kimarri deserves a generous Christmas bonus.

Reference 94 - Posted on December 2016

Cleaning staff is rude, they leave their cleaning carts out in the middle of the walkway at night. No consideration for the guests and parking. I've watched their "family members" come and visit them in the laundry room and treat guests rudely and also park in guest parking.

Watched the same dirty food trays and dishes from "room service" left in the hallways and on the trash bins outside for two days before they were picked up.

Reference 95 – Commented on December 2016

I have done that and they have done nothing about but refer me back to the hotel that it happened at. They have told me that they have had no problems like that before. Then I was told they refund right away for it usually but I waited a few days to report it. As I was giving Best Western a bad review on trip advisor I saw several people who said the same thing. Your corporate will not make this right and informed me it is out their hands.

Reference 96 – Commented on December 2016

people who work there are the best,

Reference 97 – Commented on December 2016

great hospitality!

Reference 98 - Posted on December 2016

When they discovered his truck was stolen he called me to pick him up, I live over three hours away and wouldn't make it before checkout time, when he asked to stay in his room for an additional two hours to wait on my arrival he was refused. He then called corporate and was refused again. My father and step mother had to carry theirs bags up the hill in the cold and rain and wait in the lobby for me to arrive.

Reference 99 - Posted on December 2016

Lizzie (reception) is the best; her professionalism is outstanding. From the moment we booked our stay to the checking in and out, Lizzie was informative, helpful and very accommodating to my family. Thank you Lizzie - because of you and the service we received we will definitely book this hotel for all our Disney adventures.

Reference 100 - Posted on December 2016

The staff was very nice, friendly, and helpful.

Reference 101 - Posted on December 2016

The staff was nice and helpful.

Reference 102 - Posted on December 2016

I went to the front desk and Linda helped us find the best room in our price range. She help calm me and accommodate us. I was so worried and upset. She also gave us a room next to our vehicle so we wouldn't have to walk far.

Reference 103 - Posted on November 2016

Inconsiderate, unfeeling, lack of consideration for a hotel full of Paying Customers going without sleep for an entire night with no official apology, no offer of reasonable compensation, no nothing. Customer Satisfaction?? I am awaiting an example thereof..

Reference 104 - Posted on November 2016

Management said they have no more rooms and there is a laundromat downstairs. That was the extent of their helpfulness

Reference 105

Management didn't ask to see the beds or go check the new room. This leads me to believe that this is not a new complaint as he didn't seem shocked or concerned by my discovery.

Reference 106 - Posted on November 2016

We have been lied to and disrespected our entire stay  
We have been given the runaround on using our point and the cost of our stay.

Reference 107 - Posted on November 2016

The workers at the hotel had the WORST attitude when I approached them about the situation. One lady at the front desk lied and told me the man was the manager then the manager admitted he wasn't the manager and yh manager wasn't in. The works then tried to tell me that we never callEd even though I had proof on my phone. If I was best western I would be extremely humiliated that these two employees were part of my franchise. Best western is nothing but liars and they will never get a single dollar of my money ever again and I hope yours not either!



Reference 108 - Posted on November 2016

1st night i was here i was accused of smoking in my room when i was'nt even here a rude night clerk said the 3 to 11 clerk said she smelled smoke coming from my room...funny thing is i was told this at 12:30 am after coming in from outside smoking the clerk then stated as i stood in hallway i can smell it now.....i ssid really maybe because i was outside smoking.he then said oh it may be your clothes that smell then.. the funny thing is between 3 and 10:30 pm i WAS'NT even at the hotel..so im not sure how a person smells smoke from a room that has no one in it...? im to say the least very un happy with the way this hotel has treated me.....

Reference 109 - Posted on November 2016

below the mark front desk help,,,

Reference 110 - Posted on November 2016

Staff were all very nice

Reference 111 - Posted on November 2016

I called at 12:30 and they told me my room was available. It's now 3:50 and they're saying my room isn't ready. Check-in is at 3pm. So I'm paying for a room from 3pm on, and I'm getting screwed out of an hour. We have to be at a concert in an hour. Terrible.

Reference 112 - Posted on November 2016

The manager offered a 10 % discount, not on the total for 15 nights, but only for these two nights: a discount of 20 USD :-). We agreed both on 50 % for these two nights in the end. I also posted here and the social media team told me they were so sorry about that and customer service will get in touch with me on that issue. I'm waiting for nearly a week now and know what: you can remain being so sorry.

Reference 113 - Posted on November 2016

I told the woman who was managing the next morning and gave her the washcloth in a plastic bag...I should have kept it for proof, because my daughter got no help when the manager, Kay, called her and said we had to understand that they have been busy with Ocktoberfest....

Reference 114 - Posted on November 2016

but when I notified the staff, nothing was done about it. It was freezing, and I had to spend two nights like that before I was able to find another hotel that had availability

Reference 115 – Commented on November 2016

Customer service has been rude to me on multiple occasions now as I called to try and determine when I will ever receive the bonus points I am missing.

All I have been told for over 2 months now is that someone named Nora will look into it....I have no way to contact Nora directly. I have lost all faith that I will ever see the missing 20,000+ points and gold upgrade that I am due.

Reference 116 - Posted on November 2016

Front desk guy not so much. I called to complain about the construction above my head and he actually argued with me that it was two floors above so I shouldn't hear it. We are on the top floor and one of the construction workers was looking in my window when I opened the curtain. We asked for a late check out hoping to sleep late....that didn't happen.

Reference 117 - Posted on November 2016

....Not and Honest group of people

Reference 118 - Posted on November 2016

On the day of check in at around 10 am I receive a call that they had overbooked and would not have a room for me to stay in. After talking with other hotels the best alternative they had was to move me to a hotel on another nearby island, which would have been a major inconvenience. I ended up canceling the reservation and finding another place to stay on my own, but was disappointed in the such short notice and lack of any acknowledgment of wrong doing or any contact of apology after the incident.

Reference 119 - Posted on November 2016

Management here should be horsewhipped for the mismanagement of this facility.

Reference 120 - Posted on November 2016

very nice staff

Reference 121 - Posted on November 2016

the people are rude & hateful!

#### Reference 122

no help or offer to bring stuff down either...hateful asses

#### Reference 123 - Posted on November 2016

So I am in Mankato, Minnesota and came across the kindest guest services representative I have yet to encounter. Solomon, he is the best advertising you could have. He was engaging and helpful. You have a gem in customer service here. If you haven't (I am thinking I am not the first to recognize this) you should reward him. Have him teach customer service. I wish I could be an undercover boss, I would praise him.

#### Reference 124 - Posted on November 2016

staff very nice!

#### Reference 125 - Posted on November 2016

Staff members Kevin Valescos and Cheo Macneil were EXTREMELY rude and condescending, telling us the fact we have no room is "not their problem". We were kept on hold for 20 minutes, ultimately being told that Manager Mauricio Martins was not available and not on site (why were we kept on hold for so long of this was true) and there was nothing that could be done for us. We are now forced to book a more expensive room, further from our event, last minute, and will pay additional money in transportation to and from the event due to your staff giving away the room we booked weeks in advance. You should be ashamed of the behavior of these employees. We will not be staying at your establishment again in the future.

#### Reference 126 - Posted on November 2016

I speak with another Customer Care rep that indirectly calls me a liar and tells me that I'm a "Grown Woman" and should have known better. I finally get to another Customer Care rep that explains that only the hotel can cancel the reservation but that they would contact the hotel and get back to me.

#### Reference 127 - Posted on November 2016

Dominic is who I made reservations with and he was amazing. Super helpful and very gracious. Great job Dominic!

#### Reference 128 - Posted on September 2016

tried to discuss it with the clerk on duty, but he was very rude.

Reference 129 - Posted on September 2016

I and friends planned a vacation on Lake Michigan and booked rooms at the Kenosha Best Wester for 4 nights. We were kicked out at dinner time when they notified us the fire Marshall had shut them down for over 20 violations--3rd time in a year. Best Western Customer Service thought we should be happy because they only charged us over 60.00 for the night we stayed and did not charge us the second day. Some how I am not sure why they would see that as a refund since we could not stay there.

Reference 130 - Posted on September 2016

I forgot my iPad at the Best Western Inn in Mesquite NV this morning. Housekeeping found it, turned it in, and the office called me to let me know, about 30 minutes after I checked out. I didn't even realize it was missing yet. I am on my way to catch a flight so turning around wasn't an option. They entered it into the FedEx system while I was on the phone, and gave me the tracking number right there. Of course I have to pay for shipping, but it is worth it. Thanks Best Western!

Reference 131 - Posted on September 2016

The Red River Inn, Thackerville, OK, has a WONDERFUL STAFF from Vicky or Tammy at the front desk to everyone who works there (custodial and grounds keeping)

Reference 132 - Posted on September 2016

It is rude and very disrespectful to say what he said and act like he doesn't care. So he took my money and practically spit on my wounds.

Reference 133 - Posted on September 2016

When I addressed the issue to the front desk, we were told to get towels from the maid cart that was left in the hall. Additionally, there was no effort made to make it right with us. We changed hotels.

Reference 134 - Posted on September 2016

These people lie to their customers, and do NOT properly train their staff. Will Never stay at another BW

Reference 135 - Posted on September 2016

Definitely not recommending to anyone in the future. Very poor management as well. Very disappointing. Gonna stick with Holiday Inn from here on out.

Reference 136 - Posted on August 2016

Jennifer at Best Western 130 Shiloh Drive Waynesville, NC is AWESOME...Ms. Customer Service and with such a great attitude! This is my favorite place to stay when in the mountains of North Carolina!

Reference 137 - Posted on March 2016

I was down graded arbitrarily by the hotel, to a queen size. A room half the size and for the same amount. And, I had to wait over 2 hours for my room. I arrived at 4:20 pm ( check in time 3pm) and, did not get my room until 6:30pm. I guess it's just too hard to call housekeeping and tell them that guests are waiting.

Reference 138 – Commented on March 2016

, encountered the rudest worker ever at the front desk, I will never stay at another Best Western

Reference 139 - Posted on November 2015

the receptionist and managers of both affiliated hotels were completely accommodating, allowing us to transfer our reservations to the oceanfront hotel with a balcony. We did have to pay the regular rate, which I had no problem doing, but I truly appreciated the flexibility!!! Jeff at the Best Western desk was wonderful and got us in our room right away and even called to make sure we were happy. We were elated. The hotel was great. Thank you for a wonderful time.

Reference 140 - Posted on November 2015

poor me and my 11 day stay, i may be bed ridden but im going to have to change my own sheets and clean my own room since your staff is refusing to do it for me...

Reference 141 - Posted on November 2015

wow my son and I have both sent numerous emails regarding file number 151022-6910 was told someone would be in touch within 7 days once again this did not happen maybe I will run this issue by my attorney.

Reference 142 - Posted on October 2015

So just talked to the manager at the Best Western Mountain View in Covington VA about the bed bugs. Manager says sorry and they already treated that room. Then asks Phil if he will change his survey for 10,000 Best Western points or a free night. Are you kidding me?!?! No one wants to stay somewhere that causes this!

Reference 143 - Posted on October 2015

Tonight my computer in shop. Trying to make reservevation on iPad had al sort of problems called the 800 number got Andre what a nice young man told him bad week had lost my dog on Monday could not get all of it done on silly iPad. This fine young man took over fixed all of for me. It employees at Best Western like Andre that keeps me staying with them. Thank you Andre

Reference 144 - Posted on October 2015

Was met by Tina and she checked us in and was the best! Thanks for the hospitality!!  
That is why I choose your Hotels over all others.

Reference 145 - Posted on October 2015

I'm in a Best Western in Atlanta and am MAD! I should have gotten a clue when we saw the front desk hand a guy a plunger as we were checkling in. But our toilet stopped up last night too. So we called the front desk, they gave us a plunger, which did nothing. We told them we had issues yet they did nothing. I'm not going to give details but it turned NASTY! The front desk told us the had no other rooms available so we slept in a horrindously odorous room. It waa bad. This morning we called the front desk again. We waited HOURS until finally a custodial employee came and took care of it after splashing the toilet contents everywhere. We're at the disgusted point of switching hotels but this hotel will not even refund the room because we reserved and paid through a third party site. Best Western, PLEASE do us right and help!

Reference 146 - Posted on October 2015

. Manager is horrendous.

Reference 147 - Posted on October 2015

Your staff was awesome for helping my sister out when she was put in a bad situation by another hotel. Our family cannot thank you enough for taking the time to hear her story and going above and beyond to help feel safe and valued. You will have our family's business for life!

Reference 148 - Posted on September 2015

the staff and manager (Henry You) was so unbelievably unhelpful to us. He would dry clean our belongings from the room and until being tested for bed bugs. We waited at the hotel for more than 5 hours with no where to go and no clothes to change into, for them to tell us that pest control would not be coming that day to test. The staff had no cleaners available to sterilize our belongings along with no companies to clean Anything until Monday and then would be shipped to our home towns. So now I have to drive all the way back with my suitcase in a garbage bag and have all My belongings sterilized and cleaned on my own.

Reference 149 - Posted on September 2015

lackadaisical management, poor housekeeping etc. and haven't heard anything back

Reference 150 - Posted on July 2015

the staff is ignorant and rude and the general manager made excuses for her staffs behavior

Reference 151 - Posted on April 2015

the manager accused me of getting a freebie and trying to make the staff miserable I've never been so disrespected in my life I just cried I tried to call corporate but they said they had to just allow her to fix it how can the general manager fix issues when she doesn't take responsibility and practically asked me to leave I'm so distraught and it's ruining my family vacation!!!!

Reference 152 - Posted on April 2015

the service was great.

Reference 153 – Posted on March 2015

my family and my relatives and had the most exceptional service from Linda. She was truly such a star all weekend! Thank you for the great stay!

Reference 154 - Posted on March 2014

The Best Western in Galveston, Texas has a great employee named Brandon. When our cruise was delayed and 2000 people scrambled for hotel rooms, he was fabulous and remained friendly and upbeat. He made a frustrating situation more bearable, thanks so much!

Reference 155 - Posted on March 2014

I went out of my way to stay with best western in order to earn a free night during their promotion. They never sent me my voucher. I called multiple and verified my email multiple times. Today I called again and they said they won't send it out because it is expired. They said they put in the wrong email, but said it was my fault because I should have called more if I really wanted it. I will never give them my business again. I went out of the way to stay with them and they didn't go out of the way at all for me after I had spent a lot of money with them.

Reference 156 - Posted on February 2014

The receptionist very rude and not very good customer service.... I would diffently not every stay again

Reference 157 – Posted on December 2013

THE PEOPLE WERE GREAT FRIENDLY AND VERY HELPFUL. THEY MADE SURE OUR STAY WAS MOST COMFORTABLE

Reference 158

AND THE LADY THAT SERVED US BREAKFAST IN FRANKLIN TN WAS A GEM. I WOULD RECOMMEND THEM TO EVERYONE. JANICE MCKEE

Reference 159 – Posted on September 2013

the Staff friendly and helpfull

Reference 160 - Posted on August 2013

FABULOUS staff!

Reference 161 - Posted on August 2013

the staff is amazing,

Reference 162 - Posted on July 2013

If its friendly staff or a room with A/C your looking for don't bother staying at the Best Western in Salmon Arm BC. It doesn't have either of these..

Reference 163 - Posted on July 2013

They were very rude about it and completely unapologetic. I will never stay at that Best Western again

Reference 164 - Posted on June 2013

Helpfull personel

Reference 165 - Posted on June 2013



The hotel was super nice, great staff, CLEAN!!!, and good value. Thank you so much.

Reference 166 - Posted on June 2013

I was very tired and left my DIAMOND pendant on the table after a long day. My son knocked it off under the bed and I didn't realize it until I got home. This necklace is very important to me, and when I frantically called the manager when I realized the day we got home, she promptly checked and an honest maid had found it and returned it to the front desk. They mailed it to me right away, and I have it safely home now. I was so impressed with the honesty and professionalism of this hotel, I plan to write the president and send a reward to the maid for doing the right thing.

Reference 167 – Commented on June 2013

seriously amazing customer service

Reference 168 – Posted on April 2013

the front desk staff was incredibly rude. I am sorry I disturbed them by checking in, and asking questions. Also, the construction noise is horrible. I asked the clerk if a hold would be placed on our credit card, as with an overseas move we are operating within the parameters of a budget. She said she had no idea and blew me off, basically.

Reference 169 – Commented on April 2013

this morning, housekeeping POUNDED on our door at 0830 and I had forgotten to put the "Do Not Disturb" sign on the door (I thought they always came after check-out time?).

Reference 170 - Posted on April 2013

I booked a wedding block for May 3rd & May 4th. It was dropped on Feb. 6th for no reason - there was no phone call, no notification whatsoever. They also conveniently "lost" our (the bride & groom's) suite reservation for the 2 nights. I called and left 3 messages for the manager that were all left unanswered. Only after I called the "customer care" line was I contacted by the manager. The manager then told me her sales manager who had told me our block was dropped on Feb. 6th was lying. I could not believe how unprofessional the manager was. She would not admit any wrong doing;

Reference 171 - Posted on April 2013

the last time we stayed at a best western the staff was completely rude to my dad. the last time we stayed at a holiday inn we got helped with whatever we needed....my family swears by holiday inn

Reference 172 - Posted on January 2013

The staff there were so courteous

Reference 173 - Posted on November 2012

The staff was amazing. The gals at the front desk caught mistakes on our bill and found out I was a retired Navy Vet

Reference 174 - Posted on September 2012

the Staff have been great to me

Reference 175 - Posted on September 2012

Free brunch!!!! Love the rooms, pool , hottub , service and great food!!!! Cobourg Ont. location!!!!

Reference 176 - Posted on September 2012

the staff very friendly and accommodating!

Reference 177 - Posted on September 2012

They treated us very nice and upgraded us to a suite ...

Reference 178 - Posted on September 2012

The people that work there are so nice

Reference 179 - Posted on September 2012

Is a nice hotel in t world and t best manegment

Reference 180 - Posted on September 2012

the staff was very friendly and helpful.

Reference 181 - Posted on September 2012

THE CREW ARE WONDERFUL CANNOT FIND NICER PEOPLE AS GREATER THEY ARE ALWAYS LOOKING OUT FOR YOUR BEST INTERSET

Reference 182 - Posted on September 2012

I thought the housekeeping team does a fantastic job of maintaining such a high standard of cleanliness, the front desk staff were knowledgeable and helpful

Reference 183 - Posted on September 2012

I was so delighted with my stay & grateful to the friendly, hard-working staff who made the experience such a pleasant one for me

Reference 184 - Posted on September 2012

exceptionally good service

Reference 185 - Posted on November 2011

The staff was wonderful and accommodating

## APPENDIX K: Posts and Comments Regarding Room Accommodation

The following are the posts and comments that outline what consumers discussed regarding rooms at Best Western hotels. 152 references coded.

Reference 1 -Posted on March 2017

room musty and needed dehumidifier, broken metal hook on door that fell and hit my foot, waited 2 hours for extra blanket, mirror in bathroom was written "I'm watching you" in condensation (fog on glass after shower) , magnetic cards did not work over and over for the 2 rooms we had and noticed neighboring guests with same trouble,

Reference 2 – Posted on March 2017

And the clincher - we had a clog in the toilet and I was handed the plunger to fix it myself

Reference 3 – Commented on March 2017

We planned on sleeping in a little so that we could finish off our drive rested. It was awful at 7 am, to hear an impact wrench and a hammer in a room very near ours. ARE YOU KIDDING ME? So there we are, all 4 of us up at 7 when our alarm was set for 9:30. That is probably the most disrespectful thing I could imagine a hotel doing. I paid good money for a room and it didn't matter to Best Western that I was rudely woken up by construction. I went downstairs to talk to the manager and sure enough...there was a

construction crew in the room right below us

#### Reference 4 – Posted on March 2017

I was disappointed when we stayed this past weekend. The queen beds were uncomfortable. One of the beds had a huge cave and they rotated the mattress and the slump was at my feet. Also, the hair dryer didn't work so we had to get another one, but that didn't work either. Either the electrical wiring or the hair dryer itself. It was a bad hair day the entire weekend.

#### Reference 5

The sheets were dirty

#### Reference 6

dirty pillows back on the bed!

#### Reference 7 – Commented on March 2017

I stayed the night there two years ago. It smelled like 3 day old ramen.

#### Reference 8 – Posted on March 2017

Simple-tryed to simply call & book a room tonight for my kids who were close by, celebrating their Anniversary, I did not want them to drive so called to book a room, I was told to book a room I had to send my email confirmation with CC info? WTF I called Best Western, got a better rate and book the room for the kids over the phone on my CC. I live 14 miles away!!! Enjoy your room tonight kids at the Best Western, clearly you are BEST OFF!

#### Reference 9 – Posted on March 2017

the walls are paper thin and people are being incredibly loud. Now the Denver Police are banging on the door of the room next to me! I come to Lakewood quite often for work, but I will never stay here again!

#### Reference 10 - Posted on March 2017

I used rewards points for the room for one night and paid for a 2nd night... The refrigerator could not be adjusted and was not safe for storing food... The a.c. was located in a place that did not allow for cooling the sleeping area (my wife is in menopause) and was quite warm... She wanted to sleep in my truck... The water in the shower went from hot cold hot.... My wife thought this was due to having a free night... The cable system only had clear picture and spins on Spanish or cartoon channels... Won't do that again...

#### Reference 11 – Posted on March 2017

don't plan on watching Fox News.....they have it blocked even though it's listed on the TV channels available.. Won't be staying there again as when we asked about it we were told they had several people ask but nothing was ever done.

#### Reference 12 – Posted on March 2017

Came here for honeymoon and first problem is the light in the bathroom that takes about a minute to come on and doesn't even stay on reliably. Not a big deal just planned to talk to the front desk in the morning. Next morning, start the water to take a shower and the hot water never kicks on. So I skip the shower and go to the front desk where the clerk at the front tells me that the hotel is pretty old and I just have to let the water run for fifteen minutes or so to get hot water. Will consider all other options other than Best Western from now on. This hotel has ruined it.

#### Reference 13 – Posted on March 2017

Gross!! Booked a king suite after we called n they said it would have a whirlpool tub inside. Get to room n theres just a nasty couch that nobody would want to sit on. Outdated ugly room. Just a heads up.

#### Reference 14 – Posted on March 2017

Fleas and ticks in the bathtub. I wish I'd seen it before 8:00 at night after I'd unpacked. GAK!

#### Reference 15 – Commented on March 2017

Had a bad experience with bed bugs in the room and even got charged for the night we didn't stay because we got bit! Best Western apparently failed what best means.

#### Reference 16 -Posted on March 2017

Got to the room it had not been cleaned. A pair of men's underwear were at the side of the bed. We were moved to another room on the bottom floor. Was gone most of the day. Back at 3 PM. Room still had not been cleaned. No Clean sheets or towels. Do not stay here.

#### Reference 17 – Posted on March 2017

You have a little problem in your Byron, GA property...BED BUGS! Julie Sandoval can fill you in...

#### Reference 18 – Posted on March 2017

No sound on tv. Door didn't automatically lock. Desk clerk didn't want to honor request for king bed. I had three rooms. I would not recommend this hotel

#### Reference 19 – Posted on March 2017

Extremely noisy with no sound proofing and zero rest after a long road drive. We had booked online a room two months prior to our visit on 25 March 2017. The room was located just in front of elevators, an ice vending machine and just a few steps away from the indoor pool. It was so noisy that after a 5 hour long road drive we couldn't get to sleep till pool was closed. Once we woke up in middle of the night because of the noise of late checking in guests. Moreover, even after complaining they didn't change our room or provide any other compensation. As we were driving further so had to get up early next day too so we didn't get any rest.

#### Reference 20 -Commented on March 2017

The hotel room was smelling and the towels were dirty, which i still let go of as I had got my own towel and fanned out the room.

#### Reference 21 – Posted on March 2017

how bad the beds are. My back is killing me and my kids are grumpy! Rough night!!!

#### Reference 22 – Posted on March 2017

we got into our room to find it entirely full of ants. Not one or two. THOUSANDS. They moved us to a different room with the same options of the prior room. The room was undusted, stains on the comforter, and un-vacuumed carpets.

#### Reference 23 – Posted on March 2017

They had bed bugs. After notifying the staff and showing the clerk the video we took of the bug crawling on the sheets, the clerk said "someone before you must have brought them. We don't have bugs." We sent an email to the management staff no one has responded.

#### Reference 24 – Posted on March 2017

The room was great

#### Reference 25 – Posted on March 2017

I just checked out of your Mansfield, CT location because the door didn't lock. When I called the front desk, the attendant said, "I've never heard of that happening" and came up to see.

Yup. The door doesn't lock.

He then told me to leave my belongings in the room, because no one would know the door didn't lock, especially if I had the Do Not Disturb sign up.

I asked to have my room changed. I was presented with two options. First to move to a dirty room. Secondly, move to a room this afternoon, which was impossible, as I am up for an all day conference.

I opted to check out.

#### Reference 26 – Posted on March 2017

Beautiful rooms

#### Reference 27 -Posted on March 2017

Love it:))) Super Clean!!!! not that Expensive:))

#### Reference 28 – Posted on March 2017

The rooms are spacious and very clean

#### Reference 29 – Posted on March 2017

The ac/heating was not working

#### Reference 30 – Posted on March 2017

I had booked 2 rooms, one for myself and the other for my daughter and family. As we were on the 3rd floor and as we were walking down the hall we noticed that it smelled musty. And the rooms also had a musty mildew smell. We turned on the a/c, and went out to get something to eat. Upon returning the rooms still had the smell

#### Reference 31

The room had seen better days, it was dingy and worn, especially the carpeting. The bathroom was horrendous. Mold had eaten through on the shower walls. It was disgusting! None of us took a shower as we didn't want to get near the mold. Do not stay at this hotel!!! Especially if you have any breathing difficulties. My daughter has asthma and by morning was using her inhaler often.

#### Reference 32 – Posted on March 2017

we are still talking about how modernized and beautiful our room was. So many outlets, fridge, microwave, beautifully remodeled, and clean. Coffee products, personal products, with plenty of towels and washcloths.

#### Reference 33 – Posted on February 2017

We booked two rooms for our family and neither room was cleaned to our liking. My daughter found two pills on the floor in her room and we found bits of paper on the floor in our room. I guess the vacuum wasn't working!

#### Reference 34 – Posted on February 2017

The floors made our feet black!! The parking was a nightmare even though you have to pay for parking! No breakfast served! No vent in the bathroom! Very loud bar next to our room! Was not quite till 3 am!

#### Reference 35 – Posted on February 2017

.....it was the worst place I have ever stayed in my 75 years.....the disabled room was impossible.....the bed was so soft that the fitted sheet would not stay on when you sat or lay on it.....the hand held/sliding shower head was in the center of the long section of the wall..... which sprayed half the room when you turn the water on..... because the shower curtain did not reach the floor.....and that caused the floor to become very slippery.....over night it rained and caused the outside walk to be slippery also

#### Reference 36 – Posted on February 2017

the room smelled

#### Reference 37 – Posted on February 2017

It's after 10 pm and the room above us is stomping around.

#### Reference 38 – Posted on February 2017

I think you guys have forgotten about this hotel. Incredibly disappointed. Colleague had MANY lady bugs sharing his room/bed with him.

I'm glad I didn't need to shower this morning as the shower is definitely unloved. Holes in bedding. Please update for these kind hotel staff and guests.

#### Reference 39 – Posted on February 2017

for a Business traveller like myself who is also a Diamond select member I am disappointed with the lack of space on the standard double room (£68 for the night for room only in Winter is certainly not good value here). No room to work as cannot fit my laptop and paperwork on the so called desk and coffee tray in wardrobe because there's no where else to put it. Also no offer of upgrade and no welcome gift and this seems to be usual at the Best Westerns now. May have to start looking at other hotel loyalty options going forward as not to happy with Best Western this year!!

#### Reference 40 – Commented on February 2017

We where first time users of BW Murphy NC and found it to be clean

#### Reference 41 – Posted on February 2017

Next, the beds are TERRIBLE I barley slept the 2 nights we were there, I was tossing and turning on the hard bed. The A/C heating unit rarley ever kicked on, and we kept turning it down to get it to stay on because the place has such funky smells running through it and very musty, eventually we had just decided to keep the window open. There was only a sheet, and a very thin blanket on the bed...No comforter, that's it..Its basically like sleeping with 2 sheets.

#### Reference 42

The walls are paper thin. I could hear our neighbors talking when we were going to sleep, and people walking above all night. Our family members stayed in the room directly above us, and it wasn't them. We got a complaint call right at 10 PM saying we were banging on walls, while my sister was trying to make the roll away bed.

#### Reference 43 – Posted on February 2017

The room is filthy I guess the cleaning staff didn't read your mission statement that was in the binder next to the bed. The shower curtain is installed so far into the shower you fight with it the entire time. The toilet leaked all night the tv has no reception it's still analog.

#### Reference 44 – Posted on February 2017

My room was ok. Crack in the sink. Plastic shower cubical turning yellow, areas around sink plugholes grubby. Sparse amounts of tea, coffee & milk. When adjusting the spray on the shower head, it came off in my hand, and the shower head needs a good clean as it dripped rather than having a decent flow. The resulting sound on the cheap and aged plastic was like a thunderstorm. The outer windows were damaged, catches were loose and did not shut properly which is poor security & did not help reduce sounds from outside. The AC controller was cracked & damaged & buttons were unresponsive. From speaking to other people staying at the hotel at the same time, the above faults were common throughout most rooms.

#### Reference 45 – Posted on February 2017

I realized that when I book at Best Western I could expect a low rate guarantee. I didn't realize that I needed to expect a low quality of cleanliness also.

#### Reference 46 – Posted on February 2017

The room was big and clean but very loud. I had a horrible time sleeping because my room was right next to a major intersection. The lighting in the room was also very poor. I had to have every light on just to be able to read.

#### Reference 47 – Posted on February 2017

Our room was large and very comfortable and clean.  
On checking in the front desk person was friendly and efficient.

#### Reference 48

Good coffee in the room. Lots of channels on the TV.

#### Reference 49 – Posted on February 2017

I would never stay there with bed bugs!!!! Seriously 15% off. No empathy or any form of help. Stating, nothing you can do!!!!!! Unacceptable. With all the competition out there you should be ashamed of yourselves!!! I guarantee that no one in our family or friends will stay at Best Western!

**Reference 50 – Posted on February 2017**

very pleasantly surpris by the amazing service, totally clean room

**Reference 51**

Eevn though the water pressure was low and the shower head was hard to manage.

**Reference 52 – Posted on February 2017**

I recommend this place to stay, very clean, nice,

**Reference 53 – Posted on February 2017**

Would be nice if the rooms had working climate control units. Stayed one night and froze as I could not get any heat. Another team member had the same issue.

**Reference 54 – Posted on January 2017**

Dirty vent in bathroom floor felt gritty.

**Reference 55 – Posted on January 2017**

Filthy rooms. Headboard not dusted.Inch of dust on furniture. First night in room smelled like bodyodor and cigar smoke. The coffee maker has a used coffee pod in it. Two people in two beds,always had to ask for the amenities every night. Housekeeping never cleaned or swept the floors,no dusting of furniture,cleaned the sink once.

**Reference 56 – Posted on January 2017**

The room was cold even with the heat turned up all the way. The shower was tiny. I was highly dissapointed in my stay.

**Reference 57 – Posted on January 2017**

Clean comfy rooms

**Reference 58 – Posted January 2017**

Clean rooms

**Reference 59 – Posted on January 2017**

Our room would not lock! Had to pack everything back up and move us to the other end of the hotel. The hot tub at the hotel is broken.

**Reference 60 – Posted on January 2017**

cheap price but dirty ,nasty room,had roaches in bathroom

**Reference 61 – Posted on January 2017**

Just did the fastest checkin/checkout in history....I have severe allergies n whatever the Amarillo tx hotel uses is so strong it made me sick. First time for this at a BW, but the staff immediately refunded our \$\$

Will have to call ahead for non-carpeted rooms!

**Reference 62 – Posted on January 2017**

. The beds were the most uncomfortable we have ever slept in. On top of that the beds felt as if the footboard was actually higher than the headboard. The mattress was lumpy and saggy. That couch in the sitting area of the room was absolutely horrible. It felt like you were going to slide in to the floor. To add to that, I'm not sure if the staff was trying to hide a smell or wanted the place to smell nice but, the air freshener was sprayed so heavily that you could almost taste it. I'm not sensitive to theses things, but I noticed that by the time we got to the elevator my throat was irritated from the thick haze of air freshener being sprayed in to the air. Needles to say, the next time that we are in the area, we will not stay there again.



#### Reference 63 – Posted on January 2017

Our room was on the main floor of the motel and was totally unacceptable. The Floor in the living area was dirty around the wall area. The bathroom stool was not able to empty due to the sink being clog up as well. I went to the office desk and made them aware of the problems. And they chose not to provide us with a different room. So we had to use the lobby public bathroom, as the shower would drain as well.

#### Reference 64 – Posted on January 2017

The customer service at the front desk was horrendous! We had to ask for shampoos, coffee, cups, etc. Everyday! Then at night other "guests" had loud music and fights in the parking lot, we repeatedly called the front desk to remedy these situations but our calls were never answered and when brought to their attention in the morning the staff simply said they have no control over their guests.... the whole stay was not worth the money we spent for the room. There were light bulbs burnt out in the room, the heater worked when it wanted too, and I'm fairly sure our carpet has never been vacuumed. This hotel is a sorry excuse for a best western, I will never recommend them again.

#### Reference 65 – Posted on January 2017

Hopefully this cold front kills your bed bugs!

#### Reference 66 – Posted on January 2017

have an ongoing terrible service issue.  
I was given a key to an unclean?occupied room.

#### Reference 67 – Posted on January 2017

hotel was dirty and freezing cold.

#### Reference 68 – Posted on January 2017

Additionally the value for money in our spacious room plus the breakfast was more than we could have ever hoped for during our last day of our holiday! 10/10 :)

#### Reference 69 – Posted on January 2017

had to leave at 2:30am because of BED BUGS crawling across my daughters' pillow!

#### Reference 70 – Commented on January 2017

Bed bugs are my biggest fear about staying in a hotel. So sorry this happened to you. Which BW location was this at? Will make sure to avoid.

#### Reference 71 – Posted on December 2016

Very low end customer service. never cleaned the bathroom, we had to repeatedly ask for our room to be cleaned. Repeatedly ask for towels as dirty ones were taken and new ones not placed. a light bulb was burned out for 4 days, my husband finally changed it. Our shampoo dispenser fell off the wall and it stayed empty for 2 days. We had to ask for cups several times as well. These were all simple things that the desk was very un- committed about fixing

#### Reference 72 – Posted on December 2016

The beds are very comfortable, the place was clean, pleasant looking

#### Reference 73 – Posted on December 2016

Electricity went out and it is getting cold in our room!!!

#### Reference 74 – Posted on December 2016

Pictures and hotel descriptions on Expedia are a total misrepresentation of what you actually get with the room. Full kitchen is not a full kitchen that is functional. Bed is not "premium" by a long shot. Sofa is frayed. Chair in main room has broken springs and makes one strain to exit chair since it rests a person in an extremely low position. Bearing going out on bedroom heater blower motor. The room is outdated, half clean, bathroom is hard to use with a very small and low sitting toilet and nothing to brace one's self with for lifting support, along with bathroom sink cabinet door doesn't

even fully close, which has almost made me fall a few times when catching on my leg.  
I selected a King Suite, pool side room. I got a "standard room" at best with a un-functional kitchen and bathroom.

#### Reference 75 – Posted on December 2016

I was chewed up by bugs at Best Western In Franklin TN. I had to throw away my clothing and pillow when I went home. Tried to discuss this and they laughed at me. The corporate office will not help on this issue either.

#### Reference 76 – Posted on December 2016

When we came up to the room, a housekeeper was vacuuming. The room and hallway smell like burnt vacuum. It's gross.

#### Reference 77 – Posted on December 2016

. Never had a hotel anywhere in the world that did not have a blind or something to block the light or provide privacy. Also has direct tv. terrible!!! stopped and started!! Worse than anything I have experienced anywhere (and the heating system makes more noise than someone snoring).

#### Reference 78 – Commented on December 2016

super large and very clean rooms,

#### Reference 79 – Commented on December 2016

great rooms with comfy beds and

#### Reference 80 – Posted on November 2016

The rooms were exceptionally clean and comfortable,

#### Reference 81 – Posted on November 2016

The room was specious, clean, and had every thing you would need to stay longer and cook.

#### Reference 82 – Posted on November 2016

We stayed one night, 11/13/16. Had a king room and it was very nice. Spacious, clean, and pretty. The bed was very comfortable.

#### Reference 83 – Posted on November 2016

Bed bugs! On top of everything else in our lives that we are dealing with I now have to disinfest all of our belongings We were given another room but that too shows signs of infestation

#### Reference 84 – Posted on November 2016

BLOOD on the sheets! Guess it's foolish to assume the sheets are actually changed between customers??????

#### Reference 85 – Posted on November 2016

Room has bugs in it. flies, ants, and such, dirty place, lots of rust, tub had plastic clogging drain, rust, what looks like mold, hot tub not hot, paint missing in spots, under beds not fully cleaned, and the it just isnt a place you want to stay at. you lay in the bed, it feels like your getting bitten, and you start itching. unfortunate for us, we are stuck here one more night. Will never stay again.

#### Reference 86 – Posted on November 2016

I'm going to suggest not staying here as I was there less than 1 day and a cockroach ran right up the wall by my head while I was laying on the bed I left immediately and I'm very unsatisfied with the 1 day stay I had

#### Reference 87 – Posted on November 2016

from musty smelly rooms to cold hot tub,

#### Reference 88 – Posted on November 2016

Room was great. View was great

#### Reference 89 – Posted on November 2016

ROOM LEFT UNSECURED. Stayed here two nights. Picked this hotel due to the brand and near to Oxford street. When we checked in our room had NOT been cleaned, toothpaste marks all up the mirror, the work top and black curly hairs all around the sink! Went down to reception to complain however there were two in front of us also complaining

#### Reference 90 – Commented on November 2016

had problems with our room (A/C wouldn't cool the room until the last night and it was hot).

#### Reference 91 – Posted on November 2016

we found the bathroom floor disgusting! I had dropped medication on the floor and when I put my hand on the floor to get down, I stuck to it! I took a wet washcloth and scrubbed a tile and it came up grey! It was night and I had already been fobbed off with excuses when I noticed our beds weren't made while we were out on our first day and this dirty discovery was made on our last day, so I knew I'd get no help

#### Reference 92 – Posted on November 2016

I was so disappointed in my stay that I checked out four days early. Not only was there no heat in my room,

#### Reference 93 - Posted on November 2016

The staff was so nice and understanding!

#### Reference 94 - Posted on November 2016

best wester is contaminated with bedbugs Nasty hotel

#### Reference 95 - Posted on November 2016

Room is great, excellent view!

#### Reference 96 - Posted on November 2016

Light in the bathroom that was just replaced the night before came crashing down on the floor spreading broken glass the next morning. We had to pack up and leave the room early. I had a medical issue that did not allow me to leave the hotel until urgent care opened so we had to sit in our vehicle instead of our paid for room.

#### Reference 97 - Posted on November 2016

Clean rooms.

#### Reference 98 - Posted on November 2016

Wood on the balcony doors is splintering in places where it's not painted, so to, the trim. Maids are mindful to constantly shut off the fan in my room so that air doesn't circulate. Melted soap is left in the bathtub days in end without being removed and replaced, so to other toiletry items

#### Reference 99 - Posted on November 2016

clean rooms,

#### Reference 100 - Posted on November 2016

your location in Frederick MD 420 Prospect Blvd has bed bugs

#### Reference 101 - Posted on November 2016

The room was ok besides the problem with the shower (the curtain was too short and leaked water out. Based on the water damage in the bathroom it is a problem).

#### Reference 102 – Posted on September 2016

Bathrooms outdated, wifi only works when it wants, tv sucks along with the 10 fuzzy channels,

#### Reference 103 - Posted on September 2016

Cold showers with barely any flow and the floor is softer than the bed. Yes go green and save the planet by turning the hot water down so low is like ice coming out of the shower head and restrict the water flow so much it takes 2 minutes to get your hair wet. Tell the truth you're doing it to save a buck you cheap bastards

#### Reference 104 - Posted on September 2016

Place had bed bugs and within hours my girls had lots of bites. I did get my full refund after demanding to speak to the manager and making a report to The Better Business Bureau.

#### Reference 105 - Posted on September 2016

I had a horrible experience with bed bugs!

#### Reference 106 - Posted on September 2016

To make matters worse we had multiple guests tell us that their rooms were dirty, they found trash and dirty clothes in their rooms, and the carpet was wet in their rooms.

#### Reference 107 - Posted on September 2016

The stay was marred by a dirty diaper in the room and the lack of towels.

#### Reference 108 - Posted on September 2016

The room was not clean and the bedding throw cushions smelt horrific of what can only be described as old BO. We had remove them from the room. 2. The toilet seat was soiled, on the sitting side! Which we had to get cleaned. 3. The bed was horrific, the springs where almost threw the mattress. we'd stayed at a hotel the night before this and only paid £39 which was twice as less for what we paid to stayed at ours

#### Reference 109 - Posted on September 2016

I laid down on one of the beds, looking thru a travel book, and noticed a bug crawling on the pillow next to me. I jumped up, pulled the sheets back, and there were more. I picked the pillow up, there was more on the other pillow beneath it. My sister grabbed a pillow off the other bed, there were more on it. I immediately called the office, and a maintenance man was sent to our room, he said they were definitely bedbugs. I've never seen any before. I was so creeped out.

#### Reference 110

We were paranoid all weekend, creeped out, checking our beds every 10 mins. I understand it happens, that's just how it goes nowadays, but I felt very disrespected by them not coming to speak to us personally

#### Reference 111 – Commented on September 2016

I was appalled at the filthy bathroom floor at the downtown Best Western Sudbury during my recent stay.

#### Reference 112 - Posted on August 2016

Looks like I'm not showering while I'm here...

#### Reference 113 - Posted on March 2016

2 days in a row we have some weird black crud coming out of the sink. We had the night person tell us that the neighboring room was having the same thing, came back multiple times so the sink is basically useless. The night manager said they'd discount the last night because of this and they did... but \$4. Wow. Never again.

#### Reference 114 - Posted on March 2016

. Upon arriving in our room, soap from the previous occupant was still in the bath tub soap tray. Makes you wonder how well they cleaned the bathroom. Along with loose towel bars, clothes hanger in the closet was coming off the wall. The property would not let me get my rewards point because of booking through a third party. In the past I considered any lodging that carried the Best Western brand first. But, with the desk clerk telling me that the hotel did not change the reservation, the third party did. I was blatantly lied to

#### Reference 115 – Posted on October 2015

my air conditioning quit working, your people said I wouldn't need it because it's getting colder outside. . What kind of answer is that? Eventually you sent a maintenance man to my door..at 8:00am on MY DAY OFF. He said the entire unit would have to be replaced.

#### Reference 116

Your shower will ONLY stay hot for 3 minutes and some odd seconds. I can take fast showers, but not in that amount of time, especially when that is also my relaxing time. ( I eventually just timed the hot setting to see how long it actually lasted)

#### Reference 117 - Posted on October 2015

Not a good sleep in byron georgia.. roaches, big Ole spiders , in your bed itchy hotel not your best.:(

#### Reference 118 - Posted on October 2015

Yes that is a large bug that had to be killed in the room.

#### Reference 119 - Posted on October 2015

I'm in a Best Western in Atlanta and am MAD! I should have gotten a clue when we saw the front desk hand a guy a plunger as we were checking in. But our toilet stopped up last night too. So we called the front desk, they gave us a plunger, which did nothing. We told them we had issues yet they did nothing. I'm not going to give details but it turned NASTY! The front desk told us the had no other rooms available so we slept in a horrendously odorous room. It waa bad. This morning we called the front desk again. We waited HOURS until finally a custodial employee came and took care of it after splashing the toilet contents everywhere. We're at the disgusted point of switching hotels but this hotel will not even refund the room because we reserved and paid through a third party site. Best Western, PLEASE do us right and help!

#### Reference 120 - Posted on October 2015

it's pretty gross, the place smells like a musty smoking lounge, the shower is not something I want to use, the pillows are useless, the towels are Motel 6 quality,

#### Reference 121 - Posted on October 2015

the rooms were supposed to have microwave and refrigerators, this element was very important and was a must for me and the other families, because we are traveling for basketball for our children for the weekend so we have to be prepared with certain foods and things, the hotel looked good to the quick eye but there were several issues that are just not acceptable, but the main one being only a couple rooms actually had the microwave and refrigerator, mine was not one, I called the front desk and told them but nothing happend, so the food we brought to go in the refrigerator went bad and we couldn't use our microwavable items to eat,

#### Reference 122 - Posted on September 2015

We found bed bugs in our room

#### Reference 123 - Posted on July 2015

. I didn't want anything but a pleasant stay and a clean and well kept room I got far from it the pull out mattress had blood stains there was an old McDonald's fry box behind the couch the door to the balcony had issues

#### Reference 124 - Posted on April 2015

it was so nice. The rooms were very clean

#### Reference 125 – Commented on April 2015

There was mold in the shower and no hot water

**Reference 126 - Posted on March 2015**

Nice clean place to stay.

**Reference 127 - Posted on February 2014**

The rooms smell like sewer and the air conditioner dsnt work that well.....I

**Reference 128 - Posted on September 2013**

The Rooms are very nice and clean,

**Reference 129 - Posted on September 2013**

Spent two days never got AC fixed never got an offer for adjustment of bill.

**Reference 130 - Posted on August 2013**

Thanks Best Western, nice clean & clean smelling rooms :0)

**Reference 131 - Posted on July 2013**

If its friendly staff or a room with A/C your looking for don't bother staying at the Best Western in Salmon Arm BC. It doesn't have either of these..

**Reference 132 - Posted on July 2013**

We stayed at several Best Western's, clean, convenient and affordable.

**Reference 133 - Posted on July 2013**

my room didn't have ac they put me in a room above the kitchen with a loud noise from the floor my view was the roof (I mean I can open the window an step out to the roof )not only that it was a big central air unit making noise. I call front desk he acted like it was his hotel and told me he only had one room left and if I don't like it I have to find another hotel so I went and got the new keys

**Reference 134 - Posted on July 2013**

Our air conditioning went out and we woke up drenched in sweat about 3 am. got switched to a room that had only one bed, and a sofa that let out into a bed, but it wouldn't let out because the air conditioning unit was in the way. So my 6ft Son had to sleep on a 3 and a half foot wide love seat for the rest of the night.

**Reference 135 - Posted on June 2013**

nice rooms, and very clean.

**Reference 136 - Posted on June 2013**

The hotel was super nice, great staff, CLEAN!!!, and good value. Thank you so much.

**Reference 137 – Commented on April 2013**

The floor did not appear to be vaccummed very well so I just went around and picked up the stuff I found so she would not cram anything else in her mouth (dog food, random bits of plastic).

**Reference 138**

The front desk clerk was very nice and helpful

**Reference 139 - Commented on April 2013**

your hotel suck like hell. food sucks, beds suck, tvs suck, and the bathrooms never work right in the rooms. and the rooms always smell funky.

#### Reference 140 – Posted on January 2013

the bed was too comfortable for words. Definitely a five star night.

#### Reference 141 - Posted on September 2012

Free brunch!!!! Love the rooms, pool , hottub , service and great food!!!! Cobourg Ont. location!!!!

#### Reference 142 - Posted on September 2012

The accommodations are modern, comfortable, spacious and

#### Reference 143 - Posted on September 2012

the rooms their clean and nicley decorated :)

#### Reference 144 – Commented on September 2012

I've been a Best Western customer for years now, but lately the rooms I've stayed in are awful. The furniture is so uncomfortable. One place I stayed at, I sat in the chair and it was like sitting on the floor and the arms of the chair were at my shoulders. How can you be comfortable with something like that and the desk chair was just as bad. I'm trying to find a different chain to stay at in the future

#### Reference 145 - Posted on September 2012

comfortable beds

#### Reference 146 - Posted on September 2012

The room was clean and beautiful

#### Reference 147 - Posted on September 2012

Room is kind of small has a frigerator but no microwave???? what the #@??, and the light in the bath room is out for the stand up shower with very little water pressure

#### Reference 148 - Posted on September 2012

When I shared my situation with the hotel they very kindly upgraded me to a beautiful room with two (!) full size bathtubs, one of them a big, jettet jacuzzi I could hop into from my king-sized bed.

#### Reference 149 - Posted on September 2012

We had comfortable, quiet rooms

#### Reference 150 - Posted on July 2012

Think they might have bed bugs???? Yeah.. probably.

#### Reference 151 - Posted on November 2011

The room was spacious, nicely decorated, flat screen TV, microwave and refrigerator in my room not to mention free wi fi.

#### Reference 152 - Posted on July 2009

Really do like staying at the Best Western always clean and afforable!

## APPENDIX L: Posts and Comments Regarding Website

The following are comments regarding the Best Western website. 83 references coded.

#### Reference 1 – Posted on March 2017

Would love to sign up for your rewards program IF your rewards website would not hang up when registering. Been trying for two days now. I am in a Best Western right now and still no luck

#### Reference 2 - Posted on March 2017

I am unable to join Best Western Rewards due to website issues. After I entered all information for joining and website just displays a spinning BW indicator – it's still spinning after 45 minutes.

I've been unable to join Best Western Rewards program for 4 weeks now due to website issue.

#### Reference 3 - Posted on March 2017

I have been trying to make a reservation online for two days. You told me to call but you never bothered to tell me that your website has been down for two days. I am annoyed.

#### Reference 4 - Posted on March 2017

I am shocked that a reservation made 24 hours ago cannot be cancelled. Online reservations bury the no cancellation policy in the same section as no pets

#### Reference 5 - Posted on March 2017

I always thought that the cancellation policy is stated in a red box before making the reservation official.

#### Reference 6 - Posted on March 2017

It is for most hotel websites.... but sadly not Best Western.

#### Reference 7 - Posted on March 2017

Well last night I called up to book a reservation with an agent because it was denied when I tried to do it online.

#### Reference 8 - Posted on March 2017

Best Western now has the worst web site in the business, sad it used to be the best.

#### Reference 9 - Posted on March 2017

Will your website people ever make your site more Mac compatible? Really is aggravating using Firefox or Safari browsers

#### Reference 10 – Commented on March 2017

Your Best Western Rewards site allows a person to create a new profile with any latin extended letter, eg. Ä,Ö, Å in Finland and many similar characters in other countries. But when a person with such character in his/her name tries to make a reservation when logged in with his/her profile, your reservation system doesn't recognize those characters and says "your name doesn't match with BWR profile". I can't find any statistics but I would guess that this affects millions of people in Europe, if all the extensions behave similarly. I fixed this with your support and we changed my name so that Ä is replaced with AE. After that I was able to make a reservation. .

#### Reference 11 - Posted on March 2017

Any word on when you'll be able to take reservations online again?

#### Reference 12 - Posted on March 2017

the website is always giving me trouble no matter what device I pull it up under or what web engine (Firefox, IE, Chrome, etc). It simply will not load my account nor my rewards activity completely. This is frustrating because I can never tell if rewards have been properly applied until the site randomly chooses to work for me.

#### Reference 13 - Posted on March 2017



Wow.....Web site still not working. You would think that a business would care about their customers concerns. Every time I complain about not being able to open my account, all I get is a form letter saying we are sorry and you must be doing something wrong.

#### **Reference 14 - Posted on March 2017**

Why have a web site if it never works?

#### **Reference 15 – Commented on March 2017**

Yes.. It's a big inconvenience..... I have an account that won't open again today.

#### **Reference 16 - Commented on March 2017**

Been reported by countless people and totally ignored by BW since last October. Won't be fixed, all you will get is the canned reply above. I'm Diamond and still don't book BW anymore, its quite sad.

#### **Reference 17 - Posted on March 2017**

Twice out of the three days I have been trying to use your website, I have not been able to make a reservation. Why can you not modify a reservation, once it is made?

#### **Reference 18 - Commented on March 2017**

I was trying to book a room in one of your hotels in Paris via your website. After putting in my card details and all, it sent me this message "Invalid guarantee option".

#### **Reference 19 - Posted on February 2017**

Website just keeps getting worse! Now I can't book online using points... probably not going to be a Diamond member for much longer, there are better websites out there :-(

#### **Reference 20 - Posted on February 2017**

dissapointed BW site won't allow me to redeem points for restaurants for 2 days now

#### **Reference 21 - Posted on February 2017**

My first attempt was to cancel online but that failed.

#### **Reference 22 - Posted on February 2017**

Can't log in. Just keeps cycling. What now???

#### **Reference 23 - Posted on February 2017**

Amazing that I can't get a receipt for a past stay off your website, like one easily can with every other major hotel chain. As a busy business traveler who needs to submit monthly receipts, the hassle of having to call the individual hotel when I've misplaced a receipt is a deal breaker. There is also no option to chat with a customer service representative? So not user friendly.

#### **Reference 24 - Posted on February 2017**

Best Western reservation system leaves a lot to be desired...your website sucks!

#### **Reference 25 - Posted on February 2017**

Above all, Best Western US doesn't give any email or complaint procedure to complaint about anything, this shows the level of transparency not given at all

#### **Reference 26 - Posted on February 2017**

I'm trying to reset my password to access my group reservation and it keeps giving me an error message and the same password each time I press reset. Can you assist?

#### Reference 27 - Posted on January 2017

I have enough points for a gift card. I am trying to order it...I click " I agree to the TERMS AND CONDITIONS " and click submit but nothing happens. Any idea why it isn't working?

#### Reference 28 - Posted on January 2017

What is going on with your website?? Ever since you guys changed it I can't get on it most of the time. I keep getting access denied. The few times I can access the site all I get is a spinning wheel and I can't get into my account. Simply stated the new site sucks. My husband and I average about 150 nights a year at Best Western normally but lately we have been using Marriott as we don't have problems accessing their site. I know I'm not the only person having this problem. If you can't work out the kinks on the new site then put the old one back in place.

#### Reference 29 - Posted on January 2017

Your website really sucks!

#### Reference 30 - Posted on January 2017

What is going on with your website? Why can't we check upcoming reservations or past reservations? It used to be user friendly

#### Reference 31 - Posted on January 2017

Too bad their site hasn't let me look at my reservations or account for over 2 weeks without locking up.

#### Reference 32 - Posted on January 2017

Yes it is having issues it just keeps loading I even contacted head office and they told me what my phone was doing before even telling them and said IT closed for weekend they be back Monday to fix it

#### Reference 33 - Posted on January 2017

I just tried again using the link you provided (which appears to be the same page I have been going to) and it still locks up when I try to check my reservation. There are also problems when I use the Android app. This has been going on since 28 Dec. That is when I originally contacted customer support.

#### Reference 34 - Posted on January 2017

I don't have any points for that stay on my account even though I showed my card to the staff at the hotel at check in? I can't see the points either on my Best Western app?

#### Reference 35 - Posted on January 2017

Please Best Western fix your website. It's been over 3 months that I cannot access my reservation past, present. I've reported the problem. When I click on my account, my reservation, all I get is a group of white spirals spinning around your logo. I stayed in a Drury Inn over the weekend due to this issue...you are losing business...or at least mine. I have upcoming reservations with you...might just want to change them, look at them, print them...but I can't.

#### Reference 36 - Commented on January 2017

With no functional website I can't do business. I just can't. I hope BW has a serious lawsuit going against whoever created the new site, it's costing you an insane amount of lost business. Three months is an OUTRAGEOUS amount of time to fix these issues. These things should be fixed in one emergency session by your "IT" people.

#### Reference 37 - Posted on January 2017

I would love to stay with Best Western, but the website just makes that impossible. It has been over a week since I've been able to properly view my account, or view active reservations. I have gotten "Access Denied" errors over 1,000 times according to my browser logs. I've been reporting this for months, and it is clear BW's IT has no interest in fixing anything.

#### Reference 38 - Commented on January 2017

And yes, this is on 4 different browsers, including new installs, cleared cookies, cache, etc. I'm a web developer - it's the site. The old site was SO MUCH better... why was it changed?

#### Reference 39 - Commented on January 2017

I would but your website won't let me. I've tried to sign up several times on my laptop, iPad and now iPhone. It just keeps spinning.

#### Reference 40 - Posted on January 2017

Access Denied

You don't have permission to access "http://www.bestwestern.com/en\_US/best-western-rewards.html" on this server.  
Reference #18.54f50717.1483508528.39351b03

MORE ERRORS on your website. Will it ever be stable again?

#### Reference 41 - Posted on December 2016

If you go to Best Western corporate website there is no where to complain

#### Reference 42 - Posted on December 2016

Is BW doing anything about their awful website? I'm a Diamond Select that books from website usually. The site was not great before, but functional. Since you had that third party vendor "improve" it a few months ago, it is now a worthless pos! Please fix it, I don't want to have to go somewhere else!

#### Reference 43 - Commented on December 2016

I've already left for IHG, and cancelled more than 30 nights booked for next year at BW. Except for one reservation that the site won't allow me to even view... it's been like this for months and all I ever hear is "Sorry!" Whoever approved the new site to go live should be sued. The new site also broke the affiliate program and tons of old links, but that 's another issue (that's also been totally ignored for months now),

#### Reference 44 - Posted on December 2016

Whoever rebuilt your website should be fired. Several times it has not allowed me to complete a reservation, and it never allows user to put in special room requests. Total failure on your part.

#### Reference 45 - Posted on December 2016

I am missing points for recent stays, and cannot find a contact link on the website.

#### Reference 46 - Posted on December 2016

can't log in to account. What Now folks???

#### Reference 47 - Posted on December 2016

Can your webadmin check your site ? Every time I try to make a hotel reservation, no matter what browser or device I use, I cannot input anything in the "request" box... For example on this or any other hotel ---

#### Reference 48 - Posted on December 2016

Best Western, Please fix your new website. I have not been able to access my account for months now. I can't see my reservations or my points. I've called customer service several times they tell me you are working on it but after three months my patience is wearing thin. I have a son who is an IT and a son-in-law who is a programmer perhaps you need to call them! Vacation planning is underway and Choice Hotels may be getting my business in 2017.

#### Reference 49 - Posted on December 2016

Customers beware! If you book your reservation through Best Western's website and you have an issue with your hotel, they will bounce you back and forth between the hotel and the customer service number and neither will take responsibility for the error to make it right.

#### Reference 50 - Posted on December 2016

Love your properties but your website people really need to get their act together regarding compatibility with Firefox and Safari using a Mac. Can access parts of site but not the My Account features

#### Reference 51 – Commented on December 2016

Ya, been going on for a while now. I can't believe it's taking this long to fix the bugs...Never have issues on the Hilton site

#### Reference 52 - Posted on December 2016

I am unable to complete a reservation using <https://www.bestwestern.com> system. The web page keeps loading forever after a confirm the booking.  
Using Chrome 55 on Windows 7.

#### Reference 53 - Commented on December 2016

Hi. It looks like the website is not working properly with Google Chrome. It works on Internet Explorer. Thank you for your quick response.

#### Reference 54 - Posted on December 2016

Bestwestern.com is down. That is all.

#### Reference 55 - Posted on December 2016

You web site says "access denied" what is going on

#### Reference 56 - Posted on December 2016

Your new and improved website is basically unusable. I am a diamond level rewards member and can not currently make reservations nor review my current reservations. I thought it would be improved after the initial launch although it has been several weeks and still not working. Is someone working on it?

#### Reference 57 - Posted on December 2016

Dear Best Western, I made a booking through your online facilities to stay at one of the hotels in Grenoble France. I need to cancel the booking because my plans have changed so I phoned hotel and they told me to cancel online as they can not do it. i have been trying to do it on line for some days now but somehow the process doesnt complete I get this bw thing circulating forever. where can i cancel this booking because i do not want to be charged for no show

#### Reference 58 - Posted on November 2016

New website is not user friendly at all, trying to book at Park and Fly rate that I have booked many times before at the Best Western Inn at the Airport in Cheektowaga NY and it is not giving me the option! Very frustrating!

#### Reference 59 - Posted on November 2016

I have stayed at Best Western hotels many times but I have to say that the web site now makes it very hard to find the information that you need.

#### Reference 60 - Posted on November 2016

Is there a problem with your Rewards members site. I'm trying to get my rewards activity and the website just keeps on trying to login

#### Reference 61 - Posted on November 2016

Your website currently returns the following message when trying to make a booking: "The reservation can not be completed due to an unexpected error in the BW Web Services." How am I supposed to proceed from here?

#### Reference 62 - Posted on November 2016

The new website update is unbelievably terrible. You can't search by state? If I want to find a BW I have to type in a specific city? I have called the 1800 number and they said to try google.

#### Reference 63 - Posted on November 2016

Need to fix Online site .Most of the Pages Wont Load.

#### Reference 64 - Posted on November 2016

I think the website is having issues using the Firefox browser using a Mac. Haven't been able to log in for a few days

#### Reference 65 - Posted on September 2016

I'm trying to access my rewards page (like I have for the past year) and despite countless unanswered emails from me to you, I STILL can't access them.

#### Reference 66 - Posted on March 2016

Hi. Your website keeps displaying an internal server error. It's hard to book a room when the website is down.

#### Reference 67 - Posted on March 2016

Your form will not accept my current card. I have requested a new card no reply, I would like to enter your contest, please reply.

#### Reference 68 - Commented on November 2015

once again best western hotel dante Barcelona web site not accepting booking

#### Reference 69 - Posted on October 2015

I have been trying to book online for weeks and no matter what browser I use, or my phone, I cannot open anything. Every webpage says it cannot load. I am an employee trying to book a room through member web and the "Book employee rate" option does nothing. It takes me to a webpage that will not load. I cannot look up any other properties for guests with requests for information. What is the deal??

#### Reference 70 - Posted on October 2015

We're points holders, fighting with a very user-hostile website for booking, can't find a way to book the hotels we want, had to leave messages, nobody calls us back, shockingly poor customer service. If you're a points holder they just don't want to know you. Unbelievable. Considering cutting up the card and never using them again. Far too difficult.

#### Reference 71 - Posted on October 2015

Your Website sucks I entered my membership info 3 'xs'. Finally had to ask for another password as it wouldn't accept it. You sent another password and it wouldn't accept that 1/2 hour later this is stupid. Waste of time jumping through hoops that don't work.

#### Reference 72 - Posted on October 2015

The website is still down. What's the deal with the captcha thing on signing in? Much of the time they want you to click on "the matching image to the right" but there is no matching image to the right. So you retry and it still will not work.

#### Reference 73 - Posted on December 2013

I have been trying to log into the website to redeem my points for 2 days. I enter my password and nothing happens, the little wheel just keeps spinning.....

#### Reference 74 - Posted on June 2013

i just recently tried to use my i.d number as a member of best western and always i got the answer your I.D NUMBER IS INCORRECT.COULD YOU SEND TO MY EMAIL ADDRESS THE CORRECT I.D

#### Reference 75 - Posted on June 2013

I have been trying to request a new points card for about ten minutes now. Each time I do, your website redirects me to sign in again. And I do...and the cycle begins again. No matter how many times I sign in, it keeps asking me to sign in again to request a new card...give me a break here.

#### Reference 76 - Posted on April 2013

I'm trying to fill out the rewards survey online, and the form won't accept my rewards card number even though it is entered in the space correctly. I re entered it three times. The web page kept freezing up also. Do you have a link I can use? I've just spent two nights in two states and have great things to say if I can get to a survey.

#### Reference 77 - Posted on September 2012

website isn't working which means no promo codes..... called hotels directly to see if they could help me out and no go

#### Reference 78 - Posted on September 2012 (By Best Western)

Announcing the brand new <http://www.bestwestern.com/> website re-launch! A faster, easier way to book your travel with tons more images and content to help choose the perfect Best Western hotel for your trip. Check it out today!

#### Reference 79 – Commented on September 2012

what is up with this new website... you go round and round in circles and cant book anything???

#### Reference 80 - Commented on September 2012

The new site looks sharp!

#### Reference 81 - Commented on September 2012

Hey, I'm trying to book a room but when I click 'Reserve', nothing happens. Looks like the link is bad!

#### Reference 82 - Commented on September 2012

New Website is easy to navigate around, nice.

#### Reference 83 - Commented on September 2012

It almost seems to me we have to do more searching now. You have to click on a separate amenities tab to find out what the hotel offers and we also have to do a separate click to bring up a map of locations so while it is new and has the trip adviser reviews that are added, some of the important content was hidden from selection

## APPENDIX M: Posts and Comments Regarding Cancellations, Bookings, and Payments

44 references coded.

#### Reference 1 – Posted on March 2017

I'm being held to a cancellation policy on a reservation made in error without my knowledge until after the reservation was complete? Really?

Is business really that bad that you have to treat customers this way?

#avoidbestwestern

#### Reference 2 - Commented on March 2017

I would like to be in the loop because we have not been able to be refunded. The credit card company has been more accommodating than your hotel. They allowed us to dispute the charges. I'm curious on why Best Western has no interest in saving their name on this matter.

Not having hot water is something people I know and their friends will know about. This is nonsense. Truly disappointed.

#### Reference 3 - Posted on March 2017

I have a confirmed reservation at your Dayton Beach property, booked through AAA travel and your property is refusing to honor

the rate (published and confirmed). I would love for someone to make contact asap to resolve. This seems like a very poor way to conduct business.

#### Reference 4 - Posted on March 2017

Was told the hold fee on the room was 10% of the room. Turned out to be the FULL price of the room. I was left with a -\$300 bank account, charged bank fees, and no money to use for food/transportation. Was staying at another Best Western this weekend, but I cannot cover DOUBLE the price of the room with the additional hold, so I cancelled the room. Now getting charged \$200 for canceling. I most likely will not be using Best Western ever again.

#### Reference 5 - Posted on February 2017

Beware and stay at your own risk, especially if u are a #singleMom and traveling at night with kids... they asked me to leave despite having a prepaid reservation through @Hotels.com (which has been super helpful in resolving by the way) past 8pm at night on a Sunday. Awful #hospitality and #customerservice. After staying at @BestWestern with no issues all over I am shocked and not sure I will stay again ever. Beware and avoid at all costs in #Tully New York, the @DaysInn up the street in @Cortland is cheaper, kinder and better.

#### Reference 6 - Posted on February 2017

Today I tried to cancel a reservation for a Best Western Hotel on 22 February. My first attempt was to cancel online but that failed. My second attempt was to call their toll free number and actually speak to a human to cancel the reservation and this also failed. The representative could not adequately explain why I could not cancel this reservation even though I was trying to do this with 48+ hours notice. Really people? You are going to charge me for NOT staying at your hotel?

#### Reference 7 - Posted on February 2017

I had a very bad experience with the Best Western Gardens hotel in Twentynine Palms. I asked them to let me come next weekend instead of this one because there are hazardous weather conditions in the area. They refused, saying it was a non refundable ticket. I was not asking for a refund. I could have come just one week later. In the past other hotels had shown common sense so that their customers won't have to put their lives in danger. I will not put my life in danger by trying to drive in hazardous conditions, as reported on TV. They have my money already. Being alive is more important to me than saving money. I hate their attitude toward their customers. There are many good hotels in that area. Are all Best Western hotels as bad as this one? If yes, it's good to know that I should avoid the Whole chain. I will definitely avoid the one I had this bad experience with. I am likely to go to that area many times and I will definitely find something other than a best western hotel.

#### Reference 8 – Posted on February 2017

We have been told we may not change or cancel and will NOT be refunded. This is very frustrating as all we wanted to do was change the date by 2 days!

#### Reference 9 - Posted on February 2017

Highly unsatisfied first of all the rooms are mediocre and certainly not worth the price. I book for 2 nights so the cost was \$178.00 plus tax so it came up too \$203.36 however after looking at my bank statement later that night it stated I was charge \$233.36 so there an unexplained over charge of \$30.00

#### Reference 10 – Posted on January 2017

I had reservations to stay at BW Airport Plaza in Reno, NV. I called 2 hours after the cancellation deadline, as my sons Air Force deployment date was changed for the 3rd time. Mind you, this was 3 days before my reservation. Needless to say, not only did the property refuse to help me, they were rude as well. A call to BW main line had similar results. I have cancelled my card and will NEVER stay at a BW property again after being a loyal customer for more than 3 years. Even when I called to cancel, the rep was disinterested in my reasoning. I am done with BW. So disappointed.

#### Reference 11 - Posted on January 2017

I booked at a Best Western hotel through booking.com with a rate that had free cancellation. I cancelled my reservation weeks in advance, and yet Best Western still charged me for the hotel (a "no show"). I spent way too much time on the phone with many different people, as they attempted to figure out why I was charged anyways (this is after spending hours on the phone with my bank as well). Finally, over two weeks later, I am refunded the money, only to find that I have not been refunded the full amount! How is it possible that the manager could see what I was charged, and yet submit a different amount for the refund? I'm not waiting on the phone again to try and deal with this, but this is honestly ridiculous and I shouldn't have been charged in the first place. Definitely won't be booking with Best Western again soon if this is the kind of hassle that ensues, just to get money back that should never have been taken (don't give them your credit card info, apparently, as they can't be trusted to not use it when they shouldn't).

#### Reference 12 - Posted on January 2017

when I tried to change/cancel my BestWestern reservation I wasn't able to because there was a two day requirement to cancel without penalty. I called the hotel on the 31st and was told I had to talk to the General Manager who was not there. I called again on the first and second to no avail. On the 3rd I finally talked to him and was told that corporate says no refund for no shows for any reason at all.

#### Reference 13 - Posted on February 2017

I was charged on Friday from Hotels.com for my stay. I was then charged AGAIN on Sunday morning, from Best Western.

I talked to someone at the front desk before I checked out Sunday and they said it'd be back in my account within a day or two. I checked my account early this morning and the money was refunded, BUT...no more than 2 hours later, the money was withdrawn again...PLEASE HELP!!

#### Reference 14 - Posted on February 2017

I reserved the room on booking.com, when i arrived i was not asked for any ID or bank details/ payment. I assumed this was because they already have mine on file from the reservation. when i checked out i paid the 83 euros that was due.

my problem is that I have just checked my bank account and it turns out i have been charged twice ??  
the stay was great and i have no issues with that

#### Reference 15 - Posted on February 2017

I'm tired of you holding my money hostage.

#### Reference 16

You say, We have no record of billing more than \$246.51 and if we could fix it, we would. Put in a dispute with your bank and we will clear it right up. WRONG! I spoke with the bank today and they said they denied my dispute because they spoke with your General Manager, Charlene or Charlese and she said I was to be charged \$416.95 so the charges stand. Even if I was to be charged \$416.95, how do you get off taking \$493.02? THEFT! I have a bill that I recieved from your Motel the day I checked out for \$246.51. I have 2 EXACT charges at my bank for \$246.51. This may not seem like a lot of money to your company but I am a single mom that works at a children's shelter. I don't make a ton of money. I wanted to give my son a nice Christmas. He enjoyed himself, at least after he stopped crying over his disappointment over the pool but the memories of this trip have been all but ruined because of your horrible business practices. I spoke with a manager named Stephanie today and got the run around. I was put on hold for 10min and then hung up on. When I called back I was put on hold for another 10min. She finally understood I wasn't going anywhere and took the call. She's looking into it. We'll see how far that gets me.

#### Reference 17 - Posted on February 2017

Worst hotel I ever stayed at and don't give the your credit card because you don't know how many times they will charge you. Don't book through Expedia and try to go to this hotel because you will be charged through Expedia and the hotel because the hotel will want your card on file for accidental and they will then charge you for your hotel room again.

#### Reference 18 - Posted on February 2017

Two un authorised payments now been taken from my bank! No one giving me answers and it's Day 3 I'm livid never again will I be staying at best western

#### Reference 19 - Posted on February 2017

We paid, full price, long time ago and could not travel and were promised a room at any time we could come. We are almost 80 years old and do not like this run around ! Should we get someone involved ?

#### Reference 20 - Posted on February 2017

I was charged two additional nights plus an upgrade with no apologies for the inconvenience. The staff, who claim to be management, said because I booked on Priceline, I would be treated as a third class citizen. Is this how Best Western operates?

#### Reference 21 - Posted on February 2017

Best Western just lost my business. I stay fairly frequently, probably a drop in their bucket to Best Western but enough to be a Platinum member I went to the Best Western Grand Manor Inn tonight in Eugene, OR Handed the young lady at the counter my ID and Credit Card and told her I wanted to pay cash rather than have my card charged, she stated that if I did pay cash I had to post



a \$350 cash deposit with her, I stated that I stayed at Best Western in Sutherlin, OR last week and didn't have to post a cash deposit, they had accepted my Credit Card as the deposit. She told me it was a new policy that went into effect this week, needless to say I went next door to Courtyard and they were more than happy to take my cash and my Credit Card as the security deposit. SO LONG BEST WESTERN

#### Reference 22 - Posted on February 2017

Extraordinarily dissatisfied with Best Western. When we travel now, we will stay anywhere but with them. We have traveled to the same hotel every year for the last 10 years to visit my son. We were just there from Sunday to Tuesday of this week. We went through Expedia and booked and paid in full. When we went to check out, we were told we need to pay in full. When I tried to tell her that we paid already, she accused us of lying and would not let my husband, myself and our special needs child (who was getting into trouble in the lobby) leave and she accused us of stealing services since we did not want to pay. I am not a thief and do not like being accused of one. I called BW and they said it is the hotel's problem where we stayed. The hotel said that it is Expedia's problem. Expedia said that it is the hotel's problem. So now we have paid twice. Currently I want all charges to be dropped even the one that we paid originally and at the hotel because I don't like being called a thief. So terribly angry. So embarrassed. Not that BW will do anything about this. I really doubt it.

#### Reference 23 - Posted on December 2016

They took \$25.00 from my card to pay a taxi but said the payment didn't go through, so they made me withdraw cash. Only afterwards I found out they made me pay twice because the payment by card DID GO THROUGH. I've been trying to contact them for weeks and they don't know what to do because apparently the manager or a person who could solve the issue is never there. They literally STOLE MY MONEY and don't even answer my emails.

#### Reference 24 - Posted on November 2016

cancelled my reservation just four days before my trip. They offered another option 50% more expensive. When we finally accepted the cancellation, because we found other option, YOU HOTEL CHARGED MY CREDIT CARD!

YOU CHARGED A CREDIT CARD AFTER YOU ASKED ME TO CANCEL IT???

Is this the normal procedure? You ask us to cancel to just charge after it?

#### Reference 25 - Posted on November 2016

Booked on 30 October and the hotel took the full cost for two rooms for two nights on the 31st. Cancelled on 6 November and still no sign at all of the refund due to me being sent to my card account. When may I expect to see my money?

#### Reference 26 - Posted on November 2016

I booked a hotel room at your best Western plus Casino royal in las Vegas and i am not going until christmas. I Have been charged some money and I assume that its just a check up from you to see if i Have money on my card that many hotels do but i Wonder When that money Will be released to my card again. . Have a very tight budget before i Go There and i need all my money. I am not getting money for The hotel until right after i Go. If I dont get this money back next week i Will unfortunately Have to cancel The booking and would be glad If you could help me tell When i Will get The money back.

#### Reference 27 - Posted on November 2016

We were double charged at the Best Western Inn in Newberg Oregon on Nov 12 and 13th 2016. I tried to reason with the front desk person and get credit for being double charged but they did not credit me and now I have to dispute the charge with my bank. Very frustrating experience to say the least. Sad.

#### Reference 28 - Posted on November 2016

I'm angry to find that Best Western chose to take an additional \$75 out of my bank account without my permission. The charges on my receipt are \$225. My bank account shows nearly \$300 removed. I called the location and was told the roughly \$75 "incidentals" charge would be refunded. It's been more than 24 hours. Best Western was not authorized to take the extra \$75 out. I consider this fraud.

#### Reference 29 - Posted on November 2016

Tell me why I've been waiting over two weeks now for my incidentals deposit to be released back into in my account? I've NEVER had this problem at any other hotel chain.

#### Reference 30 - Posted on September 2016

When I had to cancel due to being hospitalized I asked the agent to contact the manager at the hotel and explain why I wouldn't be filling my reservation and needed to cancel. I found out the manager told the agent it wasn't his problem that I was in the hospital and he wouldn't cancel and refused to refund the reservation. I am still sick in the hospital and full of mixed emotions with regards to the managers response.

#### Reference 31 - Posted on September 2016

Your company in West, Texas cancelled our room without our consent and now are trying to charge us over \$100 more for each night!!

#### Reference 32 - Posted on September 2016

We made the reservation through Booking.com. We are now being told, 10 days after booking, and we built an entire vacation around this booking, that your hotel had made an error when typing the rate into the Booking.com system. Now we were offered one of two solutions. Either pay the higher rate which was approximately \$150.00 more PER DAY, or cancel our reservation. This was your "middle ground solution"? This is not only NOT middle ground, it is an insult! I feel that you should have to honor the price for your mistake! Why should we be penalized for your error?

#### Reference 33 - Posted on September 2016

I have been a faithful Best Western customer for about 10 years, and now I have been charged over \$1000 for a stay that we never made! Stayed in another Best Western on the very night that this hotel charged us. It's a shame that Best Western will not make this right!!!!

#### Reference 34 - Posted on March 2016

Been let down yet again by Bestwestern!!! When you go online and book a hotel through your site you expect at least to have a room!!! today I book online for Pinewood hotel in Wilmslow and 40minutes later get a call to say they have no rooms left and Bestwestern shouldn't have let you book it!  
Last month i turned up to a hotel in bradford that I booked a few days before. However when trying to book in I was told they knew nothing of my reservation! I showed my conformation email and to no avail and had to find another hotel at 7pm after being out on the road since 6am! not good!

#### Reference 35 - Posted on October 2015

A month after my original stay, they charged me over \$90 out of nowhere. I contacted "Joe", the manager multiple times and after talking to their GM Tammy i found out that he was lying to me. After 2 months of fighting we got our money back only to be charged again a month later. Our bank has put this under fraudulent charges and claimed someone working there may have stolen our card number. I have attempted to contact their GM, but none of my calls have been returned.

#### Reference 36 - Posted on December 2014

so disappointed by your company and it's policies! I had to cancel a reservation a week ago due to vehicle problems (we were stranded several hundred miles away with no way to get home or to the hotel). My debit card is still being charged for that stay even though I cancelled in a timely manner! How does that seem appropriate? I will be certain to stay in other hotels and motels when I travel from now on, and will encourage everyone I know to do the same.

#### Reference 37 - Posted on February 2014

DON'T stay at Best Western Inn & Suites in Crandon Wisconsin. They keep your credit card info on file and decide a week after you check out they want to charge you more. Feels great to know my information is floating around for any employee to steal.

#### Reference 38 – Commented on February 2014

They did the same thing to us. They charged us for a night we didn't even stay and they refuse to accept PROOF that we weren't there. GPS PROOF from our phones and our car (we went into a ditch during a blizzard and had no choice but to stay here) We have tow truck receipt also and the tow truck driver also said we were not the only ones they ripped off that night! I already hired a lawyer, maybe someone on this "fan?" (HAHAHA) might prefer to reverse the charge. I will never ever stay at another BW, affiliate and I will make sure everyone I know is aware that they scam money!

#### Reference 39 - Posted on February 2014

After you check out they contact you a week later and tell you to pay for another night. VERY BAD BUSINESS!

#### Reference 40 - Posted on July 2013

If they have the opportunity to book your room out from under you for a higher rate, they sure will do that...even when the room is confirmed through the Best Western website WITH a confirmation number and guarantee! JUST SAY NO.

#### Reference 41 - Posted on July 2013

I still have over \$50 of pending charges that should have been refunded by now but hasn't. Your hotels are nice but, the extra "incidental" money your hotels add to the bill makes it hard to budget my move across country. You need a new policy and quick!

#### Reference 42 - Posted on June 2013

I have NEVER been so upset by a company or felt basically robbed before. This is when I wish I had the power to start a boycott, but I am totally helpless. The big bad company just screwed me over and took my money, and said "tough, too bad".

#### Reference 43 - Posted on September 2012

I booked one nights accommodation and arrived at the Hotel to find out that I have been booked for two. To make matters worse I have to pay for the second night out of my own pocket and hope that I can get some sort of refund from Best Western at some point

#### Reference 44 - Commented on March 2010

Best Western stole over \$375 from me. I have never stayed at the hotel they charged me for. They will not refund.

## APPENDIX N: Posts and Comments Regarding Brand Image of Best Western

The following are the text messages that consumers made regarding the image of Best Western. 16 references coded.

#### Reference 1 – Posted on November 2016

I'm a Reward Member and I know that all hotels are independently owned, but on the outside you can read Best Western. I'm in tourism marketing and I'm a travel consultant and after these personal experiences with this given hotel and this customer care behavior of this brand I'm about to give up being a loyal BW customer any longer

#### Reference 2

There are other brands out there

#### Reference 3 - Posted on November 2016

After reading the BW reviews of other hotels I will not be staying at BW any time soon.

#### Reference 4 - Commented on September 2016

Upsetting because I have thought Best Western has meant quality for me for the last ten years.

#### Reference 5 – Posted on August 2016

I wish your hotel branding was more consistent. In my opinion a BW Plus should provide the same amenities no matter where it is. One should be able to expect certain amenities for each brand/group a BW falls into

#### Reference 6 - Posted on March 2016

This stay has really changed my view of the Best Western brand

#### Reference 7 - Posted on March 2016

If I can go anywhere I would never stayed at Best Western ever again in my life I am awake at 1:36 AM because your construction workers that are working at midnight are so loud it is beyond me they are working on a suite of rooms next to mine I've called management three times they cannot do anything because the construction workers were hired by someone else so I have a big day

ahead of me tomorrow I have to be up at 6 AM and I'm supposed to get really good sleep instead I get to listen to your guys hammering I am absolutely appalled that you expect people to pay \$160-\$200 a night to listen to people do construction on rooms next to theirs and you won't do anything about it. This is going to become a PR nightmare for you it is marketing 101 that you take care of your hotel guests and you don't cause issues so they cannot sleep and get a good nights rest. I cannot fathom how your hotel would even think that it's OK to hire people to work in the middle of the night while people are sleeping hello you can't sleep with someone's yelling back-and-forth using power tools and hammering. Like I said PR nightmare. Happy to yelp about it happy to tweet about it happy to Pinterest about it happy to Snapchat about it happy to periscope about it no problem it's one thing if the management was able to switch me to another room or do something instead they can't do anything it's absolutely beyond unacceptable. I have tried to come up with a solution I comanagement three times starting at 8 PM 10 PM and midnight and nothing can be done so it is now on you when you get bad press.

#### Reference 8 - Posted on September 2015

what I don't understand. You have won awards for customer service but yet you don't want to deal with customers.

#### Reference 9 - Posted on September 2015

That is the main problem with Best Westerns, they are not consistent throughout their chain. Some are okay and others not so much. I have stayed in a couple that were nice but they were the Best Western Plus.

#### Reference 10 - Posted on September 2015

brand is headed in the future as i will no longer consider best westerns in my planning as a place to stay

#### Reference 11 - Posted on July 2015

Share all the photos and information with corporate offices along with statements by family members. Note that if this is an acceptable situation for a Best Western hotel, even if run by a local owner, then this implies that either corporate needs to verify acceptable standards to owners, or as a representative of their brand, then corporate standards are no longer acceptable for basic industry standards. Corporate should encourage this particular hotel to come up to industry standards. The corporation has a responsibility to protect their Brand which this owner has almost destroyed for you.

#### Reference 12 - Posted on February 2014 (Against gay rights)

Well, at least that's one less state I need to see. Effectively immediately, I'm personally banning all businesses based in Arizona. Corporate Headquarters for national companies (Best Western, Dial Corp., PetSmart, U-Haul, US Airways and many more) are just as liable (esp. given their powerful lobbying power) as the small business owner.

#### Reference 13 – Posted on August 2013 (Logo change)

Can you please bring back an updated version of the Gold Crown? The Gold Crown defines Best Western since the 1960s - 1994... The RED Crown just doesn't cut it. It is almost 20 years old. Time for a fresh, NEW corporate image, dont ya think?

#### Reference 14 - Posted on July 2013

Then Best Western was brought up, the guy sitting next to me freaked out, He said, "I have never been treated so well, that i dont have to compare hotel prices, i stay at best western everytime." I think he just convinced me to convert from Hilton to Best western. :)

#### Reference 15 – Posted on December 2012

Best Western, why are you in bed with the NRA? Until you pull your hotels from affiliation with the gun lobby, I will not set foot in any of your hotels or motels, and I'll tell all my friends and family to do the same. Believe this campaign is gonna have a MAJOR effect on your business!!!!

#### Reference 16 - Posted on August 2012 (Regarding the incident with Staples)

A CNN report stated that after a power outage left the elevator out of service, Staples called down to the front desk to receive assistance to get from the third floor to the main level. But instead of receiving help, he was laughed at and received no further help from a female employee.

The report stated that Staples was forced to throw his bags and his wheelchair down the steps, then crawl down the steps to get to the bottom floor.

## APPENDIX O: Posts and Comments Regarding On-sight Facilities

The following are general comments about on-sight facilities at the hotels made by consumers.

### Reference 1 – Posted on March 2017

Worst experience ever. Waited 1.5 hours for room service. I went to reception and asked where my dinner was and told mine is the next order. Waited another 30 minutes before calling the front desk only to be told my dinner was another 10 minutes away.

Ended up order dominos pizza

### Reference 2 - Posted on March 2017

Your pet accommodations were well thought out. Thank you!

### Reference 3 - Posted on March 2017

I am beyond disgusted that I have been on the phone for over 40 minutes trying to book a room for my daughters Basketball tournament!!!@ this is ridiculous!!! don't have the rooms the coach blocked for us or the rate and have been on hold for almost 20 minutes for a damn conformation #.....Then they just hung up!!!

### Reference 4 - Posted on March 2017

Asked for a bottom room got a top room. Traveling with my mother-in-law who does not do stairs very well

### Reference 5 - Posted on March 2017

Im here at best western. And they dont sell drinks. Im so thirsty! I dont have cash for vending so they have nothing at all.. literally nothing to offer me drink. That is shocking. I guess i will walk to a store. Ridiculous

### Reference 6 - Posted on March 2017

As soon as you get someone on the line you get placed on hold. "Welcome to Best western, can you hold." EVERY SINGLE TIME. I just spent at least 25 minutes on hold just to get basic information. Then when I called back I was almost put on hold again until I had to talk really fast and ask if she could just answer a question. I was told I was going to be transferred but nope, I was put on hold once again and they hung up on me. I've called several times and I've had absolutely no luck because I keep being put on hold. Find out what the person wants before you just put them on hold forever. Looks like I won't be have a family reunion at this place.

### Reference 7 - Posted on March 2017

The last night I put my car in the garage at around 8pm or so. I went the next morning at 9am to retrieve it and there was damage to the drivers side rear end. I have attached a photo. I filled out a damage report immediately at the hotel. It has been five days and I haven't heard anything back about how to file a claim.

I've stayed with your company other times with no issues. This visit was incredibly disappointing.

Can someone please address the issue of my car ASAP.

### Reference 8 - Posted on March 2017

The hotel was clean,

### Reference 9 - Posted on March 2017

my son love the free Wi-Fi

### Reference 10 - Posted on March 2017

I am a BW Rewards platinum member and best western.com tells me no rooms in Uppsala. Checked bookings .com and booked a

nice room same night same hotel.

#### Reference 11 - Posted on March 2017

I had reserved the jacuzzi suite because we both work hard, and a hot soak is always very nice. Upon arrival we were told that they were no longer renting to locals who lived within 25 miles, and refused to honor my reservation. There was no phone call or email to alert us to the situation. There were several emails confirming the reservation. Needless to say, we were both very upset and angry. We have stayed here several times in the past without any problems and would have continued to visit in the future if this new rule had not been put into place! THEY WILL NEVER GET A RECOMMENDATION FROM ME EVER AGAIN and We will probably never stay at another Best Western in the future!

#### Reference 12 - Posted on February 2017

Old hotel needs updating. Other guests smoked marijuana and security didn't seem to be able to control it. The smell permeated our rooms. Party and fights in the hallway. We were on the first floor (non smoking floor) not far from the lobby but no hotel staff tried to stop this. No sleeping at this hotel!

#### Reference 13 – Commented on February 2017

I got my reservation made, but it took hours. Why can't you modify a reservation? I had to cancel and rebook. Your company needs to try making bookings and see what you experience. I kept getting a credit card message, a message that said to check rates and availability, as it had changed, which it hadn't. Once that was all settled, hours later, it took many minutes to get the darn thing confirmed.

#### Reference 14 - Posted on February 2017

.....there were many construction workers staying at the motel and they parked their very large trucks in front of the sidewalk instead of across the parking lot.....I was glad my wife and I were so exhausted that we slept anyway....but when looking for a place to stay the next time we will probably pass on Best Western.....

#### Reference 15 - Posted on February 2017

the vending machines didn't work

#### Reference 16 - Posted on February 2017

They also said the hot tub was still working, nope cold. Needed to be fixed as well. Disappointing.

#### Reference 17 - Posted on February 2017

The decor is tired, a funny smell permeates throughout the building and general cleanliness is poor

#### Reference 18 - Posted on February 2017

The exercise room was lackluster but what I expected. Breakfast was minimal and fruit was hard to come by.

#### Reference 19 - Posted on February 2017

I'm currently headed to the cottonwood best western, and called to find out the hot tub is closed? The main reason I booked was that the advertised that amenity. Why close the hot tub during cool Arizona winters?

#### Reference 20 - Posted on February 2017

What a great place if you like rustic/historic buildings.

#### Reference 21 - Posted on January 2017

The elevator had graffiti and felt like it was going to breakdown. It was shaking when we stepped in.

#### Reference 22 - Posted on January 2017

nice fitness room,

#### Reference 23 - Posted on January 2017

Best Western specifically because they have a hot tub per their website. Arrived and was told it has been broken for "awhile" and they don't know when it will be fixed. Extremely unhappy with this, but can't cancel and stay elsewhere without paying a fee!

#### Reference 24 - Posted on November 2016

Maybe i could spin for some hot water..... yesterday they told us we would'nt have no water for 3 or 4 hrs at bw plus in sikeston missouri.....then after we got it back we had no hot water.....told them they said they were getting it taken care of....that was at 9 pm..got up went to take shower at 9 am and no hot water...went back to desk ask about it was told they were here from 10 pm til 1 am to fix it.... well it's not..... clerk told me she would TRY to get maint back in, and maybe give me a discount.....really.....? what is a discount going to do for me getting clean.....?

#### Reference 25 - Posted on November 2016

gringo hating front bar,

#### Reference 26 - Posted on November 2016

Run down old hotel.

#### Reference 27

Parking Sucks.

#### Reference 28 - Posted on November 2016

This place is going to hell and a hand basket. The hotel advertises a spa tub yet the rate is never adjusted for it being unavailable.

#### Reference 29 - Posted on November 2016

Great hotel

#### Reference 30 - Posted on September 2016

hotel has no respect for keeping you away from construction (they are currently ripping up the tile with a jack hammer right In front of our room,

#### Reference 31 - Posted on September 2016

I and friends planned a vacation on Lake Michigan and booked rooms at the Kenosha Best Wester for 4 nights. We were kicked out at dinner time when they notified us the fire Marshall had shut them down for over 20 violations--3rd time in a year. Best Western Customer Service thought we should be happy because they only charged us over 60.00 for the night we stayed and did not charge us the second day. Some how I am not sure why they would see that as a refund since we could not stay there.

#### Reference 32 - Posted on August 2016

stay was not enjoyable as we had smoke smell all night long , when i mentioned it to front desk in the morning cleck said "well we do have smoking rooms on third floor which is above where you stayed and we have smoking rooms on second as well" so i said i know cause we smelled it all night and didnt sleep much. so cleck said he would check into it . LOL :))) REALLY. if people want to smoke FINE but put smoking on one side of Hotel and Non-Smoking on the other side.

#### Reference 33 - Posted on March 2016

the "work out" room is a tiny little closet with 1 tred mill and 2 bikes (and if you try to work out it's basically a sauna) the Wifi never seemed to actually work

#### Reference 34 - Posted on March 2016

If I can go anywhere I would never stayed at Best Western ever again in my life I am awake at 1:36 AM because your construction workers that are working at midnight are so loud it is beyond me they are working on a suite of rooms next to mine I've called management three times they cannot do anything because the construction workers were hired by someone else so I have a big day ahead of me tomorrow I have to be up at 6 AM and I'm supposed to get really good sleep instead I get to listen to your guys hammering I am absolutely appalled that you expect people to pay \$160-\$200 a night to listen to people do construction on rooms next to theirs and you won't do anything about it. This is going to become a PR nightmare for you it is marketing 101 that you take care of your hotel guests and you don't cause issues so they cannot sleep and get a good nights rest. I cannot fathom how your hotel

would even think that it's OK to hire people to work in the middle of the night while people are sleeping hello you can't sleep with someone's yelling back-and-forth using power tools and hammering. Like I said PR nightmare. Happy to yelp about it happy to tweet about it happy to Pinterest about it happy to Snapchat about it happy to periscope about it no problem it's one thing if the management was able to switch me to another room or do something instead they can't do anything it's absolutely beyond unacceptable. I have tried to come up with a solution I comanagement three times starting at 8 PM 10 PM and midnight and nothing can be done so it is now on you when you get bad press.

#### Reference 35 - Commented on March 2016

The workout facilities that you offered were barely operational,

#### Reference 36 - Posted on October 2015

I could have booked another hotel but I decided on this particular one because there was a lounge/bar and we were without kids for the first time in a LONG time. Found out when we arrived it was closed since July for renovations.

#### Reference 37

Speaking of renovations, even the main entrance was closed and materials we just lying around inside

#### Reference 38 - Posted on October 2015

Your location was clean and well kept! This facility deserves to be recognized!

#### Reference 39 - Posted on October 2015

Excellent that you are Pet Friendly, very forward thinking as we pet owners love to travel with out dogs!

#### Reference 40 - Posted on August 2013

A Plus, would be nice to have a continental breakfast!!

#### Reference 41 - Posted on August 2013

Best Western-I wish the Best Western in Kearney, Nebraska could ramp up their "free internet" capabilities so that I'm not having to visit the McDonalds in town and use their wireless for every business related item I need to attend to. When a Hotel mentions "free Wifi" I expect the internet to actually be streaming and not bogged down for not having enough bandwidth or wireless routers. I've expressed a formal complain to the front office and I've seen no progress in the past 5 days. I experienced this several months back at the same hotel. I would like to continue my business with Best Western but this may be the end to that.

#### Reference 42 - Posted on August 2013

the place is sparkling and gorgeous and you couldn't ask for a more perfect setting than Carpenteria.

#### Reference 43 - Posted on July 2013

I reserved a non-smoking room but when I arrived I was put in a room which had obviously been smoked in - it smelled! (And there were no vacancies.) There was no obvious signage in the room stating that it was a non-smoking room

#### Reference 44 - Posted on September 2012

Free brunch!!!!!! Love the rooms, pool , hottub , service and great food!!!! Cobourg Ont. location!!!!

## APPENDIX P: Posts and Comments Regarding Hotel Pool Facility

15 references coded

#### Reference 1 – Posted on March 2017

Pool heater not working, pool lighting broken and room dim, pool over chlorinated (couldn't breathe



#### Reference 2 - Posted on March 2017

When we arrived, after traveling for 10 hours with two kids, we were informed the pool was closed. We booked this hotel so the kids could swim after traveling. We never received any email or anything up front. We told the kids, the entire trip that they could swim at the hotel because we booked a hotel with an indoor pool. If you would have sent an email to us we would have told the kids they couldn't swim. VERY disappointed

#### Reference 3 - Posted on March 2017

I ONLY booked best western cause it had a pool. I booked a month or more in advance. Upon arrival I was notified the pool was closed because it was being painted. I was pretty upset seeing myself and my children had been looking forward to swimming. We had been away to celebrate my sons birthday and I promised a hotel with a pool. My son only asked me 373837 times that day if we could check in and go swimming. (It was the beginning of march break as well, so closing the pool on march break to renovate was stupid seeing that's when there would be more kids wanting to swim.)

#### Reference 4 - Posted on March 2017

We then went swimming, and there were no pool towels. We left the pool WET to ask for them, we were hand 4 'room bath towels' and returned to the pool. We were there for an hour while other guests came in, but no one brought towels

#### Reference 5 - Posted on March 2017

So my sister checked in today after 3 and after inquiring about the pool was told that the pool would not be available until 7. So imagine our disappointment when the pool was not only NOT READY but that the pool would be closed until the morning. That's unacceptable seeing how the ONLY reason we checked in was for the pool. And we were not the only people there with this problem. There are at least five other families that checked in for the SAME THING!!!!

#### Reference 6 - Posted on March 2017

The water in there pool was well below the normal water temp. very cold!!

#### Reference 7 - Posted on March 2017

I made a reservation at this hotel 3 weeks prior to my stay. I did extensive research in the area and found that this one with the pool and proximity to the Metro was one of the best choices. There were a number that were about \$50 cheaper per night, but with no pool. We decided to splurge on the the extra \$50 for the pool. We had been saving up for 2 years for this trip. We called 4 days before arrival to confirm reservation and confirm the pool would be open. We were told, yes - it would be open. When we arrived we were told the pool was NOT open. Of the four days we stayed it was open the last two - which we had very limited time as it was the first two nights we'd planned on using it. Our ten year old was terribly disappointed as were we - we were given a \$25 credit for the two nights the pool wasn't open after I insisted on some sort of credit. I feel we should have been given a credit for every night as we spent \$200 more that week then we could have at a different hotel. We should have at least received an email letting us know the pool would not be open as should all your guests staying there. I heard a number of people complaining about not being told beforehand.

#### Reference 8 - Posted on February 2017

The pool was broken. Try explaining that to a 4yr old who had his heart set on swimming,

#### Reference 9 - Posted on February 2017

the pool was broken.

#### Reference 10 - Posted on February 2017

The chlorine in the pool is is high you can't breath.

#### Reference 11 - Posted on January 2017

the pool is closed. What a disappointment.

#### Reference 12 - Posted in December 2016

All my son has talked about today was swimming. He even talked about it in the lobby when we were checking in. Did anyone bother to say, Oh the pool is closed. NO. My #1 thing I looked for when booking the hotel was a pool. It's down for the winter. I'm told I can take a cab a few miles from here and he can swim. It's 10\* out and I'm supposed to take my 4yr old out with wet hair after

swimming. We planned to swim a couple times a day for 4 days

#### Reference 13 - Posted in November 2016

the whole maintenance of the grounds and pools areas were well kept

#### Reference 14 - Posted in November 2016

Three years ago, the outdoor pool that they have was heated. Swimming my daily laps could be done anytime of year followed by a steamy hot dip in the spa tub. The pool is no longer heated and the spa tub hasn't operated in over a year.

#### Reference 15 – Posted in September 2012

Free brunch!!!!!! Love the rooms, pool , hottub , service and great food!!!! Cobourg Ont. location!!!!

## APPENDIX Q: Posts and Comments Regarding Price

The following are the messages in which consumers provided feedback on price of the rooms at Best Western. 22 references coded.

#### Reference 1 – Commented on March 2017

Excellent deal. We have gotten and used many rebates.

#### Reference 2 – Commented on March 2017

Beginning to find that Best Western is pricing themselves out of the market. We always travelled Best Western and always received awesome service and comfortable rooms but this year I have had to shop around for more affordable hotels. And have found some I am very happy with.

#### Reference 3 - Posted on March 2017

not that Expensive:)

#### Reference 4 - Posted on March 2017

A little pricey but very well worth it!

#### Reference 5 - Posted on February 2017

Highly unsatisfied first of all the rooms are mediocre and certainly not worth the price. I book for 2 nights so the cost was \$178.00 plus tax so it came up too \$203.36 however after looking at my bank statement later that night it stated I was charge \$233.36 so there an unexpain over charge of \$30.00

#### Reference 6 - Posted on February 2017

Booked a room with a promise of a 10% discount off the lowest available rate by signing up for a rewards #. Turns out, that rate was the exact same as the hotels.com rate for the BW in Vegas. Really Best Western??

#### Reference 7 - Commented on February 2017

I tried that but all they keep saying is that I have to specify hotel and dates otherwise they can't help!! I want to know which hotels have 50% off and on what dates. I will try and call again tomorrow.

#### Reference 8 - Posted on February 2017

I called weeks ago about my \$10 card for my recent stay and they told me to expect it anytime. I still haven't receive it. Same thing happened to me before and I never got it. Please send me it.

#### Reference 9 - Posted on February 2017

The price of the room was a lot lower and I guess o got what I paid for

#### Reference 10 - Commented on February 2017

I had several stays during your last \$10 gift card promotion and have yet to receive ANY gift card!!! When can I expect these???

#### Reference 11 - Posted on February 2017

Best Western Hotels & Resorts I entered the Smilebration contest and won a \$70 gift card to Best Western on November 26, 2016 and still nothing, a few others that won have not received theirs either, when can we be expecting them, thnk you :)

#### Reference 12 - Posted on January 2017

Wholly! your BW promotions have sure changed within the past year, we still haven't heard anything back about the promotion from last spring when we stayed at several of your Best Western hotels over the course of a month - practically living in them. We should've received at least \$300 back after what we spent..NOT impressed.

#### Reference 13 - Posted on January 2017

cheap price but dirty ,nasty room,had roaches in bathroom

#### Reference 14 - Posted on January 2017

Not keen to book again if they don't give you a heads up in the confirmation email that advertised amenities are unavailable. And given how simple the rooms are, they aren't worth what is charged if those amenities aren't available.

#### Reference 15 - Posted on January 2017

For the price \$103 a night very poor service!

#### Reference 16 - Posted on December 2016

I was told I'd get a 20% discount. Woop te do. I booked through #expedia and I found out I'm paying about 20% more than if I booked straight through Best Western. I'm not too impressed with this 20% and it certainly does not make me feel any better.

#### Reference 17 - Posted on November 2016

We slept so well from our 8 hour drive home, had a hot meal, and a great price room!

#### Reference 18 - Posted on November 2016

Thankfully best western in Quesnel BC Canada was able to hook us up with an executive suite for a great price and over the top service

#### Reference 19 - Posted on November 2015

Is it a common practice at your chain to charge per pack and play/crib? Or do you prefer young children to sleep on your hotel floors? Thanks!

#### Reference 20 - Posted on September 2015

The Sutherlin Oregon Best Western is charging my in-law's \$10 for a towel that apparently has a stain they could not get out. I find this to be ridiculous and terrible customer service. Not only did my in-laws have a horrible hotel stay due to a sick little boy but now you're charging them for a towel you claim needs to be replaced. Isn't that what bleach is for. I know \$10 isn't a lot of money but it's the principle of the matter. Shame on you.

#### Reference 21 – Posted on July 2013

We stayed at several Best Western's, clean, convenient and affordable.

#### Reference 22 - Posted on June 2013

This is a very good hotel, and not that expensive

#### Reference 23 - Posted on July 2009

Really do like staying at the Best Western always clean and affordable!

## APPENDIX R: Posts and Comments Regarding Best Western's Loyalty Program

### 32 references coded

#### Reference 1 – Posted on March 2017

I used rewards points for the room for one night and paid for a 2nd night... The refrigerator could not be adjusted and was not safe for storing food... The a.c. was located in a place that did not allow for cooling the sleeping area (my wife is in menopause) and was quite warm... She wanted to sleep in my truck... The water in the shower went from hot cold hot.... My wife thought this was due to having a free night...

#### Reference 2 - Posted on March 2017

I make a habit of staying at Best Western and I'm a Platinum member. So at check in I was upgraded to a deluxe room because of platinum status. They put us in a room right above the lobby which made sleeping IMPOSSIBLE because of the constant noise, especially early in the morning. So we gave up and went to breakfast. Coffee was empty. Some of the food trays were empty and food was cold. We had to track down the lady making omelets. Usually breakfast at Best Westerns are great and this was very disappointing. We then went swimming, and there were no pool towels. We left the pool WET to ask for them, we were hand 4 'room bath towels' and returned to the pool. We were there for an hour while other guests came in, but no one brought towels. When I complained about the noise they said they would note my name to put me in back of hotel, but that was it. So very very disappointed in our stay!

#### Reference 4 - Posted on March 2017

I have called about my rewards card and was told they would mail me a new one. That was about 2 months ago. Have not received yet. Lost my old card.

#### Reference 6 - Posted on March 2017

I stayed in Best western for more than 6 weeks between 23rd Oct till 3rd Dec in Munich, i opted for Customer Loyalty program as i liked the service. While checking out on Dec 3rd and my details were taken and assured me that things will be done automatically and i need not worry. Somtimes later when i was planning my next trip and was thinking about the same hotel i was curious to know what happened about my previous loyalty points , are they even credited. To my surprise it were not and when i contacted them via mail they By the they gave a reply which made me feel that it was my fault that i had contacted them a month later. I did some followups with them but all wastage of time, not at all professional. Since am a regular visitior and preferred to stay in a hotel chain like best western but am forced to plan my upcoming trip with some other hotel. I have never seen such unprofessional attitude

#### Reference 7 - Posted on March 2017

I recently stayed in BWP Thracia in Sofia, Bulgaria. they refused to receive my Membership card, how can i get the points for that stay?

#### Reference 11 – Commented on March 2017 (Regarding website issues and consumers having a lot of reservation history which is why their content is not loading)

Lol... what? I have a ton of history too, hence having Diamond status. I am not spending one moment to help them track that down. Nice litte unpublished "benefit" for loyalty. BW really has gone totally off the rails.

#### Reference 22 – Posted on January 2017

Gratefully satisfied....Rewards that you don't say NO.. points never expire... lots of choices and really pays off....

#### Reference 23 - Posted on January 2017

I find it sad that this property is so concerned about money that they don't even want to listen to their Diamond members

#### **Reference 24 - Posted on January 2017**

I just got helped redeeming a gift card with my rewards on Sunday on new years and they were very helpful and you guys deserve a 5 star review in my opinion. thanks for helping me get my rewards straightened out

#### **Reference 26 - Posted on December 2016**

I just went to go and book a few nights with the points I accumulated through work. To my surprise there was no points credited. I stayed over 70 nights at a Best Western this year! I called the rewards center only to be told that I don't qualify for the points because my employer paid for my stay. I specifically asked to be booked at a Best Western after hearing a lot of positive stories from co workers. I requested to be transfer to customer cares. I was. Randy from Phoenix, was the person who took my call. After telling him my problem, I was only told that was the policy and nothing can be done. I was never told what could be done. I feel the representatives I talked to on the phone did not care at all about cared about my concern. I am so disappointed in Best Western, first for not getting the points the staff at the hotel told me I was going to earn. Secondly, because the two representatives I talked to on the phone were not emphatic or even cared enough to give me some kind of solution. As a professional, I am going to start to specifically ask to stay else where. Beware of restrictions and hidden red tape.

#### **Reference 27 - Posted on November 2016**

Best Western has great customer service. Even after having an issue at a hotel in 2015 and realizing I never got the agreed upon points on the reward program, their customer service stepped up! They honored the agreement between the hotel management and myself even after one year had passed. Way to go Best Western!!

#### **Reference 28 – Commented on November 2016**

I have also fallen victim to their reward program. Not as advertised. Hard to work with. Local hoteliers do not care, when I called corporate, they didn't seem to care. Their loyalty program has made me loyal to anyone but Best Western.

#### **Reference 29 - Posted on October 2015**

The Rewards program is great too!

#### **Reference 30 - Posted on December 2014**

Very disappointed in the rewards point card. Spent 12 nights at a best western and the employee assured me i would receive my points. After only looking into it later (after 6 months) i come to find out i never got the almost 20000 points that should have been added to my account. Unfortunately i'll never be staying at a Best Western again and will not let this go.

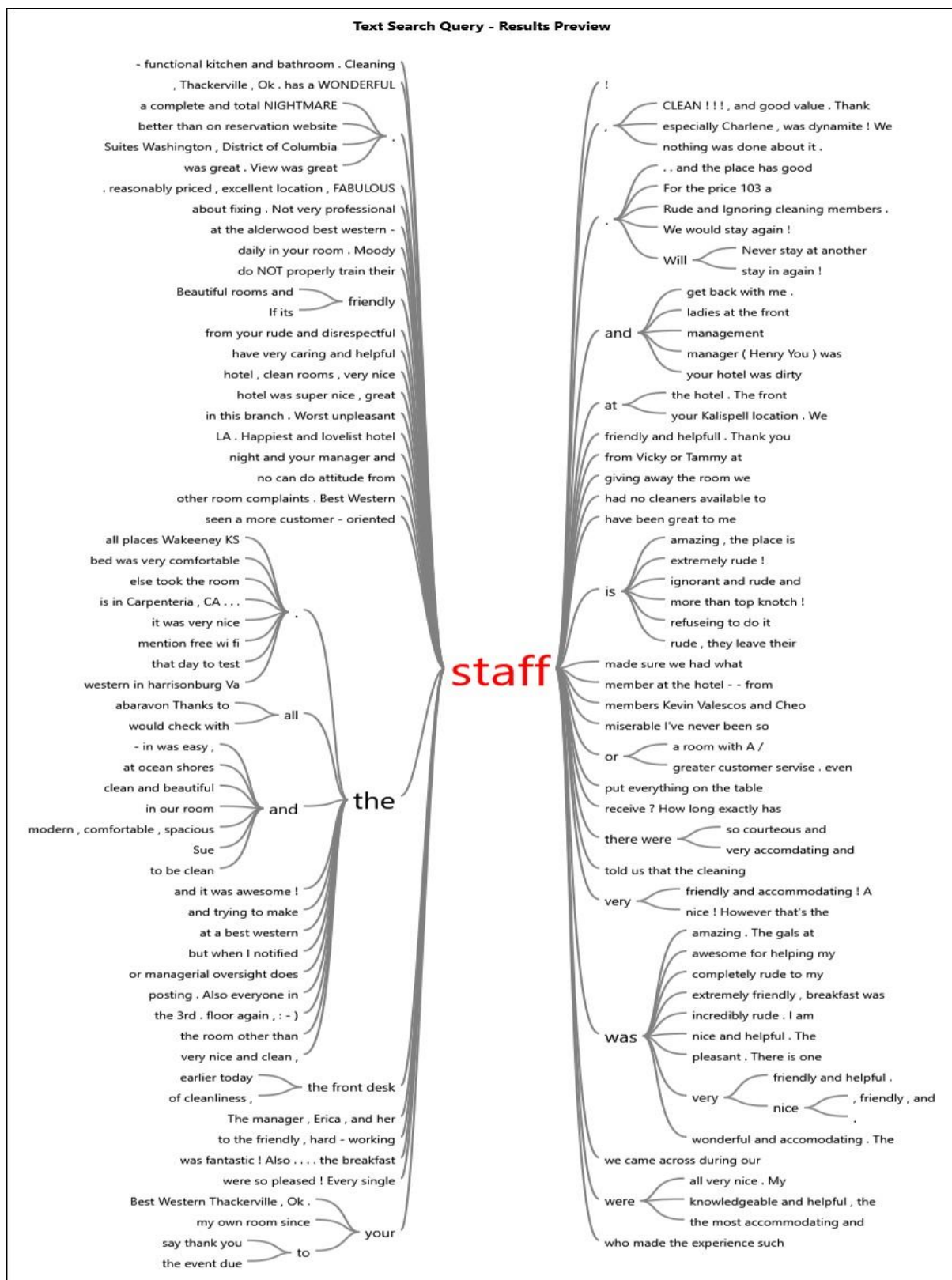
#### **Reference 31 - Posted on June 2013**

U have got to be kidding....I was told my points would double from all those crappy hotel stays so I tuffed it out and guess what now no one knows anything about that, 2 weeks ago when I called"oh yes Mrs. Fredrickson they will but it takes 3 weeks", Now whole different big ball of stinky crap!

## APPENDIX S: Word Tree of Website from the Website Node



## APPENDIX T: Word Trees of Staff and Management from Respective Node





## Text Search Query - Results Preview

